

Valuing:

A process for helping inexperienced student volunteers find placements

NANCY B. ZAHLER

Coordinator of Student Volunteer Services
State University of New York at Geneseo
Geneseo, N.Y.

WHAT DO college and high school students look for in a service-learning experience? What personal needs and values do they seek to fulfill through community service? What kind of service is most appealing and appropriate for each individual?

You as a coordinator of a service-learning or volunteer program are expected to unravel these questions daily as you work with students in an effort to find the "perfect match" of interests, skills, and needs. If your program is generously supported and staffed, you may have the resources to offer an extensive personal interview and referral to each student who comes to you. However, if you find yourself in a more limited situation, you and your staff, if you have one, may employ a variety of other techniques in an attempt to offer referral services to large numbers of student volunteers.

Our Volunteer Center at the State University of New York (S.U.N.Y.) at Geneseo tried general meetings, sign-ups, agency fairs, and walk-in interviews. It became apparent that different student volunteers had different interests and needs, and that we had to recognize their individual skills, experiences, and values. Many stu-

dents who came to our Volunteer Center were experienced volunteers, eager to try a new program for a change of pace and a different experience. They were easily served from the information available in our clearinghouse files. There were others who could identify the type of volunteer job or client group that they wanted to work with. They too could be referred with a minimum of counseling from our staff. However, as more and more new students and inexperienced volunteers found their way to our Volun-

teer Center, their questions were less precise and their interests less defined. To meet their needs, extensive interviewing became necessary in order to refer them to an appropriate community placement. To be able to tune into students' needs, the staff found it necessary to learn more about the values that motivated them to volunteer.

Dr. Edward Thomson, former dean for student development, and I developed the group process described below in 1975 in an effort to improve the quality of

EXERCISE #1—VALUES CLARIFICATION WORKSHEET

Suggested time for each question is five minutes.

1. What is an important career goal I want to set for myself?
2. What is an important personal goal for me to set to live a satisfying life?
3. How can a volunteer experience help me to fulfill my goals?
4. List six volunteer experiences that you think you would enjoy.
5. Consider your schedule and determine how much time you can commit to a volunteer experience for this semester.
6. Evaluate the time commitment required for each volunteer experience that you listed in #4. (Ask facilitator if you are unsure of the time commitments required).
7. Which experience do you have the time to do well?
8. Rank them in terms of your schedule, with number one being the experience that fits your schedule most realistically.
9. Select your top three volunteer experiences.
10. Select the top one. Analyze your selection process to determine your reasons for selecting your first choice.

referral services offered to inexperienced volunteers. The exercises were inspired by similar efforts being undertaken in Geneseo's career planning program. The group process seemed to be a necessary and practical way to reach large numbers of students in a personal, proactive manner. It also reduced the number of personal interviews, which in turn enabled our limited staff to work on other tasks. The students themselves gained an opportunity to examine their own values with their peers.

A Group Process

How do you use this group valuing process to help students find appropriate volunteer experiences? Before you start, be sure you can identify which students should be advised to participate in these exercises. An experienced volunteer who has a clear idea of what he or she would like to accomplish should not be included in the group because the exercises are designed for those who are *not* sure of what they would like to do. The ideal target group, then, would be 15 to 20 students who have expressed an interest in volunteer service but who have been unable to identify clearly their interests, goals, and needs. A series of sessions, which take two to three hours each, can be scheduled at the beginning of the semester. This group valuing process should not be used as a recruiting device because the nature of the activities presupposes genuine interest on the part of the participants.

Objectives of Valuing

Valuing as a group placement technique is a process designed to enable students to achieve the following objectives:

- To promote group discussion of both the goals of volunteer service and individual motivations (e.g., career exploration and experience, personal growth, social action).
- To give students an opportunity to clarify their own personal goals and interests, and to identify

EXERCISE #2

VALUES

Helping others directly by serving in a one-to-one situation

Helping others indirectly in an auxiliary capacity

Helping others directly by assisting in a small group activity

Helping others directly by assuming leadership of a small group activity

Helping others by doing things for them

Helping others by doing things with them

Working in a highly structured situation

Working in an unstructured situation

Working in a situation where you often see results of your work

DEFINITIONS

Direct involvement in a face-to-face relationship. Often involves personal commitment: big brother/sister, probation case work, tutoring, therapy.

Work behind the scenes; helping others to get help: providing transportation for elderly, bloodmobile, covering phone at Volunteer Center, receptionist, typist.

Helping to execute a planned activity: teacher-aide, aide in recreation programs, assistant scout master.

Helping to plan and execute activities. Responsible for activity participants and other volunteers: recreation leader, scout master, coach.

Doing those things that people are unable to do for themselves. Involves a physical dependence: writing letters for, reading to, physical care, transportation, advocacy services.

Largely recreational in nature. Involves socializing or minimal assistance: big brother/sister, probation work, therapy, recreation, visiting.

Involves execution of assigned duties or tasks, or predetermined and organized activities. Assumes others plan and supervise and have specific expectations: teacher aide, clerical tasks, therapy, physical care of people.

Working with a program or set of activities that may fluctuate with attendance, moods, or physical resources: recreation, socializing, tutoring, visiting, big brother/sister.

Need for frequent evidence of your accomplishments or of clients responses: special event, fund-raising, acting in a play.

**EXERCISE #3
VALUES/EXPERIENCES WORKSHEET**

Working in a situation where you often see results of your work	Working in an unstructured situation	Working in a highly structured situation	Helping others by doing things with them	Helping others directly by doing things for them	Helping others directly by assuming leadership of a small group activity	Helping others directly by assisting in a small group activity	Helping others indirectly in an auxiliary capacity	Helping others directly by serving in a one-to-one situation	First write in six volunteer experiences that you listed in Exercise #1, question four. Then check the values that apply to each experience.

the participants, explain the goals and procedure of the session. The facilitator should encourage students to discuss their interests in volunteering, any relevant past experiences, and the ways in which they think volunteer service might relate to the other facets of their college life and activities.

Exercise #1—The facilitator should briefly explain the purpose and procedure of values clarification to prepare the students for the first exercise, and then hand out the values clarification worksheets (see page 48). In this introductory exercise, students are asked to formulate a possible career goal and a life goal, and to speculate about the ways in which volunteer service might enhance either or both goals. Students are asked to list possible volunteer experiences they think they might enjoy. They are then asked to consider their class schedules and other time commitments as important variables that will affect the kinds of placements they will ultimately select. The final clarifying step asks students to rank order their potential volunteer experiences according to their schedules.

Discussion—Depending on the personality of the group, the facilitator should encourage students to share some of their thoughts about question number three. Discussion at this point might be reassuring to students and serve to break up the written part of the session.

Time limits of five minutes per question should be adequate. To spend longer will not only prolong the entire session, but will defeat the somewhat spontaneous nature of the values clarification process. General questions about time commitments required for potential volunteer experiences should be answered quickly by the facilitator.

Exercise #2—The definitions handout should be distributed next (see page 49). Students should read through all of the values and their accompanying definitions. They should feel free to question and discuss the values and definitions to assure that they understand them

and discuss the volunteer values found in most helping relationships.

- To enable students to identify volunteer experiences most likely to satisfy their own volunteer values and needs.

- To enable students to select the volunteer experiences they feel would be most appropriate for them from resource materials provided by the volunteer coordinator.

How do you start?—First find a comfortable setting for your group

of 15 to 20 students. Make sure that your facilitators have been fully briefed and prepared with the following materials: values clarification worksheets (see page 48); values/definitions handouts (see page 49); values/experience worksheets (see this page); copies of the master grid (see page 51); and a referral book of volunteer jobs. Plan about two and a half to three hours for the entire session.

Warm-up—After introducing all

clearly enough to apply them in the subsequent exercises. Naturally, the definitions offered are not absolute. The values themselves may be questioned, but try to avoid prolonged discussion so as not to lose sight of your goal, which is to help students to find placements. Interested students should be encouraged to meet with the facilitator at another time to continue the discussion.

Take a break—This is a logical breaking point for everyone to take a few minutes to stretch.

Exercise #3—Once the students understand and agree to work with the values and definitions provided, hand out another worksheet (see page 50). In the right-hand column the student should list the potential volunteer experiences identified on the first worksheet under question four. This column should be headed, "Potential Volunteer Experiences." After listing their potential volunteer experiences, students should be asked to consider each experience separately and to check off any of the volunteer values that may have made them choose that experience or that reflect what they hope to be able to do in a helping relationship.

Students should be able to see a pattern emerge from their check marks. The lines having several checks will reflect the strongest values for each individual student.

Exercise #4—The facilitator should now distribute copies of the master grid (see this page). The volunteer values are listed in the same way as they appear on the worksheet. The heading of the right-hand column is "Volunteer Job Titles." These titles include many of the roles that student volunteers might fill in an agency, school, or community action group. Set up this way, the volunteer values are applied to specific tasks of job roles. These values help to describe the work and psychological setting a volunteer might encounter in the jobs listed.

The students should match up their own worksheets to the grid. By

lining up the volunteer value lines they should be able to read across the lines of their strong values and find check marks in the boxes of the volunteer jobs that involve those particular values. In this way, students should be able to identify several volunteer jobs that match their values as they have identified them. Next they should copy down the job titles that sound most interesting to them (they may choose to include some that did not correspond with their strong volunteer values) and then consult the referral book.

Self-referral—This is the final step in the process. There should be

a catalog of available volunteer jobs listed by job title and cross-referenced by client group or interest area (e.g., aging, criminal justice, health, education). Each entry should describe the agency or program, duties and requirements of each volunteer job, training provided, and placement procedures.

At this point, the students have considered their individual goals and time commitments. The exercises have provided them with some insight into the volunteer work values and conditions most important and/or appealing to them. They now know the kinds of volunteer jobs that would be most likely

EXERCISE #4 MASTER GRID										
Working in a situation where you often see results of your work	Working in an unstructured situation	Working in a highly structured situation	Helping others by doing things with them	Helping others by doing things for them	Helping others directly by assuming leadership of a small group activity	Helping others directly by assisting in a small group activity	Helping others indirectly in an auxiliary capacity	Helping others directly by serving in a one-to-one situation	VALUES	JOB TITLES
X		X					X			Clerical aide
X		X	X	X			X			Advocate
		X		X				X		Attendant (physical care)
X		X	X					X		Correspondent (pen pal)
X		X		X			X	X		Transportation aide
		X					X			Research aide
	X		X						X	Big brother/sister
	X		X						X	Counselor
X		X			X	X				Instructor
	X		X	X		X			X	Friendly visitor
X		X	X			X	X			Teacher aide
X		X	X						X	Tutor
X	X				X		X			Programming aide
X				X	X					Performing artist
X									X	Medical attendant
X			X		X	X				Recreation aide
						X	X			Supervisor

to meet their needs and the programs that utilize volunteers in those particular jobs. Usually the student is prepared at this point to select a specific program or agency.

You may find that, as students consult the referral book, they are drawn to volunteer jobs with a particular client or interest group. For example, some may be willing to do any job, regardless of the volunteer values, as long as they are working with the aged. Of the many variables involved with each volunteer experience and each volunteer, it is almost impossible to speculate about which variable—time, values, job, or client group—is strongest. Each is important and assumes a relative importance to each volunteer. It is our intent that each be identified, clarified, and actively considered when a volunteer selects a community service placement.

Fewer Interviews

What are the advantages of using this process with your students? The group setting reduces the number of individual interviews you as a coordinator have to conduct. The time you save can be spent on other tasks. Although valuing is designed as a group process to be delivered in a group setting, the focus of all the exercises is strictly on the students as individuals and requires them to participate and contribute actively to the search for the "perfect match." We found that in an effort to provide many students with information, our clearinghouse was short-changing the individual student; this process gives them the time and attention they need in a way that is efficient for you. Since the process is an active and self-conscious one, it not only serves to match skills, interests, and needs, but it also becomes a valuable learning experience for the student as well. The student is required to consider some of the motivating factors that are involved in a helping relationship.

The values selected and defined are not unique to volunteer experi-

ences; they are present in careers and paid work experiences. The facilitator may wish to point out these similarities so that students may gain further insight into the kind of work values that they should be aware of as they plan and explore possible career opportunities. If your program offers follow-up and evaluation sessions for student volunteers, these values and exercises might prove to be a useful device in these subsequent discussions. Students should be encouraged to compare their expectations to the actual experiences they encounter in their volunteer jobs. Their feedback can be invaluable to you as a program coordinator responsible for modifying your information and the valuing exercises themselves.

Your staff can be trained to conduct these sessions. They can adapt the questions and variables of time, values, and preferred interest group into interview questions for those occasions when a group session is not feasible.

Agency personnel responsible for volunteers may find that the volunteer values and job titles might be of some help to them as they attempt to describe their volunteer needs. The exercises may also give them some tips on dealing with student and community volunteers and their respective needs.

In developing, adapting, or utilizing this process, there are some pitfalls to avoid. This process should not be required for *all* student volunteers. The returning volunteer who comes to your office may just want information on a new, specific program. He or she need not participate in an exercise as basic as this. Experienced volunteers may be recruited to help as group facilitators. In this capacity, they can share their experiences while learning from the group process. Although their experiences can be extremely helpful to new volunteers, it is up to you to ensure that the process remains focused on the interests and needs of the new

volunteers and not on the facilitator's experiences.

How can you develop a grid that is suitable for your own program? When we sat down to develop our first grid, it came out quite differently from the one presented on page 51. Job titles were originally combined with specific agencies and interest areas. This combination proved to be confusing, so we separated the grid from the referral catalog. The values were most easily identified in the tasks themselves, rather than in the agency, since one agency may offer many different jobs and work settings. We also felt that the roles and values involved in a particular volunteer job would remain constant and universal regardless of the client group or interest area. This certainly does not discount the importance of client group cultures or characteristics, but, for the purposes of this process, we have limited the grid to individual values and job titles. How these may vary according to the different client and interest groups poses another set of questions that cannot be addressed in this article. You can use the values presented here or develop others that better describe conditions or roles found in any special volunteer opportunities. You may also modify the volunteer job titles to include those found among the volunteer opportunities in your particular community.

Selecting Values

How were our particular volunteer values selected for these exercises? Our process is modeled after one developed by the career and planning office at the State University of New York at Geneseo. Those exercises were used by small groups of students interested in identifying potential career opportunities in much the same way that our volunteers explore potential opportunities. The occupational values used by Newell Brown in *After College. What?* (New York: Grosset and Dunlop, 1969) were refined to in-