

# DIVERSITY IN SERVICE-LEARNING

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**S**TUDENTS HAVE INDIVIDUAL AND diverse needs which can be met through experiential education in many ways. The more flexible the program and its practices, the easier it is to meet students' needs. Diversity is the essence of the Off-Campus Term (OCT) Program at the University of South Florida, Tampa. Through its service-learning (volunteer) activities, the program demonstrates this philosophy by:

- requiring students to arrange their own volunteer work assignments so they may go wherever they want to and do whatever they want to;
- offering time-commitment options, from a total of 40 hours of experience (part-time) to 40 or more hours each week for a full term (full-time); and
- providing academic credit for the volunteer experience in three different ways.

Too often, experiential programs act as though students have only one need or urge at a time and a program to meet that need is enough. Their policies inhibit students because the desire to contribute time and talent to social change or improvement is only one of a complex set of factors motivating the student. Thus, flexibility in program practices should accommodate the more diverse needs of far more students than restrictive programs.

Since 1971, over 1,500 students have participated in our OCT Program for at least a term. About 500 of them participated in service-learning activities as full- or part-time volunteers in a variety of social service programs in Florida, other parts of the country, and foreign countries. OCT practices seek to make "the world our campus, reality our objective and experience our teacher."

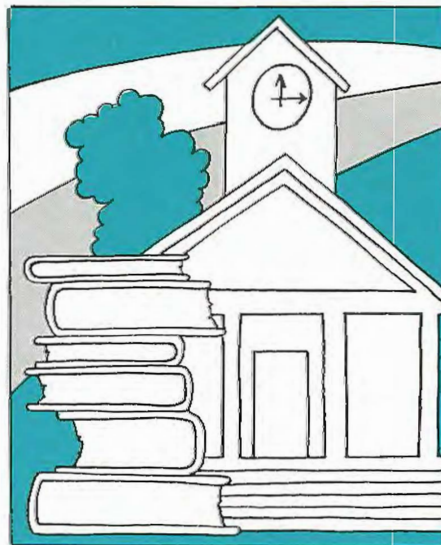
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## Diversity in Assignment

It is a common practice in service-learning experiential programs for the sponsoring college program to arrange for volunteer experiences with cooperating agencies and to place students into those agencies. A college-agency marriage results which fosters a close and ongoing relationship.

In the OCT program, we do not place students in volunteer or other kinds of work, nor do we arrange for housing, transportation, visas or passports. Instead, we require a student to develop the total format for his/her off-campus experience. Our emphasis on student individuality, creativity, resourcefulness and maturity is summed up by the program's slogan, "An Education in Life."

Ten percent of our 500 service-learning students have participated in projects abroad. One student helped estab-



lish a rape crisis center in Sydney, Australia. Another worked in a Nigerian youth camp. And many students worked as children or hospital aides in an Israeli kibbutz.

Thirty percent have volunteered in the

Tampa Bay area, working with Meals on Wheels programs, the Tampa Lighthouse for the Blind, neighborhood youth centers, hospitals, migrant worker programs, and other health and social programs.

The majority of the students, however, have found service-learning experiences throughout the rest of Florida and the United States.

## Diversity in Time-Commitment Options

OCT students may participate as volunteers on a full-time basis—40 hours per week or more—or on a part-time basis. The choice of options encourages students to find a way to volunteer their services for social change or improvement. OCT practices provide for full-time volunteer work, part-time volunteer work to satisfy *all* the academic requirements for a specific course, or volunteer work to satisfy *part* of the course requirements.

Over 250 students have engaged in service-learning as a full-time activity, with the volunteer work taking up the major portion of the term. In some instances, a VISTA-type funding (subsistence support) is provided. From 1971-74, for example, 60 percent of the full-time participants were supported by a Title I grant from the Florida Board of Regents. Since 1974, about 10 percent (20-25) of all OCT students participate in a full-time service-learning project each year.

## Diversity in Academic Credit

Academic credit can be earned in three different ways in OCT service-learning projects: for the experience itself (experiential credit); for community and society-related field experiential projects with topical themes; and for in-depth field research projects in the student's major. The first two are elective credits provided by the OCT program. The credit for the field research project is provided through contracts with faculty in the student's major discipline.

Students engaged in volunteer service-learning projects receive three hours of credit for 60 clock hours of volunteer work or more on a part-time basis. This course is the Social Action Project. A student must maintain an activity journal and write an evaluation about his/her experience. If a student is



engaged in full-time service-learning work, he/she earns an additional two hours of academic credit (basic experiential credits) for the actual volunteer experience. All hours are evaluated on a pass/fail basis.

Students also may elect to earn partial academic credit for projects related to their volunteer experience. Each project carries three to five hours of upper-level academic credit, requires extensive written essays following topical inquiries provided in the project syllabus, and are graded on a regular letter basis unless pass/fail is desired. These programs are topically-oriented community-study projects:

- *Contemporary Health Problems* explores the strengths and weaknesses of health in our society and the availability of medical services. Students look into the availability of facilities, malpractice problems, medical costs, legal aspects of practicing medicine and nursing, federal programs, special clinics, social aspects of health problems.

- *Law and Society* emphasizes various laws and systems which directly affect our society in some specific way. Volunteers study court systems, fraud, consumer protection, wills and probate of estates, probation and rehabilitation of offenders.

- *Volunteers and Society* deals with the role of volunteerism in contemporary society. Study areas include agencies utilizing volunteers; training, management and recruitment of volunteers; organizations and programs supporting volunteerism; rights and responsibilities of volunteers.

These three projects allow a student the option of engaging in 40 hours of volunteer work in lieu of 20 percent of the normal written requirements. This option is provided to encourage volunteer work by students who are not otherwise involved in service-learning projects.

Most students (70 percent) earn full academic credit during their terms off-campus. They develop their whole program of credit relating to their off-campus experiences in the same way they plan a full academic program in the classroom. Thus, students engaged in full-time service-learning experience can earn five hours of credit for the experience itself and an additional 10 credit hours for engaging in various topical projects.

## Meeting Diverse Student Goals

For a service-learning program to be effective in higher education, certain student needs must be met. No one person will have goals precisely the same as another. Here is a sampling of how service-learning experiences benefitted some of our students during 1976-77

### Personal gain and satisfaction.

John, a 21-year-old psychology major, made a career decision as a result of his work in psychological counseling at the Inter-Personal Program in Amherst, Mass. "I found that interacting in a psychological framework was a very viable avenue for me to pursue after graduation. I found that I am good at it, like it, and can be satisfied in its pursuit."

Kay, on the other hand, discovered

from her experience as a counselor at the Florida Mental Health Institute, that psychology was not meant to be her major. As a divorcee and mother of a 9-year-old daughter, however, she found the work gave her an unexpected bonus. "It taught me a great deal about dealing with my own daughter," she wrote. "I gained insight into her problems and feelings and learned how to reinforce good behavior and extinguish bad behavior. It has shown me what neglected and unhappy experiences can do to a child. I can see how fortunate I am to have a normal, well-adjusted child in spite of her having received far less attention than she should have from me."

**Personal growth and discovery.** Randy, a 21-year-old religious studies major,

## DEFINING EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION

Experiential education is not a new concept. At the beginning of this century, educator and philosopher John Dewey held that all genuine education comes about through experience and that it is the duty of educators to foster and provide growth-producing experiences for students. Antioch College adopted this philosophy in the 1920s with the initiation of an off-campus work-study program. Other colleges have continued to add to the curriculum extra-classroom experiences, primarily in the fields of business, student teaching, medicine and agriculture.

The social upheaval of the 1960s, with student demands for more relevance in curriculum, brought experiential education into social science and liberal arts disciplines. Under "experiential education" are a variety of field experiences that have become an accepted part of academia. The most common types are:

- cross-cultural exploration
- field research
- social/political action
- service-learning internships
- cooperative education.

With the economic instability of the 1970s the service-learning internship, with its primary career focus, has become increasingly more prevalent. Service-learning has been defined as the integration of a task which meets a human or organizational need with conscious educational growth. A typical service-learning internship is a ten- to

fifteen-week full-time activity in which students carry out planned work and learning tasks under the supervision of a faculty member and agency personnel, receive financial remuneration and/or academic credit.

Here are the most frequently cited goals associated with intern programs:

- To provide immediate manpower assistance to agencies concerned with economic and social development.
- To provide constructive service opportunities for students seeking to participate in the solution of social and economic problems.
- To encourage young people to consider careers and citizen leadership in programs of development and provide a pool of trained personnel for recruitment in public service.
- To allow students, agency personnel, and faculty to engage in a shared learning experience from which all can benefit.
- To provide additional avenues of communication between institutions of higher learning and programs of social and economic development by making the resources of the universities and colleges more accessible to the community and providing a means for relating curriculum, teachings, and research to contemporary societal needs.

—Diane DePuydt, former coordinator of the experiential education program at Michigan State University's College of Urban Development.



participated in an archaeological dig in Israel. "I learned that I am not a pure historian," he wrote. "I continually need to see the relevance or knowledge or experience to myself, to the present, and to reality. Otherwise, it loses meaning for me and thus my interest. Because of this attitude, I am not a scholar, a drone, an archaeologist, or an historian, but I am a religious person looking for and finding meaning in anything and all things."

**Learning from each other.** Henry, a sightless veteran and father of two teenagers, worked at Tampa's Lighthouse for the Blind. He served as a part-time volunteer with the telephone reassurance service for sightless senior citizens. "I know I gained from the experience," he wrote. "I gained knowledge of new appliances and aids that make daily living easier for the visually handicapped. I shared freely what information I had and picked up even more from the client population I served. My participation broadened my own view of society and made me more aware of the particular problems of some of the people."

**Cross cultural experiences and understanding.** Ann, a mature student at age 37, trained volunteers to work for an alcohol rehabilitation program in the Tampa Bay area. Her main goal was to develop in volunteers a greater sensitivity towards blacks, as many of the clients were black. "This project brought together many diverse people," she wrote. "Many found they did not know as much about the black community as they thought they did and others became more aware of what they do know."

**Learning about the bureaucracy.** Joyce, a houseparent in a Lakeland, Fla., children's home, noted that "work at the home also introduced me to entanglements created by governmental and organizational red tape. I also was enlightened by the administrative chain of command as well as many seemingly useless rules."

**Community studies and writing projects.** Lynn, a 20-year-old education major, spent three months as a full-time volunteer houseparent in a children's home in Carlsburg, Germany. "If I had gone to Germany without any papers to write, I doubt I would have been inspired to learn as much about this land as I did. The assignments gave me an incentive to question people, find out how they lived, and how they think Americans live."