The University of Alabama has a critical role to play in preparing students to serve as effective, engaged and ethical citizens, the Center for Ethics and Social Responsibility (CESR) seeks to assist students in developing a distinct definition of moral and civic maturity, making the values and skills of citizenship a hallmark of a UA education.

The University of Alabama’s strong commitment to civic engagement and UA’s history of community-university partnerships serve as a foundation for the center. Faculty and students in a wide range of departments at UA have earned distinction for their scholarly contributions to the study of ethics and civic engagement. CESR builds upon these substantial resources, with the larger goal of linking curriculum and the campus culture by establishing multiple opportunities through which students can engage in meaningful service for academic credit while giving thoughtful consideration to their ethical obligations toward fellow citizens.

In particular, CESR staff assists faculty members in developing service-learning courses that engage community organizations in partnerships designed to both enhance academic learning and apply scholarly knowledge to salient community issues. Service experiences are integrated into students’ academic curricula, providing structured time for students to think, talk and write about what they did and saw during the activities.

In seeking to better connect social responsibility and ethical development to the academic mission of the University, the work of CESR also entails the development of academic programs such as Moral Forum (a university-wide debate competition that is an integral part of the University Honors Program) and a minor in civic engagement and leadership (co-sponsored by New College, the Department of Philosophy, the ROTC program and CESR) as well as courses such as Documenting Justice (a year-long, justice-based documentary film-making class) and SaveFirst: Poverty in America (a service-learning course that combines academic discussions on perceptions of poverty with volunteer tax preparation services for low-income families). CESR also is concerned with developing and supporting non-curricular activities that incorporate ethical and social discourse into campus life.

CESR began in fall 2005 as a result of a gift from Mignon C. Smith. Concerned about what she perceived to be an increasing lack of ethics in business and public affairs, Ms. Smith sought to establish a university-based ethics program that would support the study of ethics and develop projects to nurture social responsibility and reflective, thoughtful citizenship. Under the leadership of the president and provost, and along with the help of an interdisciplinary group of UA faculty, this vision became the CESR.

To learn more about CESR, contact cesr@ua.edu; call (205) 348-6490; visit cesr.ua.edu or come into our office at Temple Tutwiler Hall on Colonial Drive, next to Reese Phifer Hall.