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## Community Service on Campus

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*"Everyone can be great because everyone can serve."  
Martin Luther King, Jr.*

### Introduction

As De Tocqueville observed in the nineteenth century, Americans are unique in that they rely on voluntary action to accomplish important tasks. The role of community service on university and college campuses has increased rapidly since the latter half of the 1980s (Theus, 1988). Students are demonstrating greater interest in volunteerism, and many administrators have responded through increased funding and advising.

Community service can be an integral, valuable portion of the campus community according to Boyer (Carnegie Foundation, 1990). This type of campus community helps to clarify academic as well as civic standards and defines the underlying values which support a community of learning. Such a community is described as purposeful, open, just, disciplined, caring, and celebrative. Students involved in community service may affirm these values in their volunteer activities and with linkages between these activities and their classroom experiences (Carnegie Foundation, 1990).

Unfortunately, on many campuses community service has been largely uncoordinated and unrecognized. By providing greater support, college and university administrators may improve services to students, enrich alumni relations by informing them about the activities and involving them as contacts in the community whenever possible, and enhance cooperation between the campus and the surrounding community. The establishment of a campus community service center is one way to achieve these goals. This article will review the current community service situation as it exists on many campuses, suggest advantages of a community service center, and make recommendations for the establishment of a campus community service center.

### Current Situation

#### Resources

More resources have become available from nationwide service organizations such as Campus Compact and the Campus Outreach Opportunity League in the last few years than ever before. Campus Compact is an organization of over 200 university presidents across the country. The intent of this group is to increase the level of community service on college campuses nationwide using a top-down approach. Each involved president is attempting to create a campus environment

which community service activity becomes an integral and essential part of undergraduate life. Part of this strategy is to incorporate community service with the academic curricula (Theus, 1988). Member institutions receive publications from the Campus Compact national headquarters, invitations to meetings, assistance with grant proposals, and service fellowships for undergraduates (Levine, 1989).

The Campus Outreach Opportunity League (COOL) was formed in 1984 by Wayne Meisel as a support network for volunteer activities. It is now staffed by young college graduates and takes a grass-roots approach to community service, offering advice on community service issues to over 450 campuses across the nation (Theus, 1988). COOL currently sponsors conferences, research, awards, and community service projects such as alternative spring breaks and programs which can be carried out on each campus. One of COOL's goals is to use community service as a means of addressing issues of campus racism by working to involve students of different races and ethnic groups (Theus, 1988).

Service groups currently exist on many campuses across the country. These include Alpha Phi Omega, the national coeducational service fraternity founded in 1925; Circle K, an affiliate of the Kiwanis Club; Student Y, a branch of the YMCA and YWCA; volunteer bureaus, which sponsor service projects and refer students to volunteer positions in the community; and campus ministries. Other organizations exist to meet more specialized needs, such as Habitat for Humanity, which constructs housing for the homeless; the National Student Campaign Against Hunger, and literacy groups.

### Existing Problems

Campus community service traditionally has been an offshoot of campus social organizations and student activities offices (Theus 1988). Advising and funding tend to be haphazard for these groups. Communication among community service groups and with the administration is largely uncoordinated. Resources, including funding and supplies, are decentralized which often leads to competition for scarce resources and inefficient use of those resources which could be shared. As a result, students often become discouraged that the university seems to be unresponsive to their efforts and to their needs. On many campuses, no centralized records of past projects are kept which leads to a continual reinvention of the wheel. Few records are kept of individual students' service involvement in order to provide recommendations or records of service, often known as service transcripts, to potential employers. These service transcripts demonstrate the student's involvement with the community and experience to the employer.

Community service agencies seeking student volunteers are frustrated by the difficulty of contacting students (C. Rogers, personal communication, January 29, 1991). To reach interested students agency staff members may need to call several different advisors or student leaders. This time consuming process makes it

difficult for agency staff to reach volunteers, particularly when volunteers are needed quickly, such as in an emergency relief situation. The decentralization also makes it difficult for the staff members to screen for volunteers who best meet the needs of their agency.

Fundraising is another problem faced by many student community service groups. The separate student organizations are not coordinated to perform joint fundraising projects and often may not have the skill or knowledge necessary to write for grants or solicit donations effectively. Conversely, organizations having excess materials or supplies they wish to donate may not know whom to contact.

Without concerted action by student affairs administrators, students may become apathetic about including community service as a part of their college education. In addition, community service agencies and employment recruiters may become discouraged from seeking help from members of the university community, and community service will not be truly integrated into university culture and activities.

### **Benefits and Functions of a Campus Community Service Center**

#### Benefits

Better relationships with community agencies are a result of collaboration, reciprocity, and acknowledgment of interdependence. The needs of both the university and each community organization can be met with a sharing of resources and expertise (Cotton & Stanton, 1990).

A campus community service center addresses many of these issues. Such centers coordinate community service efforts and may be integrated into many different facets of the university. The author has compiled views of undergraduate students engaged in community service and relied on extensive past experience in service projects in order to describe some of the possible functions and benefits of a community service center.

In order to improve the volunteer experiences of the student, the center distributes and keeps volunteer and agency contracts. These contracts stipulate the rights and the responsibilities of the volunteer and the agency. These forms also include a section for the student to state his or her learning goals for the volunteer experience. The volunteer and agency contracts are signed by both parties and are kept on file in the service center. These contracts also serve as job descriptions for prospective volunteers.

Centralized records of each student's volunteer service are kept by the staff of the service center to facilitate dissemination of the service transcript and to serve as a basis for letters of recommendation. This is particularly important because in many cases community service agencies have high turnover among professional staff and are therefore unable to provide personalized recommendations for students. These records also assist employers seeking students with strong records of community service.

### Functions

An established center serves as a central location for agencies needing volunteers and students seeking volunteer experience to connect. Outreach functions to recruit volunteers are also facilitated. The center acts as a central clearinghouse for information about volunteerism and provides resources for student groups. This centralized location enhances cooperation and communication among campus service organizations and community groups.

Administrative resources are available through the center, including advisors, meeting space, clerical support, computer access, and office supplies. In addition, project supplies such as shovels, hoses, building materials, paint, and wheelbarrows are gathered and kept in this central location for use by any student or student group engaged in community service. This allows groups unable to afford or borrow such equipment to have ready access to it, which facilitates service projects requiring these materials.

The community service center provides information on grant-writing and fundraising for student groups whose members wish to seek additional funding. Staff members apply for grants to coordinate community service among groups and for special projects. The community service center acts as a collection point for accepting and soliciting cash donations. It also allows local business people to be solicited one time by the center and not have continual requests throughout the year by many different groups. Any donation of food, supplies, or transportation could be accepted in one location.

A service library is an essential part of the service center. The library includes information about fund raising, volunteerism resources, volunteer job listings, descriptions of past service projects, information on other service programs, and project planning guidelines.

The center provides a mechanism for dealing with legal issues associated with volunteerism. It provides liability information and waiver forms for students in coordination with the campus legal services and the dean of students office.

Community service also helps students establish connections between academic life and the larger society (Boyer, 1987). The center may improve volunteers' learning experiences by conducting a series of developmental workshops about community service. The center staff hosts conferences and conducts reflection sessions for volunteers, during which they discuss their volunteer experiences and relate them to their academic studies (Boyer, 1987; Connolly, 1989). The addition of formal seminars and written or oral assignments creates a viable program for academic credit (Boyer, 1987). This unites service with the curriculum by involving faculty in the discussions, encouraging the faculty to incorporate community service in their classes, and providing them resource materials. Through retreats, courses, and orientation programs, community service also becomes an important component in fostering leadership development in students (Delve & Rice, 1990).

Alliances with career services helps to provide information on the role of

volunteerism in career planning. Community service often has an impact on motivation, career choice, and responsibility (Boyer, 1987). Service is also useful to students as a method of gaining experience and exploring career options. Depending upon the sanctioning guidelines of each institution, community service may be used as a disciplinary action for various forms of misconduct by students. The center works with the campus judicial system in order to assist in the coordination of creative sanctioning. Caution is necessary to ensure that the service center is not viewed by students as a punitive organization.

Ad hoc service projects often arise on campuses. This center provides a mechanism for assisting with those projects, such as Peace Corps intern recruitment (a Campus Compact project), general Peace Corps recruitment, Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) recruitment, Teaching For America (a teaching program in underprivileged areas) recruitment, student nominations for various service awards, and coordination of campus-wide community service projects. This office also addresses state and national legislative issues concerning community service.

Finally, the service center performs evaluations and needs assessments of volunteerism on campus. The center acts as a connection between the campus and the community. Its formation signals an active commitment by the university to community service and allows the university to benefit from the work its students do for the community.

Community service centers have already been established at some universities. Brown University has established the Center for Public Service, which works to tie community service to the curriculum. The goals of the center include facilitating educational community service opportunities and maximizing the impact such experiences have for the students, the University, and the community (Nozaki, 1989). The center sponsors workshops, forums, national and Brown fellowships, special programs, publications, and student groups (S. Stroud, personal communication, February 22, 1990). Other similar community service centers have been established at institutions such as Notre Dame, Stanford, Earlham, and Rutgers.

### **Implementation of a Community Service Center**

The specific needs of each institution vary. These needs must be discovered and acted upon for the community service center to benefit the university community. Because each university campus has unique needs, a task force is necessary to identify options for creating a service center to meet the needs of a specific campus. The task force can take a major role in planning a center beneficial to the institution and surrounding community, but it will also benefit from some of the many resources available from established centers, Campus Compact, and COOL. This task force involves all relevant constituencies including administrative staff, faculty, students, and community representatives. Ideally, it is

chaired by a professional experienced in the area of student community service. This person needs a strong service background and solid communication skills including consensus-building abilities in order to form a solid base of support for the center and meet the needs of the many different constituencies involved. The task force determines a mission for the center congruent with that of the university and with the agencies which it will help students serve. The task force also determines where the center will fit into the physical and organizational structure of the college or university.

If the institution has previously established community service programs, the program leaders should be allowed to remain autonomous while receiving the benefits of the center's increased advising, support, and cooperation. While the student leaders of those organizations may welcome the support of a community service center, they probably will not invite direct intervention by an outside person or organization.

The Duquesne University community service staff made several recommendations for the implementation of a campus volunteer program. Their guidelines include establishing an easily recognized name and logo for the program to identify it as a single entity. The staff also recommends directing letters to first-year students about the program, and introducing it to resident assistants and other campus student leaders, emphasizing how they can best involve their organizations. Arranging publicity in the campus newspaper and meeting with the university public relations staff in order to obtain media exposure is also suggested (Duquesne University Office of Programs and Activities, 1990).

Each campus must address issues of the responsibility of training and supervision, assessment and evaluation, and recognition with each off-campus organization with the various community organizations. (Cotton and Stanton, 1990). These issues can become problematic if not addressed early.

Much of the work for the center is performed by students, giving them valuable leadership and administrative experience. The actual labor for building the center and gathering resources is also done by students, thus giving them a sense of ownership of and involvement with the center.

### Summary

The community service center staff provides guidance and resources for community service organizations already in place, encourages communication and cooperation between them, and addresses areas currently neglected. The center staff monitors the quality of the volunteer experiences, provides support and a community of involvement for volunteers, and enhances students' learning by allowing them to consider larger issues in the context of their own service work (Connolly, 1989).

The establishment of a community service center maximizes the accessibility of available resources and provides better support for students and the community.

The center also establishes the basis for linking community service to the curriculum. The experience students receive adds to their social and intellectual understanding of the community and fosters commitment to the betterment of the campus and community in which they live (Delve & Rice, 1990). With the emphasis on community in higher education, this is an appropriate time to explore the integration of community service on campus. As the new vision of campus community is shared, colleges and universities also may foster an appreciation for the common good of the campus, the community, the nation, and the world (Carnegie Foundation, 1990).

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