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Should Institutions of Higher Learning Make Service a Graduation Requirement?

Patricio Solinas, Undeclared Liberal Arts, '10

Community service, as its name says, means that people do something for their community without receiving anything in exchange. Community service has always been optional, but as time has passed, people have become less concerned about their community; therefore, the number of people who have done community service has decreased as well. Because of this, many institutions including colleges and high schools now insist on community service as one of their requirements. This is done to create a sense of conscience in young people, which makes them care more for their communities. To help students experience what community service really is and to make students connect more with their community, community service should be a requirement for high school and college graduation.

Requiring students to do community service in order to graduate is not a bad thing, and it can be very gratifying. The high school I attended in Ecuador required students to do 30 hours of community service in many institutions that helped poor people in the community. To be honest, the idea of doing 30 hours of community service every year didn't sound very interesting, but once I finished doing every single hour of community service, I felt really good because I knew that I was doing something good for people who needed my help. I used to go to a small village about 30 minutes away from where I lived, called Puenbo. The community had a small library, which had old books that had been donated by many people. In the library, I had many functions including helping to clean, organize books, set up the computers, and even give English classes to kids from the community. Every time I went, I finished my service being really tired but it was really gratifying to know that because of my work these kids would have a better environment in which to learn. It also made me feel good that these kids could learn something new that would help them in the future.

My community service experience taught me that those kids, even though they are poor and have few resources, have an amazing desire to learn. These children would go to that library to learn something new every day, no matter what problems they had at home. There is something that the reader must know and that is about the kind of lives these kids have. I focus a lot on this because when I say these kids are poor, I'm talking about a kind of poor that many of you would not be used to seeing. I'm talking about many days when these children don't have anything to eat, when they have to skip school just to try and earn some money on streets selling candy, or when they stand next to the stop light with no shirt on in the middle of the cold night, waiting for someone to give them money for a piece of bread. I'm also talking about the kind of life in which these children suffer abuse from their parents, in which they don't have a childhood at all because they are not able to go to school, play with their friends or do anything that other kids do because they have to work and try to bring as much money as they can to the house. Even in these circumstances, kids attend the library because they want to learn and be educated to succeed and be someone in life. If I didn't do the community service hours that my high school required me to do, I wouldn't have learned the truth about these kids' lives, and I wouldn't have felt so gratified when I helped them and taught them what I knew. In other words, even in this country we might be missing many things that are going on in our community because we don't interact with many of the residents; the only way to ensure that people participate in our community would be by requiring community service in institutions such as colleges.

Besides being very gratifying, the main purpose of doing community service is to help, which is a very good thing. That could be considered as our daily community service, helping people, and making a good action every day. I believe the modern goal of society is to get everyone to help always, or in other words to do community service everyday. Society has lost this desire to help people and the only way to accomplish this goal is by starting again. Making community service a requirement of college will make people want to help always, and that way, we will reach that desired goal. People will begin to volunteer on their own even without a requirement to do so. That is why institutions should require community service.

Our modern society has lost the desire to help people, and we need to create that sense of service again. A very good and very gratifying way to accomplish this is by requiring community service from the young.

Even if initially this idea doesn't sound appealing, required service will show young people some realities and will also make them feel very good about themselves. In a very short time, people in our society will have a different point of view towards each other and will become more considerate towards each other. To accomplish these goals, we need to start somewhere and I believe community service as a requirement for high school and college graduation is the right choice.