



Corporation for National Service

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Too often college students are portrayed as apathetic Generation-X slackers more concerned about making a buck than making a difference. Those who work with college students every day know a different story. The truth is college students do care and, if given the chance, they will serve. And the rapid growth of service learning on college campuses ensures that even more students will follow the road to active-duty citizenship.

The rise of interest in student service could not have come at a better time. As government at all levels is cut back, while problems in our communities continue to mount, we need citizens who will rise to the occasion. If the era of big government is over, the era of big citizens better begin. Through service learning, students acquire the skills and the "habits of the heart" that lead to a lifetime of civic involvement.

Look at almost any mission statement of a college or university and you will find "promoting good citizenship" and "service to the community" among the most important aims. Service learning through college campuses is a powerful way to achieve that. More colleges and universities are realizing that their futures are inextricably linked to the future of their surrounding communities. This calls for more academic resources to be directed outward — toward helping solve the problems of society.

This civic reawakening of the academy can help meet urgent community needs. It is also advancing the central mission of the university — the pursuit of knowledge and the wisdom to know how to apply that knowledge. Focusing resources on tough community problems is one of the best ways to advance learning and to share knowledge. This is the heart of the service-learning experience.

A host of books and reports, from Jeremy Rifkin's *The End of Work*, to Ernest Boyer's Carnegie Foundation report *Scholarship Revisited*, have praised service learning for helping young people

make the passage into adulthood and the world of work — while helping to solve some of our most critical social problems. Congress and two presidents recognized the value of service learning in higher education when they passed the 1990 and 1993 national service acts, which created the *Learn and Serve America* program.

Service learning is more than a slogan or a concept — it's a reality that's making a difference in the lives of students, teachers, schools, parents, and communities. Through the *Learn and Serve America: Higher Education* program, the Corporation for National Service funds service-learning programs at more than 500 college campuses. Grantees include four-year colleges and universities, graduate schools, community colleges, and vocational schools. These programs integrate service into the daily educational life of many thousands of college students.

These students are taking on some of our toughest problems — crime, illiteracy, drugs, homelessness. Most are working on the critical problems of children and youth — tutoring, mentoring, running after-school programs, and organizing service opportunities for their K-12 counterparts.

For example, at Miami-Dade Community College more than 600 students are involved in service-learning projects at more than 100 schools and community agencies in the Miami area. Students in a variety of disciplines — from English to business to natural sciences — are providing vital services to the community while learning what a Miami-Dade School of Justice and Safety professor calls “the realities of the ever-changing, modern work environment.”

Teacher-education programs at the University of Iowa, University of North Iowa, and Iowa State University have teamed up to train teachers in service-learning pedagogy. During the training, future and current teachers pair up to develop service-learning projects for more than 3,500 elementary and secondary students across the state of Iowa.

These programs recognize that knowledge does not just reside inside the confines of a classroom. Service learning makes the entire community the classroom. The senior center, the elementary school, the courthouse, a homeless shelter — these are all places for learning, and the people who work in them are all teachers. Through service learning, students learn about the community and apply academic skills to solving real-life problems.

The key to teaching good citizenship is doing it. You can't learn citizenship in a direct and vital way just by books and lectures. You have to engage in it by working on problems in the community. Making and keeping commitments, learning to work with and respect people of different backgrounds, working in teams, and understanding how to improve a community's quality of life — these are all part of citizenship.

The skills that make a good citizen — teamwork, initiative, individual responsibility, problem-solving — are the same skills that make a productive worker. There is increasing evidence that jobs available to future college graduates will require even more of the

skills and attitudes developed by service learning. As Jeremy Rifkin argues, in the shift from an Industrial to an Information Age, the nation will require more than the government sector and the business sector working together; there is a growing need to strengthen the third sector — the nonprofit and civic organizations that make up our "civil society." The skills and experience that come from service learning will be in higher demand in this burgeoning third sector.

There is new evidence about the effectiveness of service learning. In 1995, the RAND Corporation in partnership with the UCLA Higher Education Research Institute surveyed grantees in the *Learn and Serve America Higher Education* program. This study found a strong link between service and improved academic performance, the promotion of citizenship, and a higher degree of concern for solving community problems.

In a conference announcing the study's findings, Education Secretary Richard Riley stated, "This study clearly shows that service improves academic performance. On ten measures of educational achievement evaluated by this study, students that serve did well in every single area. Students who serve have higher grades, greater educational aspirations, more contact with faculty and greater levels of general knowledge. They spend more time studying and doing homework — even though they have less free time available."

This study also found impressive results on the effects of service learning on civic responsibility. On every indicator, students who served scored higher than those who did not. Student volunteers were more committed to helping others, to serving in the future, to promoting racial understanding, and to cleaning the environment. They had a stronger belief that they can make a difference and change society.

Community groups were also positive about service learning. When surveyed by RAND, community groups said college volunteers were just as effective as paid staff, and 97 percent wanted them back again.

This study — and the experience of students nationwide — makes a convincing case for a major expansion of student service. Yet despite all the benefits of service learning, the number of universities committed to creating a culture of service on their campuses remains small. It is all too often viewed as nice — but peripheral.

Just as the land-grant universities of the last century helped America become the breadbasket for the world, and research universities of the late twentieth century helped us win the second World War, so must the twenty-first-century university be committed to solving our most urgent social problems. Service learning as a strategy for doing that must be brought into the center of the university and all teaching institutions.

Integrating service into your campus is not an easy task. All colleges and universities will face bumps in the road, such as funding, community support, and faculty buy-in. But if we are serious about weaving service into the fabric of American life, then

we must weave it into our most common national institution: education.

One powerful tool to help expand student service is federal work-study. Just before it adjourned, the 104th Congress in a strong bipartisan effort passed a 35-percent increase in work-study. This quantum leap in work-study will fund an additional 250,000 work-study positions in the 1997-98 academic year.

An ideal use of these additional work-study funds is in community-service positions, especially positions where students work with children as tutors and mentors or in other ways to help ensure school success. President (Bill) Clinton has called on colleges and universities to use this new work-study money for community service and is taking steps to make it easier to do so, including waiving the matching requirement. He asks that 100,000 of the new work-study slots be for reading tutors as part of the America Reads initiative, which aims to help every child in America read independently by the end of the third grade. On December 20, 1996, the president announced a steering committee of twenty college and university presidents to spearhead higher-education involvement in America Reads. As members of the steering committee, they will dedicate half of their new work-study slots to students who work as reading tutors, and recruit at least five more college presidents to join this effort.

Some schools resist shifting work-study money towards service because they rely on those jobs to help with basic operations; but since these are new work-study allotments, any anxiety should be significantly reduced. Moving work-study jobs off campus can be a win-win situation for all involved. Students benefit from the challenge of working on critical social issues and learning citizenship and problem-solving skills that will help them throughout life. Colleges benefit from improved relations with the surrounding community. And communities benefit from tapping the skills and energy of college students to help solve urgent local problems.

To take advantage of this historic opportunity, we must think creatively — and act fast. The Corporation for National Service has alerted the network of governor-appointed state commissions on service and hundreds of local service programs to work with colleges and universities to design well-structured, effective programs. But the ultimate success of this initiative depends on the leadership within the higher-education community — college presidents, financial-aid administrators, community-service offices, faculty, and students, who must work together to seize this rare opportunity.

There are other steps we can take to advance the partnership between education and service. In September 1994, President Clinton wrote a letter to presidents and chancellors of all higher-education institutions in the United States urging them to strengthen America's ethic of service on their campuses and in their communities. This was the first time in history that a president had written to all college and university presidents and chancellors, and he chose to focus on community service and service learning.

Each reader should consider the challenges which President Clinton put to college presidents:

- *Bring service into the classroom.* Service-learning enables students to apply the lessons they have learned to the critical issues that affect communities. Faculty can also be recognized and rewarded for engagement in service. Through the *Learn and Serve America* program, the Corporation for National Service can offer assistance to help faculty and administrators integrate service into your campus.

- *Get involved with AmeriCorps.* Our legislation was deliberately drafted to encourage the involvement of higher education in AmeriCorps. Take the lead. Put together your own AmeriCorps program and apply for support, or collaborate with local community-based organizations and others already involved with AmeriCorps. Consider the Rhode Island Higher Education Challenge. Every college and university in the state of Rhode Island has pledged to match the educational award for AmeriCorps members attending their schools. Or Augsburg College's action to offer renewable \$5,000 scholarships — up to \$20,000 for four years — to AmeriCorps graduates.

A new resource for expanding AmeriCorps on your campus is the AmeriCorps Education Awards program. The corporation is offering up to 5,000 education awards to programs that can support costs for members' living allowances and program operations through sources other than the corporation. If you can raise the funds to support AmeriCorps members, the corporation can supplement your investment with an education award worth \$4,725 for students to use for tuition or repaying student loans. Priority will be given to programs aimed at meeting the needs of children and youth — tutoring, mentoring, after-school and summer programs, and immunization.

- *Select your incoming class with service in mind.* You no doubt recognize the value of the high-school valedictorian or the star quarterback. Shouldn't you also prize the stars in service? The Rev. Martin Luther King said everyone can be great because everyone can serve. That special kind of greatness needs wider recognition. In fact, many admissions offices are considering an applicant's experience in service. Shouldn't you say so more clearly — and make a more determined effort to bring more of these stars of service into each entering class?

The new National Service Scholars Program will help you identify prospective students with a commitment for service. In his 1996 commencement speech at Penn State, President Clinton called for service to become part of the ethic and practice of every school and college in America. He proposed \$1,000 scholarships for high-school students who participate in outstanding service; community organizations secure \$500, to be matched by an equal federal contribution. By next year we hope to have a system in place so at least one such scholarship can be awarded in every high school in America.

- *Let every student serve.* Make service and service learning the common expectation and experience of every student. Some schools make service a condition of graduation. Every institution can ensure that any student who wishes to serve has an opportunity to do so.

- *Encourage a career of service.* Some institutions have loan-forgiveness programs for students who take jobs in certain fields of service; others have programs that connect graduates with alumni in non-profit organizations. The road to service is less traveled — but no less valuable — than is the road to the Fortune 500.

These are a few steps you can take to encourage a culture of service on your campus. Only when our students are educated through service as well as schooling — only when they aim for good lives as well as good livelihoods — can they excel as students and citizens. Then our institutions of higher education will fulfill their mission to strengthen the entire American community.

About the author

Harris Wofford brings to the post of chief executive officer of the Corporation for National Service long dedication to the goal of making citizen service the common expectation and common experience of all Americans. As a U.S. senator from Pennsylvania (1991 to 1994), he played a key part in crafting the landmark legislation that created the corporation, and winning the necessary bi-partisan support to secure its passage.

Since helping to launch the Peace Corps in 1961, he has been in the forefront of the effort to bring that idea home to America. In the 1970s, he formed and chaired the Committee to Study the Idea of National Service, which in 1979 produced the landmark report *Youth and the Needs of the Nation*. While in Gov. Robert Casey's cabinet in the late 1980s, Wofford worked with then Gov. Bill Clinton of Arkansas on a National Governors Association Task Force on National Youth Service, and came to Washington to assist the bi-partisan group of senators who drafted the National and Community Service Act of 1990, signed into law by President Bush. In 1991, as a newly-elected senator, Wofford joined Sen. David Boren of Oklahoma in initiating and, with the help of Sen. Bob Dole, securing bi-partisan support for a National Civilian Community Corps, signed into law by President George Bush in 1992. In 1993, Sen. Wofford worked with President Clinton's task force headed by Eli Segal in drafting the National and Community Service Trust Act, and co-managed the bill during the floor debate.

In academia, Wofford was an associate professor of law at Notre Dame Law School from 1959 to 1960, president of the New College at Old Westbury of the State University of New York, 1966 to 1970, and from 1970 to 1978 President of Bryn Mawr College. During World War II, Wofford served in the Army Air Force. In 1948 he earned a bachelor of arts from the University of Chicago, and in 1954 J.D.s from both Harvard University and Yale Law Schools. From 1954 to 1958, he was an associate at Covington and Burling law firm in Washington, D.C., and from 1979 to 1986 he was counsel to Schnader, Harrison, Segal and Lewis in Philadelphia. He and his late wife Clare are co-authors of *India Afire* (1951). He is the author of *Of Kennedys & Kings: Making Sense of the Sixties* (1980).