

# In the Heart of Texas: Student Volunteerism at the University of Texas at Austin

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*"Revitalizing America will require more than altering the economy and the role of government. It will require that each of us affirms our personal responsibility for serving the communities in which we make our lives."*

Howard R. Swearer, 15th President of Brown University

## INTRODUCTION

Today's young people are credited with "out-performing all prior generations in the altruism department" (Hinds, 2001, p. 5) for their involvement in tutoring programs, clean-up projects, social service organizations and health care institutions. Writing for *The National Civic Review*, Keiser (2000) cites data suggesting that two-thirds of young people are active volunteers. Campus Compact, a national coalition of college presidents from more than 900 colleges and universities committed to the civic purposes of higher education, reported in 2002 that 33% of students on member campuses are involved in service projects, up from 28% in 2001. (Campus Compact 2002 Service Statistics, p. 2) Volunteerism clearly is "an underpublicized aspect of the new politics that is emerging" among young people today (Keiser, 2000, p. 36).

Interest in youth community service emerges from multiple perspectives. In order to combat rising crime rates, violence and substance abuse among youth, public officials and news media have called on educational institutions to play a more active role in fostering moral development among youth. While earlier initiatives focused primarily on molding attitudes and beliefs, more recent efforts encourage service as a form of prosocial behavior designed to foster cooperation, respect and consideration for others. With an interest in community service as a venue for moral education and prosocial behavior

Serow and Dreyden (1990) surveyed 1,960 students in eleven southeastern institutions of higher education. Their findings revealed a connection between the frequency of community service and certain institutional and individual characteristics. Spiritual/religious values, however was the only personal variable that showed a positive significant relationship to community service. Serow and Dreyden go on to suggest that colleges and universities are taking a more active role in organizing and coordinating community action in an effort to assist students' personal development while also enhancing relationships between colleges and the communities in which they reside. They further postulate that community service projects may offer an approach for transcending the often rigid boundaries that separate the traditional academic disciplines.

Several studies have documented the positive affects of volunteering and community service on the student volunteer (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda & Yee, 2000; Johnson, Beebe, Mortimer & Synder, 1998; Hamilton & Fenzel 1988; Uggen & Janikula, 1999.) Of particular note is the longitudinal study on the impact of service activities on 22,236 students. Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, and Yee (2000) followed college students, most of whom had entered college as freshman in 1994, through the fall of 1998. The study revealed that 46% of the students participated in some form of community service and 30% participated in course-based or service-

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learning programs during the four year period. The effects of community service and service learning were assessed on 11 different outcome measures related to academic achievement, career plans, values, leadership, self-efficacy and plans to participate in service after college. Positive effects were associated with service participation on all 11 outcome measures. Service participation appeared to have "its strongest effect on the student's decision to pursue a career in a service field" regardless of prior career intentions. (Astin, et.al, 2000, p.2)

In spite of the growing attention given to service participation on college campuses, there is a remarkable paucity of research in this area. Yet, it is important to know more about volunteering at this stage of life due to the strong influence education has on volunteering among adults. Numerous studies have shown that better educated adults are more likely to volunteer and tend to do so for longer periods of time (Wilson 2000). However, these studies are unable to determine what it is about higher education that promotes volunteering. It could be the case that increased levels of knowledge or a more critical perspective promote volunteering. Alternatively, college students may be exposed to messages that promote volunteering and maintain it even after college completion. A third possibility is that college students

"learn" to volunteer in college and so are better able to do so in later life. In short, there are a variety of possible explanations for why high levels of education are conducive to volunteering, but the specific mechanisms remain unclear. Consequently, more research is needed to shed light on this seemingly important stage of the volunteering life-cycle.

## METHODS

### Data

The University of Texas Volunteering Survey (UTVS) was designed by researchers at the RGK Center for Philanthropy and Community Service at the University of Texas at Austin (UT). The goal of the survey was to better understand volunteering and giving behaviors among undergraduate students at The University of Texas at Austin. For comparison purposes, a survey format similar to that used by the Independent Sector (IS) during their surveys in the 1990s asked students a variety of questions about volunteering and charitable giving over the past academic year.<sup>1</sup>

The telephone survey conducted in the Spring of 2002 by the UT Office of Survey Research was approximately 20 to 25 minutes in length. The sample was selected using a systematic random sampling technique with a random start based on the Office of the Registrar's student database. The completion rate for the survey was 63%, yielding a total sample size of 1,514.

The demographic characteristics of the sample showed that they closely matched those of the UT student population they were meant to represent. Table 1 compares the characteristics of the survey population with the overall UT undergraduate student population.

### Measurement

As previously noted, the survey asked volunteering questions that were similar to those employed by the IS surveys in the 1990s. The UTVS asked respondents about volunteering under the assumption that asking about specific areas of volunteering, rather than volunteering in general, would yield better data on that activity. More specifically, the survey asked respondents whether they had

**TABLE 1.**  
**Demographic Characteristics of**  
**Sample vs. Student Population.**

Characteristic	Survey	Overall Student Body
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	53%	51%
<b>Race</b>		
African American	4%	4%
Asian American	16%	16%
Hispanic	13%	14%
International Students	4%	4%
Anglo	63%	62%
<b>Class Standing</b>		
Freshman	14%	14%
Sophomore	21%	22%
Junior	26%	25%
Senior	39%	39%

volunteered in each of the following areas over the past academic year: (a) arts, culture or humanities; (b) education or tutoring; (c) youth development or mentoring; (d) nursing home, senior citizen center, or other similar organization; (e) hospital or other health organization; (f) international or ethnic group or cause; (g) political organization or campaign; (h) adult or youth recreation; (i) church, synagogue, mosque, or other religious organization; (j) work-related or professional organization; (k) environmental cause; (l) UT student government or student committee/organization; and (m) other volunteer work. If students mentioned they had volunteered in a particular area, they were asked how frequently they did that volunteer work and how many hours they spent doing the work in a typical session. The answers to these questions were multiplied to create a measure of hours spent over the past academic year volunteering in a particular area. These hours were then summed across years to create a total measure of hours volunteered over the past year.

For analytical purposes, we also considered the possibility that the predictors of volunteering might vary based on the area of volunteering. Consequently, we divided the volunteering areas in a number of ways. The first division is based on whether the volunteering was UT or community-based. For this portion of the analyses, we considered all forms of volunteering community-based except for volunteering in (a) UT student government or student committees/organizations, and (b) work-related or professional groups. The choice of the former was clear; we put the second in this category because most of the volunteering in this fashion is organized and/or conducted on campus. For the second division, we grouped the volunteering areas into six broader categories of general interest. The first, advocacy, is made up of (a) international/ethnic, (b) political, and (c) environmental volunteering. The second, education/arts is composed of (a) education/tutoring, and (b) arts, culture, humanities. The third, health and human services consists of (a) health organizations, and (b) nursing homes or similar organizations. The fourth,

development, is made up of (a) youth development and mentoring, and (b) adult/youth recreation. Religion is made up of the single volunteering for religious organizations item.

Although the survey contains a number of items that can be used to predict volunteering, here we only include basic demographic variables as well as two other variables of interest. The demographic variables include gender, race (i.e., African American, Hispanic, Asian American, International, Anglo), class standing (i.e., freshman, sophomore, junior, senior), and college. Previous research has shown that other factors such as work and social interaction are important predictors of volunteering (Wilson 2000). Consequently, we include measures of work hours (per week), group memberships, and religious service attendance. Finally, we include a measure of giving over the past year. To assess this measure, students were asked whether they had given to three types of funds over the past academic year: a September 11th fund; a non-September 11th fund; or both types of funds. If they had, they were asked how much they gave. We then summed these responses to create an overall measure of giving over the past year.

## RESULTS

### Overall Volunteering Levels

According to the survey findings, 27,000 students, or 74% of the undergraduate student body, participated in volunteer activities during the 2001-2002 academic year. As shown in Table 2, approximately 77% of female students volunteered compared to only 71% of male students. Seventy-seven percent (77%) of African American and Hispanic students volunteered, followed by 74% of Anglos, 73% of Asian Americans, and 65% of international students.

Slightly more underclassmen volunteered than upperclassmen, although service figures remained fairly consistent across the academic spectrum. Seventy-six percent of freshmen, 74% of sophomores and juniors, and 73% of seniors reported serving. The College of Education reported the largest percentage of students engaged in service at 82%, followed by Business majors (76%), Liberal Arts (76%),

**TABLE 2.****Percentage of Students Volunteering by Selected Respondent Characteristics.**

	All	Percentage Volunteering Off campus	UT
<b>Gender</b>			
Female	77.0%	72.0%	32.0%
Male	70.7%	66.9%	27.0%
<b>Race</b>			
African American	76.8%	73.2%	39.3%
Hispanic	76.7%	72.1%	34.0%
Asian American	72.8%	69.0%	26.8%
International	64.8%	59.3%	22.2%
Anglo	74.1%	69.6%	29.3%
<b>Class Standing</b>			
Freshman	76.4%	69.0%	33.8%
Sophomore	73.7%	68.9%	28.9%
Junior	74.2%	70.6%	25.3%
Senior	73.3%	69.6%	31.5%
<b>College</b>			
Business	76.3%	71.3%	33.1%
Education	81.7%	79.3%	28.0%
Engineering	67.4%	63.2%	31.6%
Fine Arts	75.5%	73.5%	28.6%
Communications	70.2%	67.4%	25.5%
Natural Sciences	73.7%	68.6%	28.3%
Liberal Arts	75.9%	70.7%	29.3%
Others	76.3%	74.6%	37.3%
<b>Work Hours per Week</b>			
0 hours (didn't work)	74.9%	70.1%	28.4%
1 – 19 hours	76.0%	73.1%	31.8%
20 – 39 hours	72.0%	66.7%	29.6%
40+ hours	71.3%	67.0%	28.7%
<b>Group Memberships</b>			
Greek only	82.6%	77.2%	32.6%
Other group only	82.9%	78.0%	39.8%
Greek and other group	93.0%	91.4%	50.8%
No membership	60.2%	55.9%	14.9%

Fine Arts (76%) and "other," which includes schools such as Pharmacy, Nursing and Social Work, with 76% of these students volunteering.

As is the case in other studies of volunteering (e.g., Wilson and Musick 1997a), volunteering is less common among those who work long hours. For example, 71.3% of students who worked forty or more hours a week volunteered compared to 76% of those who worked from one to nineteen hours a

week. Although these differences mirror those in other studies, they are not that large and are not significantly different.

The largest differences we observe in this table are by group memberships. Those who are members of organizations, whether Greek or of other types, are much more likely to volunteer than those who are not members of organizations. Indeed, almost all (93%) of students who were members of Greek and other organizations did some volunteering over the past academic year. This finding supports the work of others which notes the importance of organizational affiliation for spurring volunteer activity (Wilson 2000).

### Volunteering Areas and Hours

The patterns of overall volunteering found in Table 3 are similar to those found for the total number of areas volunteered and hours spent volunteering. For example, undergraduate women (89 hours) spent more hours in service than their male counterparts (76 hours). Hispanic students reported an average of 100 hours of service, Asian American students 85 hours of service, Anglo students contributed 81 hours of service, African American students volunteered 67 hours, and international students served 47 hours.

Upperclassmen volunteered more hours than underclassmen. The average senior spent 87 hours in service, the average freshman served 71 hours. Not surprisingly, students who worked forty or more hours a week (82 hours) volunteered for less time than did those who worked one to nineteen hours a week (97 hours). As was the case for overall volunteering, students who were organization members tended to volunteer much more than students who were unaffiliated. In terms of areas volunteered, students who reported no memberships volunteered in about 1.2 areas. In contrast, those who were members of Greek and other organizations volunteered in over three areas on average. Incredibly, students who were members of both types of groups volunteered about 144 hours on average over the past academic year compared to only 60 hours for students with no memberships. Of all the factors we examined in this study, no other predicted levels of volunteer-

**TABLE 3.****Levels of Volunteering by Selected Respondent Characteristics.**

	Volunteering Areas <sup>1</sup>			Volunteering Hours		
	All	Off-campus	UT	All	Off-campus	UT
<b>Gender</b>						
Female	1.96	1.61	.35	88.62	74.50	14.12
Male	1.73	1.42	.31	75.55	61.16	14.38
<b>Race</b>						
African American	2.21	1.77	.45	67.38	58.98	8.39
Hispanic	1.99	1.61	.38	100.18	84.85	15.33
Asian American	1.87	1.60	.30	85.41	71.19	14.22
International	1.43	1.19	.24	47.37	39.59	7.78
Anglo	1.82	1.49	.33	80.64	65.92	14.72
<b>Class Standing</b>						
Freshman	1.89	1.50	.38	70.55	60.30	10.24
Sophomore	1.86	1.55	.31	79.95	67.07	12.89
Junior	1.80	1.51	.29	83.83	72.65	11.18
Senior	1.87	1.52	.35	87.34	68.83	18.50
<b>College</b>						
Business	1.84	1.48	.36	72.28	59.63	12.92
Education	2.06	1.74	.32	83.00	65.66	17.34
Engineering	1.57	1.22	.35	66.26	47.90	17.35
Fine Arts	2.12	1.80	.33	97.92	84.00	13.92
Communications	1.87	1.55	.32	81.44	63.84	17.60
Natural Sciences	1.78	1.47	.32	80.15	65.71	14.44
Liberal Arts	1.94	1.62	.32	92.30	80.23	12.07
Others	2.03	1.64	.39	98.31	87.87	10.44
<b>Work Hours per Week</b>						
0 hours (didn't work)	1.77	1.46	.31	68.9	56.4	12.5
1 – 19 hours	2.02	1.66	.36	97.2	8	0.6
20 – 39 hours	1.81	1.49	.32	84.9	71.0	13.9
40+ hours	1.78	1.44	.34	82.1	68.3	13.8
<b>Group Memberships</b>						
Greek only	2.30	1.96	.35	88.99	75.16	13.84
Other group only	2.22	1.77	.45	92.13	76.28	15.84
Greek and other group	3.08	2.47	.61	144.20	107.05	37.15
No membership	1.18	1.02	.15	59.82	51.62	8.19

**Notes:**

<sup>1</sup>Means reflect the number of areas (as shown in Table 1) mentioned. The potential range of responses was 0 – 13 for all areas, 0 – 11 for Non-UT areas, and 0 – 2 for UT areas.

ing as much as organizational affiliation.

The Independent Sector (IS), a national coalition of more than 700 national organizations, foundations, and corporate philanthropy programs that collectively represent the nonprofit sector, calculates the value of volunteer time and updates the value annually. The dollar value figure is based on the average hourly earnings of nonagricultural workers as determined by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, which is then increased by

12% to estimate for fringe benefits. At the 2001 value of \$16.05 per hour (Independent Sector's Value of Volunteer Time), the estimated dollar value of the 2,997,000 hours of volunteer service provided by UT undergraduate students is \$48,101,850.

### Volunteering Areas in the UTVS and IS Data

Table 4 shows the percentage of students volunteering in each of the thirteen areas assessed in the survey. The first column of percentages represents the portion of the UTVS sample who mentioned volunteering in that area or in one of the areas represented by the broader interest categories. The second column of percentages is similar but was generated based on the combined (IS) surveys from the 1990s. That is, using data from those five surveys, we created variables representing areas similar to those found in the UTVS. Given that the UTVS was designed for this type of analysis, such a comparison was not difficult to create. However, it is important to note that for both sets of percentages, we restricted the samples to those aged 18–24. This restriction was much more limiting for the IS sur-

veys as they were originally collected from all adults. A large majority of the UTVS sample fell within this age range, so the percentages shown here tend to mimic those in the sample as a whole. Further, because the UTVS was focused on a university population, the questions were modified somewhat to accommodate that population. Consequently, questions relating to university-level volunteering as asked in the UTVS were not asked in the IS surveys.

**TABLE 4.**

**Percentage Volunteering by Service Area in the UT Sample and Independent Sector Samples, 1990-1999.<sup>1</sup>**

UT Sample	IS Sample	
<b>Advocacy</b>	<b>23.3%</b>	<b>8.0%</b>
International or ethnic organizations	8.9%	1.6%
Political organizations or campaigns	8.8%	1.1%
Environmental causes	9.7%	6.7%
<b>Education/Arts</b>	<b>34.8%</b>	<b>12.8%</b>
Arts, Culture or Humanities	10.2%	4.8%
Education and tutoring	28.5%	10.7%
<b>Health and Human Services</b>	<b>19.3%</b>	<b>14.9%</b>
Nursing home, senior center or other similar	10.6%	9.8%
Health organizations (e.g., hospitals, hospice)	10.6%	--
Human services	--	.4%
<b>Development</b>	<b>22.2%</b>	<b>16.1%</b>
Youth development and mentoring	16.6%	12.4%
Adult or youth recreation	8.3%	7.2%
<b>Religious Organizations</b>	<b>22.5%</b>	<b>15.3%</b>
<b>University-related</b>	<b>29.7%</b>	<b>--</b>
Work-related and professional organizations	17.4%	--
UT student government or other committees	15.6%	--
<b>Other volunteering</b>	<b>16.8%</b>	<b>1.6%</b>

Notes: <sup>1</sup> {Percentages are based only on respondents aged 18-24 in both samples.

The results from Table 4 indicate that UT undergraduate students were much more likely to volunteer than a community sample of adults of the same age. For example, over 23% of the UTVS sample volunteered in the advocacy general interest area compared to only 8% of those in the IS samples. The difference in volunteering for education and the arts was even greater, with 35% of the UTVS sample having volunteered compared to only 13% of the IS samples. Respondents in the UTVS sample were even more likely to volunteer for religious organizations, something not commonly thought of being tied to the university experience. In short, based on these findings, it is apparent that the students in the UTVS were more likely to volunteer than people of the same age in a nationwide community sample.

### Motivation, attitudes and opinions

Students volunteered for many different reasons. Respondents were given a variety of choices and the opportunity to rank the importance of each choice. Compassion towards those in need was ranked as a "very" or "somewhat important" reason to volunteer by 94% of the undergraduates. Based on the same scale, 92% felt that volunteering provided a new perspective on things; 88% expressed interest in the activity; 80% believed volunteering is part of one's civic duty; 74% believed volunteering to be important to people they respect; 53% reported feeling needed; 40% reported networking as a motivation, and 36% said that volunteering helped them deal with personal problems.

Students also shared their thoughts about the importance of public service. Ninety-

**TABLE 5.**

**Motivations for Volunteering and Attitudes Towards Public Service.**

	Total
<b>Motivations for Volunteering<sup>1</sup></b>	
Makes respondent feel needed	52.6%
Feels compassion towards people in need	94.1%
Helps respondent make new contacts	40.3%
Important to the people the respondent respects	73.8%
Allows respondent to gain a new perspective	92.0%
Helps respondent deal with own personal problems	35.8%
Respondent has an interest in the activity	87.7%
Volunteering is a civic responsibility	79.5%
<b>General Attitudes Towards Public Service<sup>2</sup></b>	
Need for charitable organizations is greater now than 5 yrs. ago	74.0%
Charitable organizations help make communities better	92.8%
Respondent believes in power to help improve others' welfare	92.5%
<b>Attitudes Towards UT Volunteering<sup>2</sup></b>	
University should do more to promote volunteering	72.9%
Should be possible to get academic credit for volunteering	74.0%
University should not expect students to volunteer	36.5%

Notes: <sup>1</sup>Percentages reflect respondents reporting a reason was a very or somewhat important reason for volunteering.

<sup>2</sup>Percentages reflect respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing with the statement.

**TABLE 6.**  
**Percentage Volunteering by Levels of Giving and Religious Service Attendance.<sup>1</sup>**

	Percentage Distribution	Advocacy	Education/ Arts	Health/ Human Development	Religion	University- related
<b>Giving categories</b>						
1: \$0	40.7%	18.9%	31.9%	16.7%	19.2%	25.8%
2: \$1 - \$50	38.3%	23.3%	33.0%	20.4%	25.6%	29.7%
3: \$51 - \$150	10.4%	26.8%	47.1%	18.3%	19.6%	38.6%
4: \$151+	10.6%	34.6%	42.3%	25.6%	25.0%	35.9%
Significant differences	--	b,c,e	b,c,d,e	c	a	b,c,d,e,f
<b>Attendance categories</b>						
1: Never	23.5%	20.8%	27.5%	12.4%	16.3%	22.5%
2: Once to several times/year	31.7%	20.5%	31.1%	18.4%	18.6%	29.4%
3: 1-3 times/month	18.4%	23.3%	38.0%	21.9%	23.3%	29.7%
4: Once a week or more	26.4%	28.3%	43.9%	24.8%	31.1%	36.3%
Significant differences	--	c,e	b,c,d	a,b,c,e	b,c,e,f	a,b,c,d,e,f

Notes: <sup>1</sup> Significance levels are calculated at the  $p < .05$  level and indicate the following differences: (a) 1 and 2; (b) 1 and 3; (c) 1 and 4; (d) 2 and 3; (e) 2 and 4; and (f) 3 and 4.

three percent “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that “charitable organizations help make communities better;” 92% believed it to be “within their power to do things that improve the welfare of others;” and 74% believed “the need for charitable organizations to be greater today than five years ago.”

Approximately 74% of the students felt that academic credit should be given for volunteer work tied to a classroom experience. A much smaller percentage of students (37%) “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that the University should not expect students to volunteer.

### **Giving, Religious Service Attendance and Volunteering**

Students were generous with their resources as well as their time. Sixty percent of students gave money; 19% gave only to causes related to the events of September 11th, 21% gave only to other causes, and 20% gave to both types of causes. As shown in Table 6, about 38% of students gave less than \$50 in total, about 10% gave between \$51 and \$150, and about 11% gave \$151 or more. Although not shown in the table, the results indicate that churches and religious organizations received 12% of the student donations while health organizations received 10% of the contributions.

Table 6 also shows the percentage of respondents volunteering in the general interest categories by levels of contributions. The findings indicate that those who gave the

most were also most likely to volunteer. For example, in the advocacy category, only 19% of those who gave no money volunteered compared to 35% of those who gave at the highest level. A much larger difference was seen for religion: over half of those who gave at the highest level volunteered compared to only a fifth of those who gave nothing. Clearly volunteering and monetary contributions complement one another.

The second part of Table 6 is a similar analysis but instead examines patterns of volunteering based on religious service attendance. As Wilson and Musick (1997b) note, religious activity leads to volunteering in that it provides opportunities for volunteering and exposes attendees to religious messages that discuss compassion and caring for humankind. As expected based on this prior research, the table shows that respondents who attended church more often were much more likely to volunteer.

### **Recruitment strategies.**

Although not reported in a table, the UTVS asked students whether and how they had learned of volunteering opportunities. The five most frequently cited sources for gaining information about volunteer opportunities were, in rank order: student groups and organizations, student volunteer fair table exhibits sponsored by the University Volunteer Center, media publicity, personal invitation, and places of worship.

## CONCLUSION

Students at the University of Texas at Austin are actively engaged in serving their campus and their community. Whether or not they are "out-performing all prior generations in the altruism department" (Hinds, 2001, p.5) is not known given the lack of prior data, but students do serve and they serve in record number.

Likewise the serving behaviors of the African American and Hispanic students is equally worthy of note. Not only do members of both groups serve more than Anglo students, but Hispanic students also serve a greater number of hours on average than do students of other races.

Participation in groups and organizations significantly effects service behavior. Students who are members of Greek and other organizations serve more than other students, and they also join more groups and serve the greatest number of hours. The findings suggest the importance of social networks not only in providing information about service opportunities, but also in increasing the rates of service behavior (Wilson, 2000). Whether social networks also contribute to the higher levels of service among students within particular colleges is not discernable from the data secured, but it is a question worth additional exploration.

The relationship between work and volunteering found among students mirrors data from the general population (IS surveys; Wilson, 2000). Students who work part time volunteer more hours and in greater numbers than students who do not work at all, or who work full time.

Recent attention given to volunteering, to service-learning, to citizen service and to the relationship between volunteering and citizenship have all served to draw attention to the volunteering habits of young adults. Although a great deal of work remains to be done to fully understand the serving habits of college students, this study does provide a profile of the serving behaviors of the students attending the largest single campus public university in the United States.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Copies of the survey instrument may be obtained from the RGK Center for Philanthropy & Community Service.