

# OPINION

## Community service-learning gives a fresh perspective

Volunteer requirement expands students' concepts of societal ills by giving them first-hand exposure to problems

For many years I have been teaching a course titled "Race, Poverty, and Politics in the United States" (Political Science 171). This course addresses such issues as: What is poverty? Who in America is most vulnerable to poverty and why? How have we, as a political community, attempted to alleviate and eliminate problems of poverty in our midst? What have been the consequences of our public policies and programs?

Although this course was well received by students, I felt that an important learning dimension was missing. It was all too easy to overlook the human face behind the statistics published annually by the Census Bureau. I wondered

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how I might connect classroom learning with experiential or real world learning. In the mid-80s I concluded that the best way to make such a connection would be through a requirement for students to do community service.

Students who enroll in Poli 171 must do volunteer work a few hours a week with a public or private agency that attempts to assist individuals and families in economic need. Students who have participated in community

service have consistently described it as a valuable learning experience. Since many students at UNC are from privileged family backgrounds, their knowledge and understanding of the poor is largely based on what they have read or seen on television. Direct and recurrent interface with America's disadvantaged population has frequently challenged the images they have of who the poor are and, more importantly, why they are poor. It has also caused them to be more insightful and reflective of the broad concepts and questions that we explore in the classroom setting. Discussions which might otherwise consist of vague abstractions are illuminated and illustrated by concrete personal experience.

This not only facilitates immediate comprehension of the material, it contributes also to long-term retention of what students learn in the course.

The volunteer experience has impacted upon students in other ways as well. Oftentimes those who enroll in this course feel embarrassed and even guilty that poverty should exist in a country as rich as the United States. They are convinced that there must be some quick and easy solutions to this problem. By working with those who are economically and socially at great risk, many come to appreciate how complex and difficult the problem of poverty is. A critical and sophisticated understanding of the dynamics which

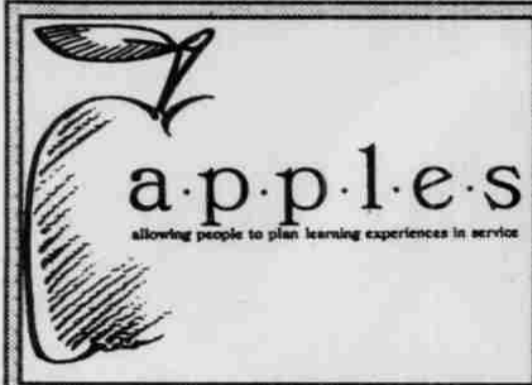
thrust and keep individuals in poverty is an important antidote to simplistic and superficial thinking about these issues. This revelation sometimes discourages students who wish to see poverty immediately exorcised from our society.

But there is an upside to this volunteer experience as well. In a small way each student is doing something to improve the life of America's most vulnerable citizens. No one pretends that their community service will solve the problem of poverty in America. But each student derives some satisfaction in knowing that they can do more than agonize over the problem. They can be part of the solution to the problem.

Many students have told me that their

involvement in community service helped them redefine their personal goals. Rather than focusing exclusively upon their own needs and interests, they think about what they might do, in concert with others, to make America the society it has always aspired to be but too often fails to be. If one purpose of a liberal arts education is to instill humanistic values in future adult generations, then community service learning can be an important teaching resource in helping to achieve that goal.

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The following six classes comprise the a.p.p.l.e.s. pilot program for Spring 1991. They are not the only service-learning opportunities on campus, but ones that are participating in the pilot program's efforts to define, evaluate and promote service-learning. In order to evaluate whether the integration of the academic course work and the volunteer experience is beneficial to all involved parties, classes will be assessed from the faculty, student and community agency or member's point of view. Two long-term goals of

a.p.p.l.e.s. are to centralize existing service-learning efforts and to initiate new ones; this semester there are four pre-existing service-learning courses, and two that will employ service as a learning experience for the first time (American Studies 40 and Physical Education 41). Some of these courses may already be filled but will be offered in subsequent semesters.

**American Studies 40; Joy Kasson; Section 001**

This introduction to American Studies course of 15 to 20 students provides a critical look at the roles of family, public life, racism and nature in American society. The course explores such primary sources as "Beloved," "The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin," "The Invisible Man," and "Walden," to give both an historical and a modern perspective on these issues in America. This semester the class will break into four groups, with individuals participating in a service-learning

project focusing on their chosen area of concentration (for example, a student concerned with the theme of public life may volunteer for the Town Council). The integration of class work and service will be completed through group discussion periods. Garrett "Boo" Martin will be the a.p.p.l.e.s. student representative working with this class.

**Education 306; Ralph Wileman; Section 091**

This "Practicum" is a graduate course in which students experience "real world" applications of their knowledge of educational media and instructional design. The students coordinate their own internship experience which must ultimately be approved by the instructor. For assistance in their practicum, students are given a list of competencies in which they should try to gain experience. Students are rewarded three credit hours for 150 hours of service. Thus they gain work experience while providing the company of organization

with a valuable service. Lori Meadows will be the a.p.p.l.e.s. student representative working with this class.

**Physical Education 41; Boyd Newnam; Section 003**

"Personal Health" deals with basic concepts in the areas of physical fitness, disease control, drug abuse and human sexuality. Emphasis is placed on the individual's responsibility for his or her own health. This semester the course will offer a service component in which interested students may volunteer at rape counseling and drug abuse centers. Neda Amani will be the a.p.p.l.e.s. student representative working with this class.

**Political Science 171; Joel Schwartz; Section 001**

"Race, Poverty and Politics" focuses on the social disease of poverty and the responsibility that society may or may not have to assist its least advantaged citizens. The course also examines and

evaluates how the government has addressed and tried to reduce or eliminate poverty. Students will work with an agency which deals with the needs of low-income individuals and households. They will choose projects that should insure recurring, face-to-face contact with low-income individuals and families. Terri Stroud will be the a.p.p.l.e.s. student representative working with this class.

**Psychology 152; Ann Louise Barrick; Section 001**

In "Atypical Personalities in Groups," students are given the opportunity and experience of working with the elderly and the mentally ill through extensive volunteer work at John Umstead Hospital, local nursing homes and community centers. Each class of 15 to 20 students applies in-class training and course work to leading remediation groups, working as activity therapists or tutoring on a one-to-one basis with patients. Students are evaluated on their

performances by their supervisors and/or instructor with whom they have weekly meetings. They are also required to write a journal. Dr. Barrick describes the course as "challenging, but rewarding in developing self-confidence and in helping to solidify career goals for psychology majors." Trish Mark will be the a.p.p.l.e.s. student representative working with this class.

**Sociology 31; Anne Hastings; Section 003**

"Social Relations in the Workplace" focuses on the meaning and content of work in modern industrial society. The spring section will choose whether to role play a private organization, portraying managers and workers, or to volunteer in a service organization. In the latter case, the students could work at the Battered Women's Shelter (or a similar agency). Shonera Gillespie will be the a.p.p.l.e.s. student representative working with this class.

## Severity of problems demands hands-on experience in addition to a theoretical understanding of background

Our generation faces an uncertain and troubled future in an ailing society. We read in the newspaper, see on television and hear from our parents and professors about the various diseases of modern America. Whether or not we all agree on the severity of our country's problems, we have at one time or another been disturbed by the world we see around us. A person we talked to, something we read or a trip into another community bothered us enough to stop and think about an issue and its significance for our nation. After that common experience our behavior has differed: some have become social activists, others have looked to political

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ideas, while many have felt that the issues were too complex to be solved.

As college students, we tend to focus on our present concerns and our lives after we graduate. We are all too aware of the immediate need to learn what we can in order to be valuable members of the work force. Yet as we sit inside the tower of academia every day, life continues outside it. How do we know that when we enter the "real world" we will

be able to apply our knowledge? We are overflowing with theories and formulas, but how will we fare as working citizens when our years of studying must yield tangible results? Will the activists be able to view their cause in a larger context and decide what actually works? Will the intellectuals understand the intricacies inherent in human society well enough to implement their grand doctrines? And will all of us have learned to be active citizens, who will vote in a thoughtful, just manner and exercise our civic consciousness in all aspects of our societal life?

As individuals with a vested interest in the world around us, it is natural that

we should want to make connections between our academic lives and the outside community. We do not have to wait until we graduate to determine whether or not what we are learning is relevant and useful in society. Picture a class in which community service was a voluntary or required part of the syllabus. Regardless of how each individual reacts to their volunteering experience, each student will see the theoretical translated into the practical and will be an actor instead of an audience. They will bring back to the classroom an enhanced understanding of the material and a broader view of its context. They will challenge their books, their profes-

sor and themselves to provide a more viable explanation for what they have seen and done. As they question the material, they will regard with a more critical eye society's handling of the situation. Should the issue be addressed in a more effective, a more human, a more direct way? Whether by government or individual action, what new steps could be taken to improve the community, the state, the country in which we live?

Community service-learning is a way for us to venture forth from our ivory tower to evaluate the benefit and meaning of our education. We can be thinkers and actors, reacting to service

experiences, returning to the classroom with original insight and eventually making our own decisions about the societal dilemmas facing us today. We must begin to answer these looming questions, the complexity of which demands the attention of all citizens. We have societal ills; we need societal efforts to find a cure. If we are taught to participate in this recovery, we will be a generation of thoughtful and resourceful individuals realizing a vital nation.

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## Peaceful ends should be employed in Middle Eastern conflict

Soldiers should not go to war without support of voters

Perhaps the most frightening aspect of our country's military involvement in the Middle East is the prospect that we may send troops into battle to kill and die without our consent. President Bush and his decision-making corps have discouraged public debate on the issue, instead calling for unwavering support for whatever they decide.

The essence of our nation is based on self-determination, that the people of the nation should decide their fate. Is a nation of, by and for the people simply a myth? I suppose it is if our leaders do not ask for our opinions, and the people do not let their opinions be known.

Here we have a situation which affects every citizen profoundly and the

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time (about six weeks) to find out where we stand.

We owe it to every soldier to make our views known. Soldiers want to know they are fighting with the backing of their country. This does not mean a blind, silent approval of whatever the president approves. They want to hear it from the citizens. What an inexcusable nightmare it would be if our soldiers killed and died only to find out later that the people of the country really did not want them to fight anyway. I shudder at

the possibility that the massive rally for nonintervention in Washington on Jan. 26 will take place after shooting has started.

We must let them know before the fighting starts. Whatever your views are, take time now to seriously consider the issue and let your views be known.

Write or call your senators and representatives, demand that a congressional session be called and talk to your friends and family about what you believe in. If we are to live in a democracy and avoid a war we never really wanted to start, we must do it now.

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finally saying is that patriotism and a my-country-right-or-wrong-mentality will not justify this war, if it happens, since the only rationale for the troops being there may be summed up in a word — oil.

So if war begins, and the dead begin

coming home by the thousands, don't say they died as patriots, but rather that they died as unfortunate victims of a nation preserving its economic privileges. There are still options open so that we can preserve these privileges without any bloodshed.

May we all recover from the war fever, and save this brand of mindless patriotism for the day we'll really need it, God forbid.

Ed Hardin is a graduate student in English from Zanesville, Ohio.

## Situation in Gulf draws comparison to Vietnam conflict

Isn't it funny how we can look at events in retrospect and understand them so much more clearly than similar events that are happening today? Take wars, even the mere threat of war, for instance.

In looking back at the Vietnam War, it's clear to most sane people that it was a great, unfortunate mistake, and yet as a nation we have a need, myself included, to try and find some value to what happened so that many thousands didn't die in vain.

Most people would say that the men and women fighting in Vietnam died for their country so that we might enjoy the freedoms we have — and I respect

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the beliefs of such people, though I do not agree that our government's cause justified the resultant loss of life.

Today America faces the prospect of another war in a far-off place, but this time it's not a war based on any principles whatsoever. At least with respect to Vietnam our government could claim to be waging a war of ideologies, the freedom-versus-communism theme that worked so well in the fifties. But for

now the big bear is friendly, and we're even willing to feed him with emergency aid.

Those of you who are eager to see America assert its muscle, especially you folks who were mere toddlers when the body bags were coming in daily from across the Pacific, should ask yourselves a few questions. Can you justify supporting an American offensive in Iraq in the name of patriotism and freedom? If we no longer have to keep the world safe from communism, does this mean we have to single out some other beast for the purposes of whipping up patriotism and keeping the Pentagon financially secure? What I'm

## Delay of residence hall recycling vote was based on sound principles

Every organization tries to find the fine line between implementing a great program idea and ensuring quality programming. The Governing Board of the Residence Hall Association (RHA) has had just such a struggle the past three weeks regarding the proposed recycling pilot in Morehead Confederation.

On Dec. 6 we decided to postpone a possible vote by Morehead Confederation's residents on the pilot. Our decision may not be the most popular, nor was it an easy one. Rather, in our attempt to find the fine line mentioned above, we decided that the implementation of such a great program at this point in time would sacrifice the

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quality it needed to be successful.

Recycling in the residence halls has been, and continues to be, a top priority of the RHA Governing Board. Many area governments have purchased additional bins for their areas and have expanded the program to newspaper and glass. These governments have assumed full responsibility for emptying the bins as well as ensuring that they meet all the standards given to us by (the Office of) Health and Safety. RHA made a com-

mitment to expand recycling, and we have followed through on it.

Our decision to postpone the pilot program was not a decision against recycling, but a further commitment to creating permanent recycling in the dorms. The decision to advocate a rise in room rent for any reason requires careful planning and a concrete proposal to take to the residents. Neither the RHA proposal, nor Tar Heel Recycling Program's (TARP) proposal was sufficient.

Understanding that the idea of paying someone to empty bins was born only about three weeks ago, it is not surprising that these proposals weren't thorough enough. As the employer,

RHA must consider the tax implications of hiring additional staff to empty the bins. Other details, such as the collection of the money if the referendum passed, were not yet settled. In fact, we saw no solution to this problem, as bills for room rent have already been sent out for next semester, and door-to-door collection seemed too precarious a method.

There have been rumblings of tension between RHA and TARP. TARP has moved full-speed ahead on this project by talking to the residents and publicizing their proposal. It's no secret that they want this program implemented next semester. The implication of some of TARP's publicity is that RHA is

holding out on the residents, and that they will be allowed to vote only "if their Residence Hall Association area Government allows them to." Publicity should not have been done until a final decision regarding the referendum was made.

RHA never misled the residents of that area, or anyone else, on our position. We never said we were putting forth a referendum this semester, only that we would contemplate the feasibility of such a project. We were trying to make the decision that was in the best interest of the residents. We feel like we have done that.

Quality and long-lasting programs take time to develop. We want to ensure

that the recycling pilot is successful and permanent. For these reasons we postponed the referendum for a semester. It is our hope that RHA and TARP can work together on the further development of this program. We are also willing to answer any questions that you, the residents, may have concerning our decision, so please feel free to call our office.

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