



SERVICE LEARNING: AN HONOR(S)ABLE ENDEAVOR

In early November 1993, Ernest J. Bursey, a professor of New Testament studies at Walla Walla College in College Place, Washington, delivered the school's inaugural Distinguished Faculty Lecture, "Praxis in Higher Education: What a Little Adventist College Can Do." It was a manifesto for Adventist higher education to become involved systematically in service learning. It tied together a reference to service in the college's mission statement with its long-term commitment to service, which included a "Gateway to Service" installed by the class of 1918.

Bursey noted, however, that while institutions pay lip service to the idea, students are pretty much left to themselves to figure out how to incorporate service into their education. Bursey clearly thought Adventist colleges and universities could do better. Service learning, he pointed out, "occurs when we give something

of value and learn from those we help. It involves supervised and interactive reflection along with the activity. According to the Commission on National and Community Service, service learning is 'a method under which students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences that meet actual community needs and that are coordinated in collaboration with the school and the community.' However, it is more than a method." Bursey pointed out that service learning is a way of life, an enterprise dedicated to becoming a permanent addition to a college graduate's view of the world.

Furthermore, if service is to be a legitimate part of higher education, it must be accompanied by reflection and analysis—in other words, it must be service *learning*. "It is intellectually dishonest to grant academic credit to students for simply spending a certain number of hours in community service," Bursey said that night in

1993 and also in a subsequent article for Adventist educators. "If thinking is not enough, neither is doing." The type of service that results in academic credit, he maintained, required examination. "We must insist that the concrete experiences be balanced by analysis, reflection, and wider reading. It is not enough to have a warm feeling about those who show up at the soup kitchen. We need to understand what brings people there, and we also ought to ask what can be done about making the soup kitchen obsolete." Bursey called for a denominational summit conference on service.¹

Various initiatives have resulted from Bursey's lecture and article, but Seventh-day Adventist higher education has yet to live up to the potential that he envisioned. While Adventist education has created a broad and admirable record in community service, it has been much slower to

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Walla Walla University's Gateway to Service was donated by the Class of 1918. Before the institution outgrew its original church building, graduating seniors marched through the gateway after commencement. The gateway is also the inspiration for the university's radio station's call letters, KGTS.

adopt service learning as defined by Professor Bursey and many other writers. Some Adventist campuses still lag behind most secular and other private colleges and universities in their provision of service-learning courses and experiences for their students.

Bursey pointed out that in 1993, Rutgers University offered an array of service-learning courses that were highly recommended for its students but mandatory for participants in its Honors program. He saw Adventist Honors programs as an ideal place to launch service-learning programs that would eventually apply to the entire institution.

How successfully have Honors programs at North American Adventist higher education institutions incorpo-

rated service learning into their curricula?² Some programs require community service, while others have created specific service-learning components. Some of the requirements connect to a larger institutional service-learning plan, and a few serve as potential models for what entire Seventh-day Adventist campuses can do. Several Honors programs are presently developing service-learning requirements.

Schools With Community-Service Requirements

Several Honors programs at Adventist higher education institutions have incorporated community service into their Honors requirements.

Andrews University

Honors students at Andrews University are required to log 12 hours of community service per year of residency at the school. This practice, according to L. Monique Pittman, associate professor of English and director of the university Honors program, “builds on a long tradition of service established by Dr. Merlene Ogden many years ago; she formed the program with an understanding that significant academic talents create an obligation and responsibility to put those skills into action for the benefit of others.”

Andrews students actively volunteer to serve with various groups both on campus and in the surrounding communities; many volunteer at the Harbor of Hope ministry in Benton Harbor,

Michigan (an underserved urban area near Berrien Springs) every Sabbath afternoon; some volunteer for Habitat for Humanity (also in Benton Harbor); others work at veterinary clinics and animal shelters or at a juvenile justice facility; many serve as volunteer officers and coordinators of university clubs and organizations as well.

Each year, in addition to the individual service projects, the Honors Officers, a group of student volunteers, coordinate an Honors program service project. This typically takes the form of a Christmas toy drive, but it has also included the collection of items for a non-denominational charitable organization that serves the homeless in nearby South Bend, Indiana.

Union College

Students enrolled in the Honors program at Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska (Union Scholars), are required to participate in three service projects each year. The Union Scholars office plans four service projects each school year. Scholars choose at least two projects and have the option of designing an individual project for the third requirement.

Some Honors programs on Adventist campuses have integrated service-learning components into their course requirements. In addition to participating in community-service activities, students complete scholastic requirements that connect to community activities, in the form of mentored service project design, research on the population being served, or other academic learning components.

Schools Where Honors Students Participate in Service-Learning Programs

Some campuses have implemented or are designing campus-wide service-learning programs.

Atlantic Union College

Atlantic Union College (South Lancaster, Massachusetts) has made a strong institutional commitment to



Andrews University Honors students landscape a Habitat for Humanity home nearing completion.

service learning. Many of its required core courses include service-learning components. According to Timothy D. Trott, professor of biology and Honors Core director, the program has also made changes reflective of the institution's new direction and emphasis. Instead of following the previous practice of requiring a set number of community-service hours, the current program focuses on building service-learning opportunities into the Honors program as curricular requirements of each course. This practice enables program administrators to document and track the participation of each student (both in the Honors and non-Honors Core programs) and to utilize similar assessment tools for all students.

La Sierra University

The Honors program at La Sierra University (LSU) in Riverside, California, uses the classroom to connect students with service opportunities. Honors students there are part of an institution-wide service learning emphasis. "For years, service learning has been an integral part of the ethos of La Sierra University," says Douglas R. Clark, current professor of biblical

studies and archaeology and Honors program director, a fact that Bursey noted in his 1993 lecture.

Embedded in the academic policies and practices of the university as well as its motto ("To seek, to know, and to serve"), service learning is required of all students. Its role at the university can be seen in the general-education requirements (recognized nationally with its inclusion on the Honor Roll with Distinction for the 2007 President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll), the internationally award-winning S.I.F.E. (Students in Free Enterprise) team in the School of Business, and the enhanced requirements in the Honors program.

The university's mission statement on service, deriving from its motto, reads: "to serve others, contributing to the good of our local and global communities." This has been adapted and expanded in the Honors program mission statement: "Serving: Students are encouraged to engage in their communities (civic, professional, religious, cultural, and global) to transform and build them with integrity, courage,



Above: A Union College Honors student assists a child with a Vacation Bible School project in Sabah, Malaysia.

Right: Washington Adventist University Honors program seal.

openness, and compassion.”

Thus, for the Honors program, “service learning” has been enlarged both conceptually and in practice to focus on “changing communities.” LSU’s Honors program emphasizes service as a major component of lifelong learning and the development of social and ethical responsibility, making it central to what it means to live intelligently, wholistically, intentionally other-oriented.

As part of the required curriculum, service to the community (local and global) finds its central focus in two classes: Changing Communities (5 quarter units) and Community Involvement Project (3 quarter units). Changing Communities examines how neighborhoods change over time, and

how individuals and groups can transform communities. It includes social and historical context for community change, political and philosophical understandings of community, and connections with religion.

Students work in small groups with local agencies for several months to prepare an Honors Community Involvement Project. After implementation, they analyze its success and summarize in writing the ways their involvement has changed themselves and the community, and report their findings in a major public presentation.

Because of the variety and quality of La Sierra University’s service-learning projects, both within and beyond the

Honors program, the university was recognized by inclusion in the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll in 2007-2009, including a notation of “with Distinction” for the 2007-2008 school year. In 2008, LSU was also awarded the Carnegie Foundation’s Community Engagement Classification for Curricular Engagement.

Washington Adventist University

Although Washington Adventist University in Takoma Park, Maryland (WAU), has gone through a recent name change (from Columbia Union College), it continues to foster its long-standing identity as “The Gateway to Service,” an emphasis it shares with Walla Walla University. In fact, the WAU campus commons has an actual arched “gateway” that first-year students walk under as they enter college, and which seniors march back through as they head toward the graduation ceremony. “The Honors program at WAU is designed in concert with the



school’s goals by focusing on a wholistic balance of academic excellence and service learning,” says Bradford Haas, assistant professor of English and Honors program director.

The WAU Honors program seal illustrates these principles: Its arch mirrors the gateway logo of the university and includes a Latin inscription that may be translated, “so that others are better served.” Inside the arch is a bell (representing the spiritual as well as creativity) above a pomegranate (symbolizing both the mundane and unified diversity, with many seeds combining

to make one fruit). The seal suggests that the goal of the entire Honors program is to better the self in order to serve others.

In keeping with the wholistic worldview of the WAU Honors program, its leadership and service components are included in the official curriculum, but students are given the opportunity to select activities and self-report them in portfolios. It has been evident from the start of the program that students interested in Honors tend to already be engaged in leadership and service activities, and the system thus enables the school to recognize their work within a formalized curriculum.

Because WAU relies on the involvement of its students, it makes a number of official paid positions available, including leadership roles in the Student Association and in Honors. Students assist with youth activities and tutoring at nearby schools and churches. Some have taken internships on Capitol Hill or at the nearby church headquarters. In the past, some students obtained emergency-response training and traveled to parts of the southern United States to help with hurricane relief. Because of the school's proximity to the nation's capital, a number of WAU students have also become involved in political activism, working to promote awareness of issues such as religious liberty, human rights, and the environment.

It is clear that many students entering the WAU Honors program are goal-oriented and driven, and some fixate on the "requirements" of the program. Honors organizers are seeking to structure the program's co-curricular elements to help students comprehend that the synthesis of learning and serving supercedes course requirements and transcripts and must become a way of life.

Walla Walla University

How completely has Walla Walla University (WU) implemented the manifesto for service learning that Ernest Bursey delivered there nearly two decades ago? In contrast to several other institutions, the original home of

Bursey's lecture has not created a highly developed service-learning structure, and the WU program constitutes a work in progress. While certain courses feature service-learning components, the concept is not at present formally integrated into the institution's general-studies program. As part of the university's curriculum review, which is currently underway, WU's Honors General Studies Committee is developing an integrated service-learning component to incorporate into its core courses. The committee intends to place the Honors General Studies Program at the forefront of mentored service-learning opportunities for undergraduates, thereby encouraging them to embrace an ethic of lifelong service within their profession and their communities.

Freshman required reading and retreat activities provide a foundation for an ethic of service learning at WU; components under construction include building service learning into Honors core courses and providing Honors elective credit for mentored service-learning endeavors around the world. These one-quarter to one-year service-learning opportunities will include a significant research component.

A voluntary component has already been built into the program and will continue as formal course requirements are added. Prospective enrollees hear about the centrality of service when they apply to the Honors program. Those who are accepted receive an invitation to a freshman Honors retreat at the beginning of the school year, along with a copy of a book and a list of discussion questions. In 2009, Honors freshmen read Greg Mortenson's *Three Cups of Tea*; the 2010 group read Margaret Trost's *On That Day Everybody Ate: One Woman's Story of Hope and Possibility in Haiti*.

At the end of the freshman orientation, the new Honors class meets for a time of spiritual refreshment and a discussion of the connection between the book and service opportunities in the community. Each incoming Honors class is invited to create a service project connected to the students' interests and group outlook.

Conclusion

Obtaining an Honors education is both an inestimable privilege and a humbling opportunity to connect academia with the challenges of the larger world. Honors educators recognize that their programs can be potent laboratories for educational innovation. The potential to inspire an entire campus toward adopting mentored service learning is waiting to be tapped.

Service learning deserves all the attention it gets—and more. Professor Bursey's call for an Adventist service-learning summit has too long gone unheeded. Technology has made such a gathering economically feasible. The North American Division colleges and universities should collaborate to schedule such a conference in the very near future. ✍



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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Ernest J. Bursey, "Service Learning in Adventist Colleges," *The Journal of Adventist Education* 58:4 (April/May 1996):18, 19. Adventist educators have continued to stay abreast of developments in service learning; see the recent overview provided by Gary Hopkins, et al., "Service Learning and Community Service—An Essential Part of True Education," *The Journal of Adventist Education* 71:4:20-25, as well as other articles in the April/May 2009 theme issue on Service Learning (to access the articles in this issue, go to <http://jae.adventist.org/jae.php?index=issue&language=en>, and click on Vol. 71, Issue 4, 2009).

2. A recent survey of Honors program directors at North American Division colleges and universities revealed that most of the schools incorporate service or service-learning requirements in their curricula, or are actively developing requirements. This article includes a description of the Honors programs with active service-learning components.