

Improve Your Serve

Results show employers prefer a college curriculum that provides hands-on experience.

Leaders of Christian COLLEGES and universities who have made an effective case for teaching students to love God with their minds are now exploring the opportunities afforded by service learning to teach them to love God with their hands and feet as well. Providing such opportunities strengthens an institution's academic programs, draws students who are highly motivated to serve others and positions them to benefit from the educational results of experiential learning.

Service learning is the integration of community service with academic instruction and structured reflection. Students engaged in service learning are briefed on theory, apply the theoretical principles to real-world problems and then reflect upon the effectiveness of the exercise to improve themselves for future service.

This pedagogical tool, which puts God's love in action, produces social, educational, personal and spiritual results. First of all, people are helped. Whether service learning takes the form of accounting students assisting others with tax preparation, education students tutoring children, or government students guiding immigrants through the process of acquiring citizenship, problems are addressed

and issues resolved.

Second, learning is enhanced because students see the immediate benefits of service to others. When students understand the relevance of real-life lessons, they are more likely to become interested in the learning process. The excitement generated by purpose-rich activity fuels their passion for service, motivating them to pay the price for excellence. *Doing motivates learning.*

Third, students acquire social and leadership skills that not only make them more fit for service but also prepare them for the workforce. In a January 22, 2008, press release, the Association of American Colleges and Universities announced the results of a study that surveyed 301 employers.

Results showed employers prefer a college curriculum that provides hands-on experience that can be applied in the real world.

Robert T. Jones, president of Education and Workforce Policy, said,

“One important message from this study is that colleges need to develop more opportunities for students to apply what they are learning in real-world settings.”

Fourth, serving others through an educational experience enables students to develop wisdom as they acquire knowledge. Wisdom is the intelligent application of knowledge. It's not just *what*

you know but how you use what you know.

Though experience can “teach” wisdom, wisdom is not an inevitable result. Students may have been present for educational experiences, but did they learn anything? It is the powerful combination of enlightened guided experience with reflection afforded by service learning that makes it an effective way to teach wisdom.

Fifth, in serving others, students have their personal needs met. The seed-faith principle of sowing and reaping works. Albert Schweitzer said, “Only those of you who have sought and found how to serve will be truly happy.”

Finally, loving God with our hands and feet through service learning is a viable way to carry out Christ’s mandate of loving our neighbors as ourselves. Though secular institutions also offer service learning, Christian colleges and universities—particularly charismatic ones—should lead in demonstrating the fruit of the Holy Spirit.

An example of service learning—and of true religion—is taking care of widows and orphans (see James 1:27). A story from World War II, as related in a book by Paul Brand and Philip Yancey titled *Fearfully and Wonderfully Made*, illustrates the service concept well:

“After World War II, German students volunteered to help rebuild a cathedral in England, one of many casualties of the

Luftwaffe

bombings. As the work progressed, debate broke out on how to best

restore a large statue of Jesus with His arms outstretched and bearing

the familiar inscription, 'Come unto Me.' Careful patching would repair

all damage to the statue except for Christ's hands, which had been

destroyed by bomb fragments. Should they attempt the delicate task of

reshaping those hands?

"Finally the workers reached a decision that still stands today. The statue of Jesus has no hands, and the inscription now reads,

'Christ has no hands but ours.' "

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