

A REVIEW OF CO-CURRICULAR COMMUNITY SERVICE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN - WHITEWATER

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Introduction

Service to our region is part of the Select Mission of the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater and is one of the five Core Values that lie at the heart of our campus community. Service is clearly important in how we see ourselves and how we act. The purpose of this article is to summarize how our campus engages and serves our region, and review the contributions our students make through co-curricular community service.

During the 2004-2005 academic year, the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater conducted a Self-Study in preparation for re-accreditation by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. One of the five criteria of the Self-Study, “Engagement and Service,” asks universities to identify their constituents and how they serve them in ways that both value. As a first step, the Self-Study Sub-Committee charged with the review of whom and how the University engages and serves, developed a model identifying nine categories of engagement and service, all of which link the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater to its surrounding community and region (Figure 1). The categories of engagement and service are as follows:

Resource Co-Utilization: Instances where the University is responsive to community or regional needs by sharing resources. An example of Resource Co-Utilization is the shared emergency communications service between the University and City of Whitewater police departments.

Economic Development and Cultural Enrichment: Evidence that the University works to contribute to the region’s economy and culture. The Business Outreach Services in the College of Business and Economics provides evidence of the University’s commitment to regional economic development.

Student Volunteerism: Co-curricular student community service and charitable donations. Evidence is provided through community service projects conducted by numerous student organizations, as well as collaborative initiatives between the University and community such as Make-A-Difference Day.

Reciprocity: Evidence of reciprocal participation between the campus and the community. Members of the community serving on University advisory boards and search and screen committees are examples of the University's openness to reciprocal relationships.

Academic Service Learning: Education grounded in an experience providing meaningful service. A number of faculty use this method of experiential education to achieve desired learning outcomes.

Student-Community Contact: Experiential education at a school, business or agency. Students participating in internships and serving as student teachers provide evidence of this form of engagement, as does the Department of Psychology's Nursing Home Visitation Program.

Faculty and Staff Development: Evidence that faculty and staff are developing skills to enhance capacity to engage and serve. The University of Wisconsin – Whitewater was a founding member of the Wisconsin Campus Compact which serves to build capacity among faculty, staff and students to enhance their civic responsibility. Chancellor Richard Telfer is actively involved as a member of the Executive Committee of the Wisconsin Campus Compact.

Extension, Continuing Education and Camps: Personal and professional development opportunities made available to the region. Evidence provided by each of the summer camps the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater hosts.

University Outreach: University employees meet the needs of the community through service or programming. The Fairhaven lecture series is an example of University Outreach.

These nine categories of engagement and service provided the Self-Study Sub-Committee with a framework to evaluate the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater's level of engagement. The Committee then conducted a campus-wide inventory of engagement and service initiatives in each of these nine categories. This inventory identified 259 separate projects, initiatives and programs that characterized and provided evidence of the meaningful links between the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater and the local and regional community. The intent of the Higher Learning Commission's incorporation of Engagement and Service as one of its five criteria is to encourage, through the accreditation process, links between colleges and universities with the community to reaffirm the public purpose of higher education. As such, criterion five, Engagement and Service, is less about conforming to standards as

opposed to developing connections. What we learned through our self-study process is that the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater is significantly connected to the communities we serve. Through a decentralized approach we offer literally hundreds of programs and projects that respond nimbly to community needs, while providing our students with quality learning opportunities. We are a University that serves our region well. We are a University *On the Move*.



Figure 1: University of Wisconsin – Whitewater Model of Community Engagement

Review of Co-Curricular Community Service

This review of co-curricular community service will provide a more in-depth look at the Student Volunteerism category of the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater’s Model of Campus Engagement. I will focus on community service conducted by students through recognized student organizations and University programs offered through Division of Student Affairs departments, since participation data for most organizations and programs have been maintained since 2001-02. Data pertaining to the level of charitable donations made by recognized student organizations and University programs has also been collected since 2001-02, and will be shared in this article as evidence of student commitment to the greater good. What this data reveals is that our students are willing to volunteer their time to participate in socially responsible activities. The data also reveals the substantial connections established between community agencies and student organizations and University programs, as well as the level of fund-raising conducted by students resulting in donations to many charitable causes.

Community service as an activity varies from service learning. Service learning is education grounded in an experience providing meaningful service. There are four key components of service learning: 1) an educational component with clearly defined learning outcomes, 2) a service experience, 3) a reciprocal relationship with those being served, and 4) the opportunity for participating students to reflect upon what they have learned. Service learning is most effective when guided by an expert, as when a faculty member incorporates this form of experiential education into their course requirements. Students participating in service learning projects are evaluated on their learning, not simply because they participated in service. Meaningful service and learning are equal outputs of service learning.

Generally, when students participate in community service the service is the primary output, while learning is secondary. As such, many community service projects lack clearly defined learning outcomes, although most organizers of community service projects hear from students that they do learn from the service activity. The following quote from first-year student Eovanna Kelley Correa regarding her experience working with elderly in the Whitewater community is a representative sample of reported learning: *“It’s been an awesome building block for me as a person. Doing community service forced me to step outside of my comfort zone and talk to people I wouldn’t normally see in my day to day world. I’m a better person for it and I’ve learned so much from the elderly people I’m working with. They inspire me.”* Eovanna participated in Make-A-Difference Day held early in the Fall Semester of 2008, when she was assigned to visit with residents of Mulberry Glen Senior Living Center. She found the experience so valuable that she continues to volunteer her time on a regular basis. Eovanna’s belief in the value of the experience as a learning activity is not an uncommon statement heard by those faculty, staff, and students who organize community service projects. Project organizers have plenty of anecdotal evidence relating to the value of community service as a learning activity for participating students.

Incorporated into the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater’s Strategic Plan are Benchmarks that serve as indicators as to whether or not aspects of our Strategic Plan are achieved. One of these indicators is the “Hours of Community Service Performed by Students.” The goal for the 2007-2008 academic year was 25,000 hours or more of co-curricular community students performed by students. The goal for the 2007-2008 academic year was achieved as students contributed 30,383 hours of co-curricular service during the academic year. Table 1 provides a summary of co-curricular community service conducted during the past academic year:

Table 1: Co-Curricular Community Service Summary for 2007-2008 Academic Year

| Sponsoring Organizations | Total Projects | Total Students | Total Hours | Total Donations |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Student Organizations | 210 | 2,302 | 18,126 | \$57,486.08 |
| America Reads Program | 1 | 150 | 2,525 | NA |
| Center for Students with Disabilities Volunteers | 1 | NA | 3,164 | NA |
| Children’s Center Volunteers | 1 | 33 | 1,386 | NA |
| Make-A-Difference Day | 1 | 963 | 2,889 | NA |
| Residence Halls | 12 | 240 | 118 | 3,290.44 |
| Student Conduct | 1 | 38 | 795 | NA |
| SEAL Community Service Events | 3 | 660 | 832 | 17,368.42 |
| Warhawk Ambassadors Service | 1 | 25 | 548 | NA |
| 2007-2008 Totals | 231 | 4,411 | 30,383 | \$78,144.94 |

Recognized student organizations at the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater are very committed to sponsoring and participating in community service projects. Certainly it is the primary mission of some of our student organizations to serve. Organizations such as Habitat for Humanity, Best Buddies and the Student Optimist Club are service organizations that attract students interested in engaging in service.

Many other student organizations, including academic/professional organizations, sororities and fraternities, honorary groups, and multicultural organizations conduct service activities annually. During the 2007-2008 academic year fifty student organizations (nearly one-third of the student organizations recognized on campus) reported organizing or participating in community service projects. Academic/professional student organizations such as the Social Work Student Organization, Student Wisconsin Education Association, and American Marketing Association are actively involved in service projects. Collectively, fraternities and sororities contributed 9,380 hours of community service, accounting for 52% of the total hours of service conducted by recognized student organizations. What is interesting to note, and surprising to some, is the amount of charitable donations made by students involved in co-curricular organizations and programs. The \$78,144.94 donated during

the 2007-2008 academic year was the highest annual amount to date, bringing the total monies donated over the last seven years to over \$300,000.00. Last year, individual donations to charities ranged from \$50.00 to over \$17,000.00, with a per project average slightly higher than \$2,500.00.

In total, our students worked with 84 community-based agencies, churches and government agencies while performing co-curricular community service during the 2007-2008 academic year. In some cases students responded to requests for volunteers for projects organized by the agencies themselves, such as Make-A-Difference Day. In other cases student leaders and faculty advisors developed on-going partnerships with service providers in order to provide a stream of service throughout the year. All cases provide evidence of the willingness for students, faculty and staff involved in co-curricular service to engage with members of the community, to develop connections with the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater constituents and serve them in ways both value.

Participation data for co-curricular community service has been maintained since the 2001-2002 academic year. Managers of specified University Programs, such as America Reads, and student organization presidents are asked to report on the number of service projects conducted, number of students participating, number of hours or service conducted, and number of agencies served, as well as dollar amounts of charitable donations. This data is collected at the end of each academic year. Table 2 provides a seven year total of community service participation.

Table 2: Seven Year Totals of Community Service Participation

| Academic Year | Total Projects | Total Students | Total Hours | Total Agencies | Total Donations |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 2001-2002 | 178 | 2,112 | 19,619 | 68 | \$33,838.90 |
| 2002-2003 | 174 | 2,253 | 56,564 | 78 | 40,561.00 |
| 2003-2004 | 123 | 2,137 | 20,067 | 107 | 19,852.00 |
| 2004-2005 | 261 | 5,197 | 20,731 | 127 | 39,107.00 |
| 2005-2006 | 369 | 5,169 | 24,293 | 152 | 61,454.88 |
| 2006-2007 | 225 | 4,335 | 19,782 | NA | 39,327.00 |
| 2007-2008 | 231 | 4,411 | 30,383 | 84 | 78,144.94 |

Student organization leaders and project managers of University Programs conducting service are asked to report at the end of each academic year in order to gain a cumulative perspective on the level of volunteerism and charitable donations annually. Participation rates and contributions vary from year to year as a result of changes in student organization leadership and annual goals. Some student groups consistently conduct service as part of their annual goals, other organizations conduct service periodically. In addition, natural disasters and national or international crises have, at times, provided students with the motivation to increase their engagement in service

activities. While these variances exist, what is perhaps more important to note is that the volume of these connections and contributions over a seven year period are significant, providing evidence that a culture of service exists among our student organizations and University Programs.

Conclusion

The desire to participate in co-curricular community service projects by our students has been nurtured and supported by Chancellor Richard J. Telfer throughout this year and the preceding years while he has served as Provost and Interim Chancellor. Along with Whitewater City Manager Kevin Brunner, Chancellor Telfer has taken a leadership role to enhance the relationship between the campus and community. Their work has resulted in a partnership between the City of Whitewater and the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater community which enables University and City staff to work collaboratively to develop and offer service opportunities such as Make-A-Difference Day. Good leaders provide the vision and create the climate that enables others to develop worthwhile initiatives that add value to the work we do. Chancellor Telfer demonstrates his commitment to serving our constituents through his support for our co-curricular community service programs. Dr. Telfer serves as a wonderful role model on how to develop collaborative relationships with our constituents, which serves to enhance our connection with our constituents and allow our campus to serve our region in significant ways. Under Chancellor Telfer's leadership the University of Wisconsin – Whitewater is clearly a University On the Move.