

The Durham Statement

*from the participants
of the
Campus Outreach Opportunity League's Summit*

Duke University
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PREAMBLE

There is a growing movement among college students in the United States. It affects no one particular college or region, and it is not singularly ethnic or religious, reactionary or radical. It is based on a quiet but strong commitment to make American life better for people in need. Across the country we see college students staffing after-school recreation programs, organizing and maintaining shelters for the homeless and foodlines for the hungry, tutoring illiterate adults, working to clean up and protect the environment, and providing companionship to the elderly.

Sixty-five students, teachers, and administrators committed to helping students get involved in community service met in Durham, North Carolina under the auspices of the Campus Outreach Opportunity League (COOL). The participants agreed to write together a definitive statement about the strength and vital importance of this movement. This is our articulated vision.

The student service movement is a broad-based, comprehensive network of community service programs on more than 300 college campuses in the United States. While working to help others, students are strengthening their own senses of capability and compassion. They are refocusing their values, and searching for new ways to enrich their own lives, and those of others.

It is our hope that by the end of this decade every college and university student in the United States will be challenged to make concerted service efforts in their communities. To do this, service leaders—whether in the student body or the administration—must design programs which help students and those they work with discover dignity and self-determination.

THE MOVEMENT

The students, faculty, staff and administrators who comprise the heart of the movement represent a variety of ethnic, religious, cultural and economic backgrounds in the United States. We are cooperative in our efforts, but we draw support from the outside, too—from local and national leaders such as community and federal agencies,

mayors and governors, foundations, and ethnic communities. By joining together, this network is showing students how to help others and, in turn, to help themselves. We do this by providing college students with the leadership, structure, and challenge necessary for their understanding that every effort, no matter how large or small, makes a difference.

As students get involved in big brother/big sister programs, literacy projects or recycling centers, their service activism takes three different shapes. The first is direct action, through which students target crisis situations. For example, students who work in soup kitchens or shelters for the homeless make difficult situations easier, if but temporarily. Educational action improves the quality of life for people who have the potential to correct their circumstances. Students who teach adults to read are providing essential living skills. Finally, enabling action teaches people to help themselves. Community members are enabled when they can design their own long-range solutions to chronic poverty and injustice: they become essentially self-sufficient. All three levels of action are equally as important; work in any one area counts as a major contribution to the community.

The reasons students become involved in these kinds of action are as numerous as the kinds of work they do. Some tutor children so they can use their free time constructively. Others start an after-school theatre group because they want to practice their art and have fun in the process. Still others ladle soup at a soup kitchen to curb the hunger they see on urban streets. Through these kinds of action, service is building students' self-confidence, during years which can at times be both frightening and difficult. By getting off campus, students learn that their efforts are valuable to others. Yet students are also able to explore careers in the public and private sectors: whether it is law or medicine, construction or government, students are learning about segments of American vocational life by working with those who both perform and utilize services.

Furthermore, students involved in community service are learning to become leaders. This nation is dependent on an active, thoughtful and sensitive leadership. By helping students to become involved in community service, we are supporting that kind of leadership and citizenship

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now, and for the future as well. Whether they are responsible for large or small projects, students are taking on responsibility rarely given them on campuses.

No matter what level of hands-on commitment students initially have, strong organizations can also help students link their intellectual thought with their first-hand experiences. It is in this way that students develop positive outlooks on some of this nation's gravest ills, and an unparalleled enthusiasm about the difference they can make as individuals. Students recognize that their work brings renewed hope, respect, and dignity to those they help.

Students often say that they learn more from the people they are helping than the other way around. Students mature, grow intellectually and spiritually, and gain social skills. They develop social consciences, ethical sensitivity, and leadership skills. Through service, students are realizing the inherent worth in a commitment to helping individuals in need as well as society at large. It is a commitment which many are taking with them after leaving school. More and more recent graduates are becoming "Green Deans"—organizers of umbrella community service programs at their alma maters. Others go into VISTA and the Peace Corps, and still others, such as those in the private sector, spend free time doing service in their new communities, just as they did upon arriving at college.

It has been shown that students have much to gain from service. But perhaps the most important point is the way in which communities benefit from service. The addition of human resources, donated materials, and augmented social programs to community life may not make problems disappear, but the differences count nonetheless. Children learn to swim, people learn to read, the elderly gain companionship, victims of crime receive assistance, the hungry are fed, the homeless are sheltered, and houses are built and repaired. And in the process, students become not just transient residents of a place, but engaged citizens. They become thoughtful caretakers rather than passive academics.

Colleges and universities receive the benefits of service in ways as diverse as their students and communities. Professors and administrators are learning that service is not anti-intellectual: on the contrary, it makes coursework tangible, and brings words and ideas to life. It is one thing to learn about society through books. It is altogether another to put that knowledge to work—to see what the issues are first hand.

At the same time, public service is rapidly becoming a recruitment tool for prospective students. Universities long neglectful of applicants' hours of dedicated community work are beginning to place more importance on such involvement, and rightly so. Similarly, students become active early on, as freshmen and sophomores: their commitment is ingrained by the time they graduate. Thus they are leaving school with a solid, practiced commitment to the betterment of society.

OUR CHALLENGE

The opportunity to participate in community service is fundamental to a student's education, intellectual growth and personal development: it is our goal to challenge every student to participate in the student service movement. Looking ahead, it is clear that colleges and universities must offer on-campus comprehensive service programs. These programs should provide the channels through which students cooperate amongst themselves and with their communities to enhance the quality of life for both the community, and the students. Support for these efforts must come from a growing network of students, parents, faculty, administrators, community leaders, the private sector and alumni/ae.

As new issues arise in the coming months and years, students should have the knowledge and resources to recognize the issues, and move to create innovative and effective responses to them. Existing community service programs must be flexible enough to address current and impending crises which threaten the stability of our nation. Where there are homeless people, students can work directly, by volunteering time to shelters. Where there are people unable to read, students can help them learn. All schools, regions, races, religions and political factions could be represented in this movement.

National, state and local leaders are increasingly attentive to student service. It is imperative for growth that their efforts to increase student service funding be expanded. Legislators can help student service grow by developing specific legislation targeted toward making community service on campus feasible: in the future, financial aid programs will exist which qualify service as a "work-study" job intended to defray tuition costs.

Colleges and universities can expand student involvement by funding individual programs, developing service-based curriculae, eliminating institutional taxation of service grants, developing a network of service-experienced alumni, providing forums, debate, and seminars on pressing domestic issues, and recruiting prospective students with community service experience.

It is our goal that students will simultaneously address multiple issues and create innovative and effective responses to them. It is only through the examination of issue linkages—the way that illiteracy is connected to homelessness, for example—that real change can take place.

The student service movement has arrived and is growing. It helps meet the needs of students, individuals, and communities. And it must continue to do so. For those who cannot read, cannot afford a place to sleep, who live in fear, pain, and loneliness, help is not simply needed, it is necessary. Students, faculty, staff and administrators at colleges and universities cannot solve all of society's ills alone, but we can bring a new sense of a beginning along with energy, action, and hope.