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California's Human Corps: New Legislation Boosts an Old Idea

by Robert B. Choate

It has been a year since California lawmakers launched the Human Corps, an exhortation to all students in four-year colleges to perform an average of 30 hours of community service each year. Signed by the governor after overwhelming support in both the Senate and the Assembly, bill AB1820 instructs the two large university systems to tell their students that they are expected, but not required, to give service to their communities. By Operation Civic Service's definition—but by no means everyone's—"community service" is that service which educates the provider about a persistent social issue while bringing benefits to someone in need. Led by imaginative thinkers, California campuses are currently figuring out how to implement this ethic while doing their everyday work.

This bill has a curious history. John Vasconcellos, assemblyman from San Jose and chairman of the Ways and Means committee, used his powerful voice in budgetary matters to push the bill through the legislature in 1987. He did not, however, build a constituency among those groups and professionals who would provide off-campus volunteer and interning opportunities. Thus the governor felt safe in signing the legislation and removing all funds to implement it. The two statewide university systems—the University of California, with 150,000 students on nine campuses, and the California State University system, with 250,000 students on 19 campuses—thereby were legislated a mandate to ask their students to involve themselves in community work, but were not provided any funds for administrators, faculty and students to work out a method to implement the bill. Private four-year campuses with 100,000 students were also asked to join the effort.

California did not start college volunteering with a piece of legislation; programs such as Stiles Hall at Berkeley, Youth Educational Services at Humboldt State, and the Community Involvement Center at San Francisco State were in place long before Mr. Vasconcellos wrote his bill. In 1986, a group of San Diego entrepreneurs began to plan for a statewide effort to stimulate campus involvement in community service. Now known as Operation Civic Service (OCS) the organization has acted as a catalyst for community service by following the progress of community service efforts on fifty campuses and the amount of community (ie. public schools, non-profit groups, and other

public agencies) involvement around these campuses with the implementation of the Human Corps mandate. Since community participation was written into the law, it only seems right that those with the off-campus service slots play a strong role in designing this grand experiment.

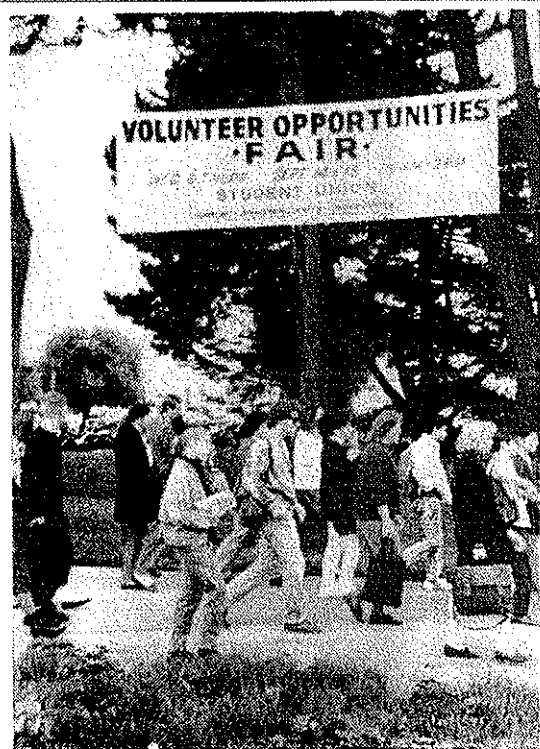
As of September 1988, 27 public four-year campuses and some private ones had formed Human Corps Task Forces and are in the midst of figuring out what, if anything, they must do to carry out the intent of the bill. Telling 500,000 young people to do something is not without risks. The process of launching such an endeavor is not simple. Let us use an "Olympic team" analysis to explain the difficulties of the process and to determine how this first-in-the-nation approach to community service is affecting nearly half a million college students:

First, what is the equivalent of "going for the gold?" If AB 1820 works half as well as its author hopes, California communities by 1993 will receive 500,000 donated hours per month from college volunteers. If AB 1820 succeeds, it will expose college students to the facts of life as they tutor dropouts, aid the illiterate, help the aged and disabled, improve the English of the foreign-born and assist the poor. The legislation also gives employers and admissions officers of graduate schools a tool to judge the civic worth of applicants seeking post-baccalaureate employment or education.

Continuing with the Olympic analogy, there are at least five teams which must merge their interests in the Human Corps statewide endeavor. Team one is the campus, Team two includes the schools of the involved communities, Team three is the non-profit sector, Team four is the concerned city, county, state and federal agencies, and Team five is the supporting organizations such as foundations, service clubs, and business leaders. The following is an in-depth look at each of the five teams, viewed from experiences gained of over the last thirty years and from other college and community volunteer programs in California during the past four years.

Team One—The Campus

When looking at the subject of student community service, it is clear that there must be positive commitment



At San Francisco State University, community service has been a part of campus life since 1973.



Students learn about a community service program during a Volunteer Opportunities Fair; these fairs are held on campuses throughout California.

from the top administration of each campus and collegiate system. The leadership must be clear and public. There can be no equivocation in speech or written documents. California Compact, an association of university presidents, soon will be vigorous in this regard. Academic deans, deans of student affairs, deans of residential life and members of faculty senates must come together to weigh the questions of credit, educational content, internships/volunteers, work-study and record-keeping. Currently in California, some campuses view the Human Corps as an expanded intern program, while others wonder if there is any learning to be gained by going off campus. Campus Outreach Opportunities League (COOL), an intercollegiate student organization with members from 300 different campuses, is educating students to the rewards of community service and urging them to become involved with Human Corps planning on their campuses.

Intern programs are common throughout the state, but they generally involve juniors and seniors with selected majors. Freshmen and sophomores are a new challenge, particularly those who have not yet chosen their first career field. An education department that has placed 100 interns a year in nearby schools has worked out a protocol for their supervision and evaluation. What happens when 2,000 students sign up to tutor potential dropouts? The education school people may balk at the load—or at the competition.

In addition to the intern challenge, the subject of faculty involvement remains up in the air. It is true that those professors with a strong commitment to social concerns offer their help, but they often are the already over-committed

faculty members. It appears that some of the faculty spend many hours devising a Human Corps program; unfortunately while they may gain the admiration of their peers, there is no incentive in the academic world [either financial or professional] given for organizing volunteers. Academes interested in organizing community service programs profit neither at the bank or tenure committee for their efforts. A ray of hope exists, however, from those professors and departments which offer courses to introduce students to community affairs.

Another problem is that some campus administrators have limiting concepts about the role of volunteer service. Some administrators in California universities view the Human Corps as another work burden, another claimant on unavailable space and phones. More importantly, the Human Corps bill specifically mentions that students shall be involved in Human Corps planning, yet some faculties and administrators often do not include students in planning sessions. Other faculty leaders and administrators believe the whole effort should be placed in the student career office, thereby inviting a conflict of interest as to who shall be placed for service or who shall be placed for pay.

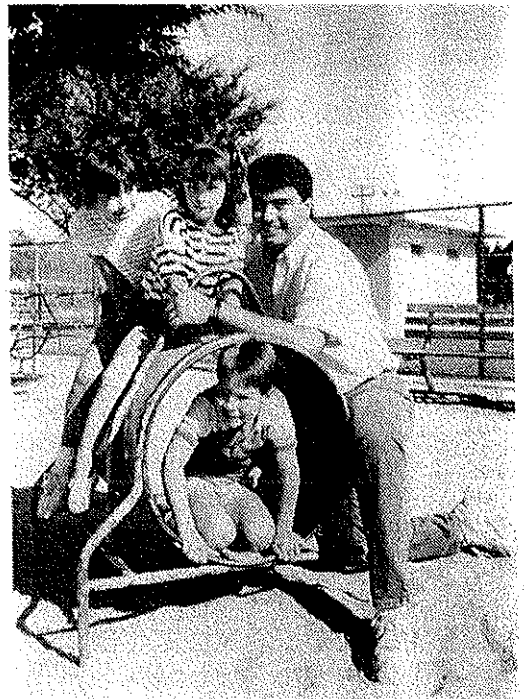
Some administrators turn to existing student volunteer services, of which there were over 30 programs in the state in 1987. The rub comes when one tries to expand a gem of a stu-

dent-led volunteer program from 300 to 3,000. In many cases it cannot be done, although the earlier program remains a valuable example upon which to plan for a broader program.

Team Two—The Schools

The most obvious locale for California service providers is the public schools. Today the state has nearly 650,000 English-impaired students in grades K-12. Many are refugees, others are beneficiaries of recent amnesty laws or are closely tied to Mexico, or Central America or Southeast Asia. Professionals who work in the school systems of California must deal with overcrowded classrooms and often have no way to address the needs of these children. Teachers, however, could be the masterminds behind a broad-scale tutoring program which used college students to improve the English, math and science skills of children in California's elementary schools.

Campus Compact, parent of California Compact, is currently identifying the best models of tutoring the young in this country. California has some excellent examples of volunteer utilization, but the particular challenges of youth-to-youth work need careful planning.



Some California college students could fulfill the Human Corps mandate as volunteer counselors and tutors for elementary school children.

There will be barriers of race, culture, class, gender and language which must be anticipated as college students are made ready to work one-on-one with those needing a helping hand and mind.

Here, too, commitment from the top is critical; to show real commitment, the school board must indicate its approval of a volunteer utilization plan and the superintendent must clearly state his or her approval. Principals, teachers and the teachers' unions must come forth to invite Human Corps planners to meet with them to discuss responsibilities and management. Other topics for discussion include: Who will recruit, screen and orient prospective tutors? Who will select, train, supervise and evaluate the students who serve? Will it be done on school grounds or at a nearby youth agency? How will bused children be tutored?

Nearly 40 percent of California's community servers could potentially be involved in some form of education, either with children, adult illiterates or those requiring special services. If there are 650,000 English-impaired children in K-12, those needing help with math and science must also number in the thousands. The potential volunteers are there, but many school districts have been hesitant to contact the nearest Human Corps Task Force to ask for help. Moreover, the campus-based Task Forces seem sluggish in seeking out the public schools they might help. To combat this problem, Operation Civic Service has prepared a list of the zip

codes near each of the state's fifty major campuses and has offered to the Human Corps Task Forces a list of all public school facilities, ranked by Aid to Families with Dependent Children attendance rates, within their cluster of zip codes. Unfortunately, the response has not been overwhelming.

Team Three—Non-Profit Organizations

The track record of the private sector in utilization of college youth is mixed. Ironically, profit-making concerns such as McDonalds are constantly recruiting, and major employers show up for career day to woo prospective graduates to their firms; the non-profit part of the private sector, however, has been slipshod in this regard. Many college students do not know what constitutes the 501(c)3 non-profit world, nor its professional needs and its services to a private enterprise economy. Needless to say, students on work-study sometimes have contact with the non-profit world, but they seldom think of it as offering a career. Similarly, those agencies utilizing volunteers have not been adventurous in seeking young volunteers. There are, of course, volunteer fairs, along a well-traveled campus route, at which 20 to 40 organizations staff tables to attract new young recruits, but on the whole, the effort is low-key. There is no real "sell"; there is not real recruitment by non-profit organizations.

The 40 Volunteer Centers of California, many of which are located near college campuses, are wrestling with this problem now. Volunteer Centers have the experience and expertise to give strong guidance to the Human Corps program. They acknowledge that they should be doing more to make their on-campus efforts an adjunct of what has already been well-established downtown. The problem which the Volunteer Centers must address is the elemental fact of life that if an ethic is to take hold on a campus, the students must be instrumental in

placing it there. They must believe that they have control over the operations of a campus volunteer office and that they are responsible for its maintenance through hired staff. Otherwise the recruitment effort will have to be repeated year after year.

Many California non-profits have experimented with utilization of young volunteers and have ended up consigning them to filing and phone calls. While this may work for high school volunteers, it will not work with college students. Non-profit administrators need to advise the universities about orientation and training or take the responsibility for these tasks themselves. To resolve this dilemma, non-profit organizations can pool their training needs; they can collaborate on Human Corps planning to let their views be known at the highest university levels.

One alteration to AB 1820 may be necessary. The California legislation speaks of an average of a 30 hour commitment per year. Many organizations and agencies will not want someone for that short period of time because the training and supervision costs get an inadequate return. Some students may give two or three times the amount of the requested service, but the quick-in/quick-out volunteer remains the challenge. It may therefore be wise for an organization to think of opening up slots into which student volunteers can be placed. The previous occupant of a slot could be responsible for at least half the training of his or her successor. After the first semester or year of operation, those with experience at a particular agency or organization could be part of the on-campus orientation which prepares successive waves of volunteers. This process has worked well at Stiles Hall at U.C. Berkeley, where the managers of programs are drawn from those students who have served in prior years.

The inauguration of an on-campus student community service office can overcome many of these barriers. It will need paid staff to ensure continuity, and a number of computer stations around campus at which students can give evidence of their interests. The community service office will, in a sense, become a "talent bank" to which the community can turn for assistance. At Stanford University, the Public Service Center is now a well-known landmark for students to pursue volunteering sugges-



Other college students may work with the elderly and homeless.

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tions. In effect, such a center is an on-campus extension of the local community. It may also be wise to have a "needs bank" station at the school system headquarters and at several sites among non-profit and public agencies. Notices of the volunteer needs of a teacher, a youth program or a public library could be placed into such a system. Linking the "talent bank" to the "needs bank" is an obvious challenge; someone must act as the broker between those offering service and those needing it.

Team Four—City, County, State And Federal Agencies

The fourth team includes city, county, state and federal agencies in the vicinity of the college. Like public

schools and non-profit agencies, they too can host volunteers and interns. Strong administration acceptance of youth volunteers is critical, however, if underlings in the public bureaucracy are to accept young people in their midst. Problems which may be encountered in placing youths in public agencies include confidentiality, liability and education, but a good public agency can understand the value of telling the next generation of leaders about its charge in life. If college students come to understand the complexity of running a public agency as well as the need for the agency to exist, the next generation of voters will be more supportive of public service endeavors.

Again, the public agencies will have

to enter into the planning sessions with those on campus and help to shape the orientation program. They will have to plan their own recruitment and training procedures. They will have to devise a plan where one volunteer takes part of the responsibility for training his or her replacement. Interns have served with public agencies for years; now it is time to expand that effort to those somewhat less directed but still eager to learn about the world.

Public agencies need a firm commitment from the executive in charge and from the elected officials over them, whether it is at the state level under a governor or at a county or city agency level under a board of supervisors or city manager. There must be interest at

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the top of each bureaucracy to take the youth into their midst; it won't happen accidentally. For example, if the governor of the state declares his commitment to supporting community service by college students, many barriers will fall.

Team Five--The Supporting Team

Approaching team five requires tact, experience and community organization knowledge. Here is where the elders can come in. Although retired people can approach the Rotary Clubs, business roundtables, philanthropies, publishers and corporate executives more easily than can youth, they should take youths with them. OCS has met few people who understand the tremendous education a young person gets by being involved in the launching of an enterprise such as a corps of young volunteers. Their elders who know how to do it can pass on this knowledge much better than a professor with a textbook.

The press is of critical importance in all of this. Much attention has been paid in recent years to the "me-ism" and

"careerism" of the young; "yuppies" have been glorified for their monetary goals. Now the press must be alerted to the growing number of students who want something more, who do not feel satisfied with book learning to make money. On every campus in California, there are students who have served their communities and want to do more. They should be models for their peers. On several California campuses exemplary outreach programs have operated for years, yet their work is known only by those who have participated because these programs have not been given the deserved attention by the campus press, the university's press office or the mass media of the surrounding area. This must change. A concerted effort must be made to invite the press to cover campus-community service activities.

Service clubs and commercial interests such as Rotary, Kiwanis and downtown merchants must be approached because many public service efforts are considered lightweight by outsiders if business leaders are not involved. In many cases the apathy of the business

and service communities has contributed to the disengagement of the young in civic issues. If the young are not invited to civic meetings, and are not thought of as needing training to become future city leaders, the young will avoid those groups that ignore them. Conversely, if local youths try to sponsor well-intentioned community service programs without the help of traditional civic groups, these young people have a difficult time finding moral and monetary support for their efforts. Long-time religious forces in the community must be invited into the campus planning. During the 1930s, '40s and '50s, the Young Men's Christian Association fostered large numbers of the campus community service efforts; unfortunately, few such places exist today. It is time for students to invite into their deliberation the experienced leaders of these efforts. Ethnic groups through their clubs, associations and professional societies should also be part of this campus planning. Minority students should be part of the administration of a campus volunteer center; they should

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also be a major part of the outreach team.

Which brings us full circle. How many college campuses teach a course about the role of profit, non-profit and public agencies in our society? Students hear about making a profit from day one, yet an amazing number do not know about taxes, 501(c)3s, philanthropies, part-time employment, shared work and the professions involved. They do not understand how issues reach the voters, or which public bodies make decisions on their behalf. Fewer still know how to influence these groups and forces. Many college campuses could design a course to let the youth service corps be the field experience.

The legislation which created the Human Corps is only one year old, and while there has been impressive efforts by college administrators, faculty members and students to make a campus experience a real-life experience through volunteer service; it is too early to judge accurately who is doing what well. Currently, California, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Massachusetts

and Vermont seem interested in broad-scale youth service. Something has to come on the American scene to cope with the problems of illiteracy, unemployment, drugs and crime—issues which plague our youth. It is clear that youth corps of many sorts are needed; the California Human Corps model is ripe for expansion.

For more information, contact Operation Civic Service, 3717 Buchanan St., San Francisco, CA 94123 (415) 567-0740.

Robert B. Choate is founder and president of Operation Civic Service, a non-profit, California-based organization funded by the Ford, Hewlett, Irvine and ARCO foundations to act as a stimulant for campus-community collaboration on the subject of college student community service. Mr. Choate is also a senior associate of the Youth Policy Institute.

