

Reason and Respect

Volume 3
Issue 2 *Spring 2007*

Article 7

2-5-2008

Mandatory service : a holistic, uplifting educational experience

Brian Amaral
Roger Williams University

Follow this and additional works at: <http://docs.rwu.edu/rr>

Recommended Citation

Amaral, Brian (2007) "Mandatory service : a holistic, uplifting educational experience," *Reason and Respect*: Vol. 3: Iss. 2, Article 7.
Available at: <http://docs.rwu.edu/rr/vol3/iss2/7>

Copyright ©2-5-2008 by the authors
Reason and Respect is produced by The Berkeley Electronic Press (bepress).
For more information, please contact mwu@rwu.edu.



Mandatory Service: A Holistic, Uplifting Educational Experience

Brian Amaral, Communications and Creative Writing '10

Albert Einstein, regarded as one of the smartest men to ever live, is quoted as saying “Only a life lived for others is a life worthwhile.” This way of life is reflected in striving to uplift those around you with volunteer services. Anything from cleaning up garbage to bringing companionship to elderly and disabled people is a way to change the world, bit by bit. But not one person can change the world on his or her own. There must be a solid consensus of society that subscribes to this belief. One of the ways this can be accomplished is by mandatory service. This can be implemented through schools, charities, churches, or other private establishments. Though some may see mandatory community service as an oxymoron, or some sort of terrible punishment, when the issue is broken down one can see that not only is community service a fulfilling activity that both uplifts the receiver and the giver, it can also, when working in unison with a college, be part of a holistic education.

One of the joys of life is bringing happiness to other people. Knowing that you did something that put a smile on a young child’s face or made life easier for an elderly woman who wouldn’t be able to take care of something on her own fosters faith in humanity, not only for the person who receives this free of charge service but also for the person who goes out and does this service. It satisfies the age-old maxim that it is better to give than it is to receive. Some critics deride community service because some of it is seen as unnecessary, that if you go to a house to clean up a woman’s garden it is because she does not want to do it or pay for it on her own. But a menial task that would take a few eighteen years olds an hour would be laborious, back-breaking work for an elderly woman, an elderly woman who may not be able to afford health insurance, much less a landscaping service. What seems like an unfulfilling chore to the youth would be a great burden lifted off the shoulders of someone in dire need of this service. Some charity work can be even more fulfilling. Building relationships, playing games, and just talking to an elderly people can brighten not only their day, but their lives. Some retirement home residents never see their families. This lonely existence has a cure, and that cure is community service. Just an hour out of a week can change someone’s life.

Some critics put down mandatory community service because they have never experienced it for themselves, at least not with an open mind. I used to have the same views, until I was required to fulfill a community service obligation for my school. All I did was move a few air conditioners to prepare for the winter ahead for an elderly person who had neither the strength nor the family to help her move them out. Her look of appreciation and sincere gratitude warmed my heart. If it weren’t for community service I would have never seen the joys this gratitude proffered, and though some people in my group or in my school were not affected by this woman’s plight, I feel opening one person’s eyes to the benefits of community service may even be worth making ten others unhappy for an hour.

Education is about more than numbers. It’s about more than what year Columbus sailed the ocean blue. It’s a holistic approach that can involve anything from facts to life experiences. Reading is crucial to learning. Studying is crucial to learning. Repetition is crucial to learning. But the best way to learn is to live. Life experiences can offer more than just facts. Math can teach you about numbers, but community service can teach you about life. As Honnet and Poulson, people who studied the benefits of community service learning once said, “Service, added to learning, adds to the value of each and transforms both” (“Information About”). A student can be better educated by living in the real world and having life experiences than by staring blankly at a textbook. This is why educational institutions, both public and private, should be allowed and even encouraged to make community service mandatory; it is simply a part of the curriculum.

According to Roger Williams University, there is a three-pronged benefit to community service: the first is academic, the second is developmental, and the third is community. Service learning helps join theory with experience and thought with action. It also enhances a sense of pride and self-esteem, and fosters a bond between the university and the community (“Information About”). If a five-hour requirement is established for each student, and the student population is roughly 4,400 (roughly Roger Williams’ population), that means 22,000 hours of community service are met. Five hours is not a substantial number: though it may

change one person's life, it wouldn't change the world. 22,000 hours, however, is a significant amount of time. Not only are those 22,000 hours met, it may encourage students such as myself to participate in non-mandatory community service. If I had been lectured to by a teacher about the benefits of community service, I would have summarily dismissed performing service. But bringing me out into the real world and showing me how it really is to help those around you opened my eyes to community service. Mahatma Gandhi once said something quite relevant to my experiences, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others" (qtd. in Asimov). According to Alan Wutzdroff, Executive Director of the National Society of Experimental Education, mandatory service is a beneficial activity with few drawbacks: "Community service... not only assists the community, but also creates a critical mass of citizens who have a positive attitude towards service, are more knowledgeable about social problems and issues, and are experienced in skills necessary for effective service" (qtd. in Cripe). This satisfies both ends of the equation: the provider of the service benefits just as much as those provided for, because he or she has had a living-learning experience, rather than one found in a textbook. All these opportunities to learn and give are ruined by the selfish belief that five hours out of four years is just too much to ask.

College students are very busy people. Between jobs, school, and yes, social lives, our docket is filled every day with activities that do not constitute our ideal Saturday morning. But in the real world, responsibility is an issue. Sometimes, people have to do things they don't always want to do. Community service might not always be fun, but it is a vital part of our education, one which we must all complete before graduation. Learning about the world around you is one of the most important lessons you can learn. Gandhi lived his life in service. Einstein lived his life helping others. The stubborn critics of mandatory community service would be hard-pressed to disagree with the beliefs of people like Gandhi and Einstein. Community service is more than just an educational opportunity. It's an opportunity to help those around you who cannot help themselves. It is a good idea for students and members of a civil society that wish to improve such a society. Unfortunately, however, not everyone can see the clear benefit of community service, so it has to be mandatory. Though the obstinate few may still disparage the benefits of mandatory community service, this essay might shed light upon the benefits that such an activity brings, and therefore will inspire the open-minded to go above and beyond, and fulfill more than just the requirement.

Works Cited

- Asimov, Nanette. "Governor taps predecessor's idea: Community service may be required for public college-goers." *San Francisco Chronicle* 31 July 2004. *SFGate.com*.
Citater fra. . .Albert Einstein. <http://www.fys.ku.dk/~rabeneinstein>.
Cripe, Joan. "An Education Lived is an Education Learned." Michigan State University Writing Database. June, 2005.
"Goals of Service Learning." Information about Service Learning. *Roger Williams University web site*. <http://www.rwu.edu/academics/specialopportunities/fls/slinfo/goals.htm>.