

# SIENA COLLEGE CENTER FOR ACADEMIC COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



## Annual Report 2023-2024

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## LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

Time flies! It feels like we just started the 2023-24 academic year and in what seemed like a few moments—we are in the midst of reflecting on all the amazing work that our members engaged in this past year. The 2023-24 academic year was filled with exciting community engaged projects, research, courses, and service that our members and supportive faculty, administrators, and community partners participated in together.

Our dedicated members worked with our community partners to establish opportunities for equitable change. Our Bonners and NExT Fellows worked on mutual and reciprocal projects that supported partner-identified challenges. Our VISTAs fought poverty by building organizational capacity and uplifting the work of community organizations. Our SPIn teams implemented an interdisciplinary approach to endemic community challenges. Our faculty and administrators developed their community engaged identities through numerous pathways for community engaged research, teaching, and project-based work.

I am sure that you will be impressed and (possibly) called to action in this or your own community as you read through the following 2023-24 academic year report. I continue to be inspired by the innovative and extensive engagement work that ACE members are participating in throughout the Capital Region and I look forward to the great work to come!

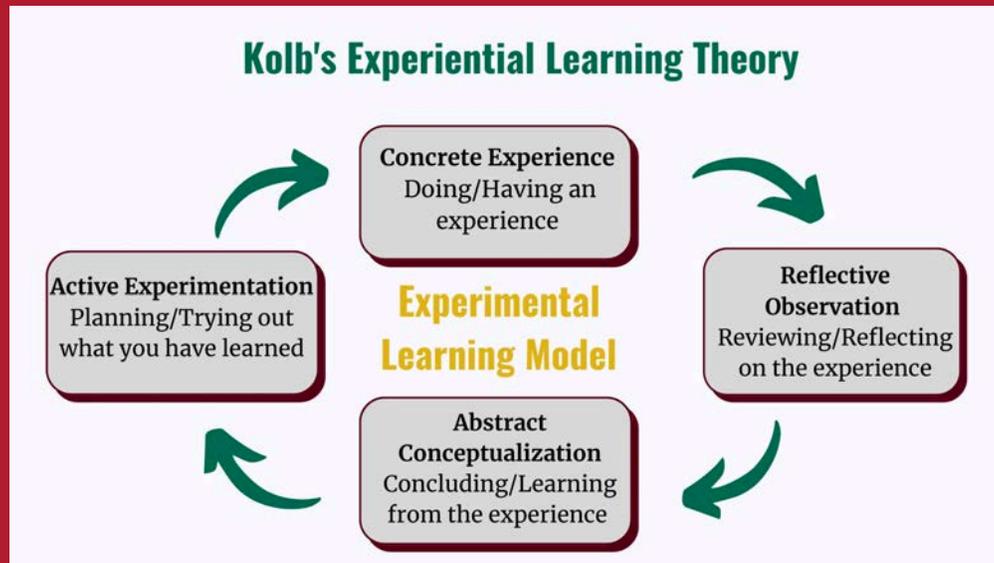
Peace,  
*Allison*



# Mission Statement

Siena College's Center for Academic Community Engagement (ACE) focuses on the development and success of our members by fostering transformative and impactful experiential learning opportunities through equity centered community engagement initiatives.

At ACE, we learn by doing! Our programs, initiatives, and courses are informed by Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory as pictured below.



While members can start anywhere in the cycle to engage in experiential learning, most begin with a concrete experience. Typically, the learner has a new experience, enters a new situation, or they may reinterpret an existing experience in the light of new concepts. They then move to reflective observation of that experience, where members reflect on the experience using existing knowledge. They then move on to abstract conceptualization, where reflection gives rise to a new idea, or a modification of an existing abstract concept where the member has learned from their experience, such as applying theory to the activity (or praxis). The fourth step members take is active experimentation, where the newly created or modified concepts give rise to application of knowledge.

Each of our learning goals works to develop members' growth within this model, which ideally leads to more informed members of society.



# Meet the ACE Team



**Josh Anthony**  
Assistant Director of  
Bonner Service  
Leaders Program



**Mairead Carr**  
Assistant Director  
of NExT  
Fellowship



**Taylor Disco '19**  
Assistant  
Director of AmeriCorps  
VISTA Program



**Dr. Vera Eccarius-Kelly**  
ACE Scholar-in-  
Residence



**Dr. Allison Schultz**  
Director



**Sarah Toledano**  
Associate Director

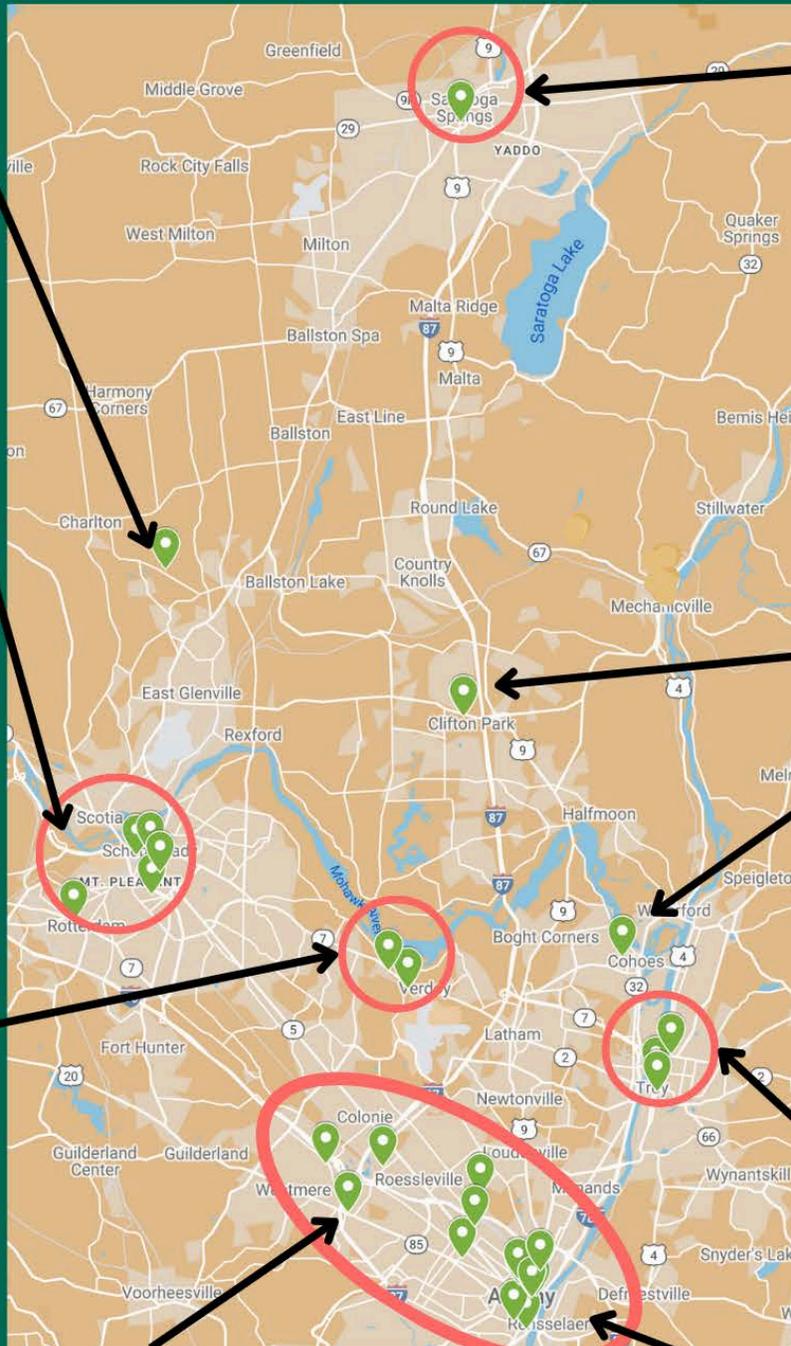


**Cheryl Voter**  
Assistant Director of  
Operations and Grants



# Our Community Partners

## ACE Serves the 518!!



- The Charlton School
- C.R.E.A.T.E. Community Studios
- Schenectady City School District
- Sycamore Collaborative
- Rotterdam Community Center

- Regional Food Bank
- Wildwood Programs

- Albany Housing Authority
- American Red Cross
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Capital Region, NY
- Bring on the Spectrum
- Can Code Communities
- Capital City Rescue Mission
- Castle Island Bilingual Montessori
- Focus Churches of Albany
- Friends of Recovery - New York

• Saratoga Health Center

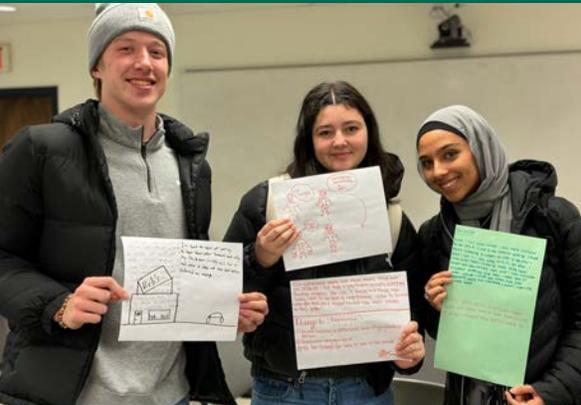
• CAPTAIN Community Health Services

• Connect Center for Youth

- Mom Starts Here
- Sanctuary for Independent Media
- Sunhee's Community Place
- Unity House of Troy, Inc.
- YWCA of the Greater Capital Region

- Girls on the Run
- IPH
- Jewish Family Services of Northeastern New York
- Pursuit Lending
- SHRED Foundation
- The Food Pantries for the Capital District
- The Radix Ecological Sustainability Center
- United Tenants of Albany, Inc.
- United Way of the Greater Capital Region
- Whitney Young

# Bonner Service Leaders



## What Do Bonners Do?

- Provide capacity-building services to Capital Region nonprofits to create sustainable change in the local community.
- Develop proficiency in community development best practices and civic engagement pedagogy through pre-semester training, weekly seminars, and completion of the Certificate in Community Development.
- Cultivate a lifelong passion for purposeful community engagement through summer service, cultural immersion experiences, and an international perspective component.
- Complete a research-intensive community engaged capstone.



## BY THE NUMBERS

- ◆ 37 students
- ◆ 48% work-study eligible
- ◆ 13 community partners
- ◆ 70 trainings
- ◆ 8,999 hours served

## Bonner Service Leader Facilitated Classes

Each year, we encourage our students to contribute to the Bonner curriculum by identifying topics they would like to explore. Additionally, we ask students to facilitate classes based on their own passions. This has been a great way for students to share their social justice interests with each other and practice developing and delivering curriculum. During the 2023-24 year, Bonner Service Leaders facilitated classes on the following topics:

- **Autism Awareness: A Guide to Inclusivity**
- **The Foster Care System**
- **The Crisis in Gaza**
- **Mental Health Resources On and Off Campus**
- **Issue Areas of the Capital Region**



# Bonners Make an Impact!

**Morgan Starke '27**, a freshmen Bonner Service Leader, hit the ground running at Bring on the Spectrum (BOTS). Morgan found her home at BOTS and created a month-long "Girls Who BOTS" program which included events to engage neurodivergent girls and raise awareness and visibility of young girls on the autism spectrum. On top of serving 8-10 hours a week as a Bonner, Morgan is also a member of the Honors program and conducted and presented her research at the campus' Academic Showcase in April—all within her first year as a Saint!



**Rachel Gifford '24**, a senior Bonner Service Leader, went above and beyond this past year as part of the Program Associate team. In addition to writing her Bonner Capstone and her Honors thesis, she also served serving 8-10 hours a week at her service site, the Sycamore Collaborative (formerly the Schenectady Community Ministries). Rachel worked with the Sycamore Collaborative on their apothecary garden project, harvesting herbs and other plants with medicinal properties and used the organization's kitchen to distill them into essential oils for various treatments! Rachel applied this hands-on experience to her Bonner Capstone and Honors Thesis, which she successfully defended in Fall 2023.



## CONGRATULATIONS BONNER CLASS OF 2024!

The Bonner Class of 2024 spent the first year of their college career managing the unknown environment of college during a pandemic. They adapted and adjusted to unprecedented situations with courage and a commitment to continue to give their best to everything they do. Despite these crazy times, our seniors served 13,970 hours over the course of their four years in Bonner. Three of our graduates will be continuing their service through the AmeriCorps VISTA program and two will be attending graduate school. We extend a heartfelt congratulations to the Siena College Bonner Class of 2024 and wish them all the best!



**Ava Bibisi**  
**Rachel Gifford**  
**Elizabeth MacMurray**  
**Kayla McKay**  
**Amanda Molloy**  
**Giavanna Pitagno**  
**Nora Diede**  
**Brianna Rodriguez**

# The Nonprofit Excellence and Transformation (NExT) Fellowship

## NExT By the Numbers

- 16 students
- 5 community partners
- 2072 hours served



The NExT Fellowship supports interdisciplinary student-led teams that engage in extensive capacity building research and consultation work in partnership with local community organizations. NExT Fellows practice what they learn in the classroom through their work with the community—bringing theory to practice. During the 2023–24 Academic Year, NExT worked with several different community organizations on a variety of projects. These projects included:

- Identifying clinic needs to provide a new wraparound service for Whitney Young Health Center
- Founding of a non-emergency medical transportation non-profit - Francis Medical Transportation Corporation
- Creating a volunteer training program for United Tenants of Albany
- Developing a needs assessment survey for the Rotterdam Community Center
- Evaluating communications best practices for community engaged programs - a capstone project on behalf of ACE

## NExT Student Spotlight

Paul Barnas, who graduated in December 2023, was a tremendous member of the NExT Fellowship. During just his second semester in NExT, Paul led a team that researched how to establish, and successfully founded, a non-profit organization called Francis Medical Transportation Corporation. Paul was a superb team leader, tasking his two teammates with meaningful and impactful work. His legacy not only remains in the creation of this project, but also in a guidebook for future NExT Fellows to use if they want to create a non-profit organization as well.

Three senior NExT Fellows completed their community engaged talks (CETx), TEDtalk style presentations, during our service celebration. Additionally, Amelia Risinit won the NExT Changemaker of the Year Award and Paul Barnas won the ACE Engaged Scholar Award.



# NExT Fellows In Action

## NExT Team at the 2024 National Service-Learning Conference



Emily Atassi and Amelia Risinit, long-term NExT Fellows, identified a gap in identifying potential issues with partnerships. Rather than sidestepping the void, they leaned into it like NExT Fellows learn to do in our program. They presented on their experience on a project entitled “Identifying the Red and Green Flags in Community Engaged Work” first in class to their NExT classmates in fall 2023 and then to the Bonners in spring 2024 before taking their training and findings to the National Service Learning Conference in April 2024. In addition to creating the training, their work was evidence-based; they spent the year collecting stories, testimonials, and information from former and current NExT students as well as from ACE administrators. Emily and Amelia completed all interviews together and have a draft of their academic journal article, which they hope to publish over the next year. In addition, Amelia who graduated in spring ‘24 was honored with the NExT Changemaker of the Year for 2024, recognizing her three years of service and contributions to the program. Congratulations Amelia and Emily!

## NExT Campus Thought Partners Share their Experience

“As an administrator, I don't get to interact with students like I do with ACE. As someone who has had a long career in nonprofit management, I think I can bring a grassroots approach to the discussion and theory vs. reality. I really enjoy connecting with students and providing what knowledge I can based on my work experience. I think other administrators on campus can bring a unique perspective that isn't necessarily faculty/academic based. I think a mix of faculty and administrators that bring a certain skill set and experience helps give the students well rounded feedback for their projects.”

Cherisse Young '96, NExT Campus Thought Partner, Fall 2023



“This unique opportunity was a very fulfilling experience where we all worked in interdisciplinary teams to learn about the work being done in the community. Although I was there to offer my expertise, it was evident that the student became experts in their research topic. I loved that there were faculty there from many different departments. I would love the opportunity to do this again.”

Jill Ensminger,  
NExT Campus Thought Partner, Fall 2023



# AMERICORPS VISTA

Volunteers in Service to America



## WHAT DO VISTAS DO?

AmeriCorps VISTA is a poverty fighting program funded through the federal government. Siena College AmeriCorps VISTAs make a year-long, full-time commitment to serve in a Capital Region nonprofit organization or public agency. They focus their efforts to build the capacity of organizations to make change in our community.

- Generate funds that **build the capacity** of local nonprofits
- **Connect** volunteers with opportunities to support the work of our partners
- Promote **awareness** of programs and events that benefit community residents
- **Create, develop, and evaluate** programs and projects that alleviate poverty

## VISTA 2024 VISTA CHANGEMAKER OF THE YEAR:

The VISTA Changemaker Award recognizes a VISTA Member who has supported program members and shown a high level of commitment to the VISTA Program. This ACE Member has worked diligently to create sustainable change through their service. The 2023 VISTA Changemaker is **Hea Gundlach** at the **Regional Food Bank of Northeastern, NY**.



“ Hea has made substantial contributions not only at their service site but also within our cohort. Hea has shown deep concern for the VISTA program's sustainability, ensuring that current and future VISTAs have access to resources. Hea helped build the capacity of our VISTA program by developing the Housing and Resource Committee and is always seeking different ways to serve, including volunteering at other VISTA sites and getting involved with on-campus initiatives at Siena. Hea embodies what it means to be a VISTA and change-maker! We are beyond excited for Hea to engage with the Regional Food Bank in a new capacity – Manager of Farm Projects. Congratulations, Hea! ”

-Taylor Disco, AmeriCorps VISTA Director

# Program Highlight: The Final Countdown!

In May, the final 90 days of service began for the majority of the AmeriCorps VISTA cohort. VISTAs embraced relationship building this spring, demonstrated by the organization of external events such as trivia nights. Members of the VISTA Social Self-Care Committee—Haley Jeansonne, Mouda Al Zaydan, and Alexa Smith—arranged a cooking class at Honest Weight Food Co-op. Haley, a Culinary Institute of America graduate, led the cohort in learning how to make tiramisu. Other notable trainings included Layperson Naloxone (NARCAN) instruction; Implicit Bias training through the NYS Department of Civil Service; and a roundtable discussion with a representative from Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD). Lastly, the VISTAs engaged in numerous networking opportunities, including a call with Congressman Paul Tonko in April for National Volunteer Month, and multiple networking events with returned Peace Corps volunteers.



Eva Murphy served at ACE as a Summer Associate in 2023, then as a full-year VISTA member, and has just been onboarded to serve a second term! Eva has served as the InPlace Coordinator with Jewish Family Services of Northeastern New York (JFS). JFS provides support, services, and resources for individuals and families of all ages, with a unique ability and responsibility to meet the needs of the Jewish community. Through Eva's service, she has assisted in developing strategic partnerships, conducted research to support the Geriatric Care Management and Occupational Therapy for Life Enrichment program, and implemented a new data management system. She has remained committed to Siena College and the greater Capital Region all while attending graduate school at Russell Sage College. We are thrilled to have Eva serve as an AmeriCorps VISTA member in 2024-25.

## VISTA IMPACT HIGHLIGHTS

- 9 VISTAs and 2 VISTA leaders
- 9 community partners
- \$49,600 raised for local nonprofits
- 49 organizations received capacity building services
- 45 organizations increased their efficiency, effectiveness, and/or program reach
- 141 youth supported
- 103 volunteers recruited and 14,313 hours served by these volunteers
- 3,554 hours of training completed





# Summer Project Incubator (SPIn) Program

## What is SPIn?

Summer Project Incubator (SPIn) is an experiential learning summer program that connects faculty, students, and community organizations in multi-year participatory action research projects. Through this program, we curate academically-grounded, sustainable, and developmental community partnerships. Our three-year model allows for projects to grow over time. In year one we explore issues, develop relationships, and celebrate small wins; in year two, we develop and support student and community leadership to implement a targeted intervention; and in year three, we work collaboratively to ensure sustainable action.

“This was an amazing experience and I could not be more grateful to everyone who I worked on it with. A lot of days were simultaneously hard and rewarding. Spreading out the survey was mostly challenging ourselves and each other to be as bold as possible and really be doers in every sense of the word. As someone who has never worked on a research project such as this one, as well as a resident of Rotterdam myself, I know how better to connect with people and conduct research for the common good.”

- David Jesse Mathis,  
SPIn Member Rotterdam Community  
Center Needs Assessment team



# SPIIn On The Move!

## SPIIn By the Numbers

- 12 students
- 4 team-based community engaged projects
- 8 SPIIn faculty mentors and community liaisons
- 4 community partners
- 1,241 hours served
- 11 majors represented



“ We all know someone who has a chronic illness, and we all know how most people end up finding out too late when the damage is already done. Then we use western medicine to treat our illness, and it’s really more of a bandage-fix, where we’re just waiting for things to get worse. Over the summer with this project, I have learned that herbal medicine is a form of holistic medicine which focuses on maintaining a lifestyle that prevents illnesses. I have learned how important it is to treat my body right in the first place and how to incorporate healthy habits into my life, which is why I would recommend this to everyone. ”

-Anum Tehseen '24 Medicinal Herbs Team Member



# ACE Associates

## WHO ARE THE ACE ASSOCIATES AND WHAT DO THEY DO?

The ACE Associates are more than just students participating in a work study program. ACE Associates take an active role in projects critical to the running of the Center. Some examples are research, data analysis, marketing, and social media. The Center relies heavily on the work of our ACE Associates to further our impact and engagement with students, faculty, and administrators on campus and in the Capital Region. The work that our ACE Associates complete is meant to be a sustainable staple for the success of our Center and the skills that are learned will be with our ACE Associates for years to come!



ACE Associate Dillon Bohlke '24, received the Nicholas Ramundo Class of 2014 Award.

This award is presented to an ACE member who has worked with enthusiasm and spirit to develop, integrate and support the ACE community. During his tenure at ACE, Dillon approached all assignments and projects with professionalism and positivity. Additionally, he was a supportive mentor and trainer to all of our new hires in the ACE Associate program. In August, Dillon began his professional career as a Budgeting Analyst at the NYS Office of General Services.

Congratulations Dillon and best of luck in your new position!



ACE Associate Liamell Quezada '25, studied abroad in France and traveled in Europe in spring 2024.

Read on to learn how her experience increased her professional and personal skillsets.

- **Adaptability:** Learning to live as a local (transportation, food, customs, and norms) will support her when she begins a full time job in a new city.
- **Intercultural communication:** Getting to know people from all over the world helped her to learn how important it is to communicate clearly, show respect, and remain open minded when speaking with people from different cultures. She will put this skill to work at ACE and on campus.
- **Confidence:** Starting over at a new school in a new country pushed Lia to challenge herself to make new friends, learn the language, and thrive in a new culture. This experience helped her to build her confidence and know that she could be successful in any environment!

# Community Engaged Faculty: Engagement Stories

ACE's Community Engaged Faculty Academy, or CEFA, is a model for faculty community engagement that starts with concrete teaching, research, and mentoring. Faculty then gain leadership opportunities and develop identities as community engaged scholars. Finally, faculty become campus advocates for community engaged teaching and research.



“My students and I took an incredible and humbling journey in our SOCI 101 HNRS class. We studied evictions in America and our Town of Colonie. We collaborated with United Tenants of Albany Inc (UTA). Students attended Colonie Town Court's weekly eviction hearings and, under UTA's guidance, responded to clients on UTA's hotline. None of this would have been possible without the support of the ACE office. I am grateful to Allison Schultz, Sarah Toledano from Siena ACE, and Canyon Ryan from the UTA for their support. The ACE office ensured that my students got to the court and returned with a profound understanding of evictions in our local communities. Thanks also to Brianna Rodriguez and Rachel Gifford, 2024 Sociology and Bonner graduates- our chaperones!”



-Siena College Professor of Sociology

## Siena Receives Selective Carnegie Community Engagement Classification



Siena College received word in early 2024 that our application for the Carnegie Community Engagement reclassification was successful. The application process involved a more than year-long self-study led by Allison Schultz, ACE's director, and Maggie Cross, director of student activities and leadership development and included representation from across campus. The Carnegie reviewers found it refreshing to learn that at Siena the community drives project identification, while the faculty works to integrate learning objectives with community needs. They mentioned our Bonner Service Leaders program and Nonprofit Excellence and Transformation (NExT) as important examples of quality community engagement programming.

*Thank you to our generous sponsors!*

*Our community engaged work would not be possible without your support*

AmeriCorps

Corella and Bertram F. Bonner Foundation

Stewart's Shops/Dake Foundation

Partners for Campus Community Engagement

Sharon (Elser) Sullivan '84 and Lawrence Sullivan

The United Way of the Greater Capital Region

*Thank you to the Siena College's marketing team for some of the photos used throughout this document!*

*Congratulations to our award winners!*

**ACE 2024 Faculty of the Year** | Robin MacHattie, M.S.W.

**ACE 2024 Community Partner of the Year** | Wildwood Programs

**2024 Academic Achievement Award** | Nora Diede

**2024 Engaged Scholar Award** | Paul Barnas

**2024 Life of Service Award** | Amanda Molloy

**2024 Nicholas Ramundo Class of 2014 Award** | Dillon Bohlke

**2024 Bonner Changemaker** | Rachel Gifford

**2024 NExT Changemaker** | Amelia Risinit

**2024 VISTA Changemaker** | Hea Gundlich



## CONNECT WITH US:

On Our Website | [www.siena.edu/ace](http://www.siena.edu/ace)

Via Social Media | [@sienacollegeace](https://www.instagram.com/sienacollegeace)