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## Motivation and Service

Sarah Scafidi, Creative Writing '10

Theodore Roosevelt once said, "This country will not be a permanently good place for any of us to live in unless we make it a reasonably good place for all of us to live in." Community service, service learning, and civic engagement are bound together by one common goal to make our society a good place for all. They all are modes of creating the better society to which Roosevelt alluded. But is there a difference in community service, service learning, and civic engagement? Community service refers to volunteers and other organizations helping to better their local community. Service learning involves students learning about their local community as well as developing an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (Bringle). Civic engagement is defined as "individual and collective actions designed to identify and address issues of public concern" (Carpini). The differences between community service, service learning, and civic engagement lie in the motivation behind service.

Community service is motivated by the need to help others on the local level. Take, for instance, this hypothetical, but recognizable case: Everyday on her way to school Lauren passes by men and women living on the street. She knows that most people ignore their haggard faces and worn out clothes. She watches as they beg for spare change. She sees the quiet desperation in their eyes. Every day her heart breaks a little as she passes by. She volunteers at a local soup kitchen every Saturday to help those who are less fortunate than her. She will never be one of those people who ignores the problems in front of her. She understands that in order to better her community, she must give some of her time to help others.

Most citizens engage in community service at some point in their lives. For some, it is as simple as donating food to a homeless shelter or clothing to a local Salvation Army. Others become more involved and volunteer at soup kitchens or help their elderly neighbor paint their house. Although Lauren's story is hypothetical, she represents the motivation behind community service. Lauren saw a problem in her community and she did her best to help those less fortunate. Although her efforts will not resolve the entire problem of poverty and homelessness, they will help to improve the lives of a few people within her community. Service learning stems from the need for community service, but the motivation for service learning is more complex. According to the National Service Learning Clearinghouse, service learning "links to academic content and standards" as well as being "reciprocal in nature, benefiting both the community and the service providers by combining a service experience with a learning experience" ("Service Learning Is"). The Roger Williams University Honors Program adheres to these standards, requiring junior honors students to perform a service project. The students are involved at every level of the service because they must plan as well as implement their projects.

In contrast with Lauren's hypothetical situation, the RWU honors service project involves a lot more. Although both are important for the betterment of the community, the Honors Program participants discover the differences between a citizen and an *engaged* citizen. Their projects apply classroom experiences to the outside world. It provides more educational depth and creates well-rounded students. Although Lauren may understand the need for service in her community, the Honors Program participants learn specifically the best ways to aid society as well as the most efficient way to implement their plans.

Civic engagement is motivated by the need to improve society as a whole. Civic service extends beyond volunteerism and other areas of community service or service learning. Politicians are the best example of civic service because they work within the law to improve the lives of their constituents. Average citizens can be engaged citizens as well. In my American Government and Politics class, we learned about the "attentive public" (Magleby et al. 172). According to *Government by the People*, these people are those who "know and understand how the government works" (Magleby et al. 172). They vote in most elections as well as keep up with current events. Voting is one activity that American citizens can participate in to stay engaged in society. The book acknowledges that American society is different than most because democracy allows citizens to have considerable influence on government and society. Peaceful protests, such as those of Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr., are examples of citizens working to change society (Magleby et al. 172). Civic engage-

ment remains one of the most powerful tools of change in American politics. Some of the greatest transformations in America have evolved from the voices of just a few engaged citizens.

Civic engagement is also important on a global level. Recently, Sir Bob Geldof spoke at Roger Williams University of his continuing service involving poverty around the world. In 1985 Geldof organized Live Aid, a cross-continent concert benefiting famine victims in Africa. With the help of Bono, he also organized Live 8 in 2005. Live 8 was a campaign to pressure world leaders to cancel third world debt. One of Geldof's greatest gifts is that he engages other citizens as well. He reminds people that there are those who live in conditions that most could never imagine. Geldof is an engaged citizen because he refuses to accept the horrors of poverty, famine, and disease that most people ignore. He actively works to better the world in which we live.

In understanding the meanings of community service, service learning, and civic engagement we also understand how they are all interconnected. Community service provides the preparation needed for continued service learning. Service learning, in turn, teaches students how to become engaged citizens. Furthermore, it is essential to learn about different types of service in order to understand the need for each. Without citizens, such as Geldof, working to instill change in our society, it would never improve. Without improvement, our society would cease to exist.

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