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Service-Learning: A New Priority for Career Centers

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The Service-Learning program provides opportunities for students to participate in community service and incorporates thoughtful reflection about the learning aspects of the service. The National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993 offers opportunities for students to earn education awards and stipends in return for service. The Service-Learning program is still in the development stages and proves to be widely supported by the campus as well as the community.

The Volunteer program is the fifth experiential learning opportunity provided through the Job Development Programs. Students are available on a volunteer basis for a long or short-term duration. Many students are interested in this type of program because they not only gain career related experience, but they are also able to make meaningful contributions to the community.

An employer who wishes to hire a student through the MU CPPC Job Development Programs notifies CPPC of the opening and lists any basic skills that the applicant would be expected to have. Occasionally, specific course work or GPA minimum is also outlined. The position details are posted on the bulletin boards outside CPPC and on the computer mainframe system. Students are able to obtain more information about the positions by bringing the student ID and the position numbers to the CPPC information desk. Here paraprofessionals will go over the position requirements with students, answer questions students have and direct students to further information as needed (resume writing, practice job interviewing, etc.).

The Job Development Programs staff is also responsible for the operation of the Practice Job Interview program. This program operates during both the fall and spring semesters and affords students with the opportunity to do a practice interview with a professional employer from the community. The interview is video taped and critiqued during the half-hour session. These sessions help students eliminate interview jitters and learn how to deal with difficult interview questions. Many students commented that this program directly contributed to successful employment interviews.

Overall, the Job Development Programs at MU have been very successful. Last year, the experiential programs provided several thousand jobs to students who earned in excess of four million dollars. This figure reflects a 65 percent increase in students earnings in comparison to the 1979 figures. Furthermore, the number of students getting jobs through CPPC in 1979 was a mere 432 compared to the 2147 who were assisted in 1992, thus reflecting a 20 percent increase in student employment.

MN01882

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Service-Learning: A New Priority for Career Centers

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What Is Service-Learning?

Service-learning is a term that has been in use for at least twenty-five years. Jane Kendall (1991) stated that she has discovered at least 147 different terms used to express the basic concept of service-learning. It's very difficult to define a concept with such broad usage, but Kendall has attempted to identify key elements of the term. She noted that a concept that has experienced so much resistance and debate over its clarification obviously entails a strong investment on the part of its proponents. There is something uniquely powerful about combining the concepts of service and learning together; this something is not explained by either of these terms alone.

Service-learning incorporates two important factors which are not found in typical community service programs. These are an inclusion of the concept of learning and an emphasis on reciprocity. Learning involves doing, as is well-described in a quote from Confucius, "I read and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand (Kendall, 1991, p. 10)." Students engaged in service-learning are involved in larger social issues which enhance theoretical classroom knowledge with real life experience, while at the same time providing needed benefits to the community.

Reciprocity involves an emphasis on both parties, both the server and the served, as having input into the development of any program. A free-flowing of giving and receiving occurs between both parties,

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perceived as equals. This is not a program of "charitable" endeavors, where one party is the giver and the other the taker. In service-learning, the served have control over the service. To summarize, service-learning can be defined as "the accomplishment of tasks which meet human needs in combination with conscious educational growth (Kendall, 1991, p. 18)."

Serving is complemented by an emphasis on reflecting and problem-solving. Experience alone does not mean effective service will have been provided, nor does it mean that any significant learning has taken place. Service-learning requires critical reflection on the part of the student and it requires support from program structures. Just placing students at work sites in the community does not guarantee that service or learning will take place. According to Kendall (1991), they need adequate preparation for this experience; they need monitoring and support while the project is ongoing. When finished, they need an opportunity to debrief; to assimilate and analyze what was learned.

What's the Impact of Service-Learning on Career Development?

Service-learning can have a profound impact on the career development of students. J.R. Ellis (1993) discussed ways service-learning can enhance this development. Education is a costly and time-consuming process. Service-learning can help students investigate careers they may be interested in and clarify for themselves how interested they really are before they have spent time and money to prepare for that career. It can open doors to new job opportunities because many employers consider experienced volunteers when hiring for paid positions or when referring prospective employees to other agencies. The students also may acquire professional work experience. Prospective employers care about what one has learned and accomplished, not whether or not one was paid. Volunteer experiences generate good sources for reference letters from people who actually know a student's work. Service-learning also is a way for someone to develop problem-solving skills, putting classroom theory into practice. Finally, it allows the individual to contribute to society in a productive way and realize that one person can make a positive difference in the life of another.

A New Priority

The passage of the National and Community Service Trust Act in September of 1993 has added new interest to the area of service-learning. The act makes possible the development and expansion of service-learning for all educational institutions and social service agencies through grant opportunities. One of the main tenets of the act is collaboration between educational institutions and agencies to ensure broad-based community support and that community needs are being met.

The Career Center (CPPC) at the University of Missouri-Columbia is developing its service-learning plan as a collaborative effort with various agencies in the community, in hopes of developing a program which meets real community needs and at the same time brings the capacities of several organizations together. By sharing resources, agencies and universities can increase the potential for community and student development. Together, the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts.

Additional Resources

Numerous professional organizations can help those who wish to develop or expand their service-learning programs. Most notable of these are the National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE), Campus Outreach Opportunity League (COOL), Campus Compact and the Corporation for National and Community Service. They offer support, consultation services and networking for schools interested in expanding students' career exploration opportunities.

National Society for Experiential Education (NSEE)
3509 Haworth Drive, Suite 207
Raleigh, NC 27609-7229

Campus Outreach Opportunity League (COOL)
246 North Hall
University of Minnesota
2005 Lower Buford Avenue
St. Paul, MN 55108-1011

Campus Compact
P. O. Box 1975
Brown University
Providence, RI 02912

Corporation for National and Community Service
1100 Vermont Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20525

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Undecided/Undeclared: Working with "Deciding" Students

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Undecided/Undeclared: Working with "Deciding" Students

Nationally, it is estimated that 77 percent of all freshmen and sophomores are in the process of deciding on an academic major (Rayman, 1993). The student body at University of Missouri - Columbia (MU) is no exception. In addition, a number of students have chosen majors, but for the wrong reasons: "My parents want me to be a . . .", "I must have a major in order to get good academic advising . . .", "I have to choose a major or I can't register . . .", "Everyone else has a major . . .", etc. These negative connotations of being "undecided" led the Career Center (CPPC) to view this population from a more positive point of view. CPPC wants students to feel that it is not only okay, but normal to be "deciding" and most importantly to realize that he/she is not alone.

The term "deciding" is now used to describe the group of students who have traditionally been labeled "undecided." "Deciding" is perceived as a more active and positive term by both students and administrators. Typically, students are exploring a variety of avenues, and this indecisiveness relates to choosing from a multitude of career possibilities. CPPC is an information center that provides a variety of services and has always taken an active role in assisting students in choosing an academic major. The CPPC philosophy is to educate stu-

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