

CREATING A COMPREHENSIVE, BROAD-BASED COMMUNITY OUTREACH PROGRAM: DEFINING WHAT WE NEED

by Wayne Meisel, 1994

The goal here is to create a comprehensive broad-based community outreach effort on campus. This does not mean that we have to start from scratch or have a big power play and put everything under the authority of the program. Instead, everything needs to be coordinated in such a way that service is presented as a daily challenge in a multifaceted way to everyone who is a part of the campus community.

The following is a definition of what a comprehensive, broad-based community outreach can be:

Comprehensive

There are an array of community service activities available for students. People have different interests and fears. In order to make community service more attractive and to draw on the skills of students it is important to offer a wide range of opportunities, including the following:

Youth - working with children in recreation, cultural activities, day care centers, after school programs, teen centers, youth correctional facilities, etc.

- *Education* - working inside the classroom, tutoring in schools, special classes in school, tutoring outside the class, ESL, adult literacy, adult education, special education, gifted and talented education
- *Relief* - working with the homeless and hungry by working in shelters, food lines, food salvage programs, house building and refurbishing, food and clothing drives
- *Seniors* - working in nursing homes in group or one-on-one activities, providing services to elderly people that live at home such as meals on wheels, home visitation and leading some kind of intergenerational service
- *Health* - working in hospitals or clinics, organizing and/or assisting in health fairs, working with special needs children and/or adults
- *Environment* - recycling, conservation of water, energy and other resources on campus, stream watches, environmental education, toxic waste and roadside cleanups, land conservation work

- *Third World* - education about development, adopt a village, fundraisers, internships, semesters and interims abroad
- *One-time events* - clean ups, paint-a-thons, service days, urban plunges

Reflection and Education

An essential part of any community outreach effort is educating students about the issues and policies that surround the areas in which they work. Thus it is important that students working on the homeless issue get a chance to discuss and hear others talk about what the problems and solutions are. The point of this is not to force people to believe in a certain policy or methodology, but instead to educate people about what is going on in a fair and non-partisan way and to offer ways for them to respond. While a political response may not be appropriate for the service program, students should be encouraged and support to choose their activism.

It is crucial that people's opinions be respected and that a group does not become closed-minded, politically correct, and intolerant of others.

Broad-based

A. Different types of students

It is important that different types of students be involved in community service. Service is for everyone, not just the honor students, the boy and girl scouts and other acknowledged leaders in the community. Community service is a great way and one of the only ways that can bring students from different races, classes and backgrounds together. This is true because it is something that everyone can agree is an important thing. While different minority and ethnic groups may want their own community outreach program to enhance their own programs, it is important that students work together when they can and that solid lines of communication be made. It is essential that the central community outreach program have a good mix of students. Oftentimes, these programs do not draw on the minority students. It is crucial that these programs make every effort they can to get this mix of students.

Other divisions on campus sometimes exist. Often community service gets identified with one type of student. For example, the engineering majors may be the ones who people think do community service. If they are not an engineer, then people often think there is no opportunity for them. This happens with all different kinds of groups taking the lead in community service. It is important to reach out to everyone involved and to help all the students understand that they each have something unique to add and that they are important and needed. Therefore, all students can get involved including Blacks, Whites, Hispanics, Asian Americans, Native Americans, Women, Men and other groups.

It is equally important to get students that are interested in different areas. Therefore, one must be able to attract people who are athletes, artistic, academic, punk, and non-traditional.

B. Different types of philosophy

People get involved for two basic reasons: because they care and they want to make the world a better place. People's backgrounds and interpretations often come from different places. Oftentimes while different groups might want the same basic things they have differences of interpretation and approach. As a result, this community of people that care get split up and not only fail to work together but at times work against each other. Therefore it is important that different groups of people come together around service. It serves as a common ground from which people can work together. This would include people who are liberal, conservative, Republican, Democrat, apolitical, agnostic, religious, family-oriented.

C. Time commitment

People have different time schedules and different time commitments. While no one is too busy to help out a little, it is important that people can get involved at the level they feel comfortable and have the time for. This does not mean you cannot encourage people to get more and more involved but there is a need to have a number of different types of time commitment and that those people are respected for their decisions. A program should have opportunities throughout the week and over the course of the term for people to make different kinds of commitments including:

- major leadership positions (10-15 hours per week)
- weekly regular volunteer (2-5 hours per week)
- participate in events throughout the term (2-4 events per term)

Community Outreach

Oftentimes, people think that there is nothing going on on campus in terms of community involvement. The truth is that there is a lot going on but people do not always count all the different kinds of service that go on. Community service can happen in any number of different ways. There should be a number of ways you can get involved either because people like to have a choice or because there are only certain ways for people to get involved.

Yet often people have their own version of what community service is and therefore do not accept what others are doing. People can service in any number of different ways. Volunteering is only one way. It is important that while there are different kinds of programs for people to get involved in, that there is a general sense that community

service, regardless of what particular form you get involved, is connected. The idea behind all this is that you get involved and become a part of your community, not necessarily how you go about it or what department you come from.

On college campuses there are a number of different programs that are involved in community service. Unfortunately, these programs often remain separate and sometimes are in competition with each other. Because people have different interpretations of service, they often build programs around that interpretation. With each interpretation there develops a bureaucracy and with each bureaucracy comes a different set of egos. As a result where there should be a community of people there is often dissension or at best little interaction. One major problem with this is that it creates a faction in what would otherwise be a stronger movement. When groups are divided they are not as strong and do not generate the momentum of student involvement or institutional support. The different forms of community outreach may include community service, volunteering, social justice, work-study, internship, academic credit, practicum, church-related service work.

Volunteering is a spirit, and people make the choice to get involved in community service. It does not necessarily mean that people do not get paid or get credit for the work they do. If you are going to promote community service, make sure that there is a volunteer effort where students do not get paid or get credit. Make sure, however, that there are other ways for people to get involved in community work either through credit or work study.