

## Service and Outreach: a Multicultural and International Dimension

*Richard J. Kraft and Jerry F. Dwyer*

### Abstract

The authors believe, with Benjamin Barber, that service to the neighborhood and to the nation are not the gift of altruists, but rather the duty of free men and women whose freedom is itself wholly dependent on the assumptions of political responsibilities (*Barber 1992*). Given the global world in which we live, however, we add the importance of international service to that of the neighborhood and nation.

The authors, both professors at the University of Colorado-Boulder when this article was written, have spent considerable time in Africa and on other continents, working with schools and universities on the improvement of instruction in mathematics and other curricular areas. They detail some of those experiences, along with information about the University's nationally recognized service-learning program, the International and National Volunteer Service and Training (INVST) program. Service-learning and volunteer activities have been part of our pedagogical repertoire for over three decades, and during that time we have been impressed by the impact of these multicultural and international experiences on not only ourselves, but also our students. Classroom learning has its place, but for powerful transforming learning, nothing has compared to the impact of these experiences on the life and learning of our students. In recent years, students have participated in "alternative spring breaks," in addition to other international service-learning experiences.

### Service in the Research University

Some years ago, one of the authors of this article served on the University of Colorado at Boulder's Committee on Service, as part of a ten-year academic planning process for the campus. The initial discussion centered around whether the university should abandon the third basic purpose of the research university's "holy trinity" of research, teaching, and service, in favor of "outreach and public relations." The author strongly suggested that if the university moved toward the substitution of public relations for service, then truly our great university had already suffered the moral collapse of which Bruce Wilshire wrote so eloquently in his 1990 book.

Thankfully, the concept of service as a fundamental purpose was reaffirmed, and since that time our campus has become a leader in service-learning and greatly expanded its commitment to and

involvement in outreach to the broader community (University of Colorado at Boulder 1996). Most departments still rate performance on a 50 percent, 40 percent, and 10 percent formula for research, teaching, and service, respectively. However, our purpose in this article is not to argue in favor of greater rewards for service but rather to share some thoughts and personal experiences that reflect how expanding our service from the campus and local communities to the international arena has changed both our lives and those of our students.

While community service and service-learning by students and faculty continue to expand rapidly nationwide and on our own campus through the efforts of groups such as Campus Compact and the Corporation for National Service, research universities too often see these efforts

as “personal . . . not considered in University performance evaluations, and outside the charge of the Task Force” (*Task Force on University Public Service and Outreach* 1997). While

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our own and other campuses may not be so blunt in rejecting service-learning and community service as worthy of performance rewards, their actions tend to confirm the lack of support given to them by the research university academic community.

We believe with Benjamin Barber that “service to the neighborhood and to the nation are not the gift of altruists but rather the duty of free men and women whose freedom is itself wholly dependent on the assumptions of political responsibilities” (*Barber* 1992). Given the global world in which we live, however, we would add the importance of international service to that of the neighborhood and nation. While some of our motivation in utilizing international service fits the aims of strengthening altruism, philanthropy, and self-reliance on the part of faculty and students, a stronger motive is integration of service into the classroom and academic curricula. We also involve ourselves and our students in this form of service in an attempt to create or re-create some legitimate form of a community of scholars. We have seen how involvement in the international service arena can truly form community, even within the large public research university context. This article explores some of the international components to service and outreach in which we have been involved.

## Mathematics and the Kenyan Schools

A few years ago one of the authors spent several weeks in Kenya in East Africa. The approach to public education there contrasts sharply with that seen in the United States. Annual family income is less than \$300. This makes it impossible for most children to attend school, as it costs about \$100 to enroll in primary school for one year. Beyond that, quality high school and university education is out of reach for most.

The situation in Kenya convinced the author of the absolute need for basic education. He noticed that education was a key to development in so many ways for these people. Education in the United States is far more developed than in Africa, but many needs remain unmet here also. This author decided to apply for funding to tackle some of the basic problems in mathematics education. The African experience convinced him that this was a worthy application of grant money.

In the summer of 1999 this author returned to Kenya. He visited many K–12 classrooms and made presentations of mathematical

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games similar to what he had developed at the University of Colorado. It was fascinating to contrast the student behavior to that in the United States. The children are always respectful

and their extraordinarily good manners make visitors feel honored. Another noticeable feature was the variety of ages in each class. One eighth grade class had several youths that were about 15 years old. This occurs because many families can afford to send only one child to school each year and their resources are rotated among different children.

The academic standards were quite varied also. Some kids are very bright and respond quickly, while others are far behind. The curriculum is formal and quite advanced and teachers adhere to this even though many of their students are nowhere near to the standard. English is an official language of Kenya, but many students do not know enough English to understand the mathematical instruction. There was also a wide variation in the standard of the teachers at this level and there is a clear need for further training. A similar situation, which is equally true situation exists here in

the United States, where many elementary school teachers need enhancement of their mathematical backgrounds.

### Kenyan University Outreach.

The author also visited Moi University, which is one of the major universities in Kenya. He consulted with faculty about curriculum and standards and has begun an informal partnership with their mathematics department. Their library is a modern building, but it has very few books. The author could only find one or two

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calculus textbooks for a course that is taken by hundreds of students. Faculty are hampered also by a lack of up-to-date journals and a resulting sense of isolation from the research world. This prompted

him to collect books and journal copies at the University of Colorado and ship them to Kenya. Many faculty do not have a Ph.D. degree and expressed great interest in studying in the United States. They have reasonably good computing facilities but are hindered by communications difficulties as the campus is served by a small number of telephone lines and does not have any kind of dedicated information line. Telephone or power lines are often damaged and connection can be lost for long periods of time. This is a considerable nuisance as we try to facilitate various exchanges.

### Effects on Local Outreach

How does this all feed into outreach at the local level? The author has learned so much from his African experience and it has provided much of the initial motivation as outlined above. The contrasts help us to focus on what are real problems while the similarities are also apparent. The university partnership with Moi allows us to explore ways of inviting their faculty to study here and also to explore ways of having our faculty visit their school and provide some international perspective for them. The shipping of books and supplies has inspired generosity in our faculty, and many have contributed in ways that might not never have occurred to them without this partnership. Graduate students are considering ways of spending a semester abroad, which can only broaden and

improve their own experience of university life. Finally, the sense of gratitude offered by our African colleagues is inspirational and a marvelous incentive to continuing this work.

### **The International and National Voluntary Service and Training Program (INVST)**

The INVST program “believes in the possibility of a just and sustainable world and develops community leaders who are engaged in compassionate action as a lifetime commitment.” The program embraces the mission to develop well-informed citizens who are trained as leaders to analyze and solve community problems. Twelve to twenty juniors and seniors are admitted each year to the two-year program that involves a sequence of academic courses and service experiences. The program begins with an intensive summer experience and includes orientation, service days, a one-week wilderness experience, a week working with the homeless in Denver, and two weeks living and serving with the Dineh Nation. Courses in the first year include Facilitating Peaceful Community Change and Implementing Social Change. Both courses include service-learning practicum experiences for credit. A second summer experience initially was conducted in Jamaica, but has since moved to the U.S./Mexico border region and a living learning service experience in the interior of Mexico. Second-year courses include Critical Thinking on Development and Democracy and Nonviolent Social Movements, with students capping off their INVST program with the design, implementation, and evaluation of a Community SOL (service, organization, and leadership) project. On graduation, students from INVST have progressed to a wide range of national and international governmental and nongovernmental organizations and follow-up research has indicated the profound effect of their INVST experiences.

### **Chancellor’s Leadership Residential Academic Program (CLRAP)**

After three decades of work as a teacher educator and international consultant on educational reform, one of the authors took over the challenge of designing a freshman residential academic program around the concepts of leadership. Along with two courses in leadership, students in the CLRAP also participate in two service-learning campus and community practicum experiences for academic credit. Several groups of students also take part in multicultural and international programs. These included the Play for Peace workshops for the International Congress on World Religions in

South Africa, a study tour of conflict in Guatemala, the design and implementation of a multicultural center for minority middle school youth in a nearby community, and a service and learning trip to the El Paso/Juarez border.

Service-learning and volunteer activities have been part of our pedagogical repertoire for over three decades, and during this time we have been impressed by the impact of these multicultural and international experiences on our students. Classroom learning has its place, but for powerful transforming learning, nothing has compared to the impact of these experiences on the life and learning of our students. The following is part of a poem by a graduate student (*Symons 2000*) on the border trip to El Paso/Juarez and captures the essence of this form of learning better than either of us could possibly state it.

The border:  
A line drawn in the sand.  
Toy soldiers guard the castle walls.  
But I can come and go as I wish.  
They cannot keep my heart from crossing.

The disparity between the have and "have-nots."  
I cling to my "haves."  
For fear.  
She who has nothing has freedom.  
We boast a developed country full of declining spirits  
And we spill our toxic vomit into our neighbor's backyard  
Only to refuse their children the right to education,  
Only to turn our backs on the dependence we have created.

Homes made of cardboard boxes, wooden pallets, scraps of  
wire fences, tarpaper roofs, floors of sand.  
Schools made of cardboard boxes, wooden pallets, scraps  
of wire fences, tarpaper roofs, floors of sand.

People speak in Mexican tongue,  
But poverty translates without words  
In those big, brown eyes,  
And effortless smiles.  
My soul drops to its knees in honor of you,  
But the sun can't warm the desert wind.  
At the end of the day, I can wash it away.  
I can wash away the sand.  
At the end of the day, I can wash it away,  
But it is I who have nothing.

Carrie Symons' poem profoundly and beautifully captures the power of international service-learning experiences. While few students or faculty are capable of translating the experiences into such beautiful language, both authors of this article have experienced the transforming nature of the international and multicultural experiences on our own lives and careers, and have seen it profoundly affect the lives of numerous students at the University of Colorado at Boulder. With Barber (1992) we would conclude that service to the local or international community, even though seldom rewarded in the academic arena, is the "duty of free men and women," and only as we ourselves as professors and our students recapture this moral vision, will there be any possibility of creating a true "community of scholars."

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## About the Authors

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Jerry F. Dwyer (Ph.D. National University of Ireland) is an instructor in the Mathematics Department at the University of Colorado Boulder. He has taught a wide range of mathematics and engineering courses and has published in the area of applied mathematics with applications in mechanics. In recent years he has organized numerous outreach and service-learning programs for the department.