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In the National Interest: Community College and Their Community Service are Vital to Democracy

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The involvement of community colleges in national service is a natural extension of their mission.

There is a critical and fragile interdependence between education and democracy. Today we are faced with an opportunity to strengthen that bond. The Corporation is reaching out to you, the leadership in the community colleges, to redefine the role of higher education in a new century democracy. A thriving democracy with education that is developed not only through specialized training in the professions and disciplines, but also through leadership development and service. We need leaders who are prepared to build community and to work, for the common good. Linking service with education can help.

The notion of service takes on a new dimension as the educational mission upon which your institutions were founded. In many ways, the time is ripe to renew this civic purpose. The poverty of our people and our nation is forcing us to grapple with the social and economic problems that we are facing. The good news is that we are facing a new generation of students that is poised to lead us to a new era of service and leadership.

John Bailey
Director, National Service
Corporation for National Service

Editor's Note: The Corporation is reaching out to community colleges to redefine the role of higher education in a new century democracy. A thriving democracy with education that is developed not only through specialized training in the professions and disciplines, but also through leadership development and service. We need leaders who are prepared to build community and to work, for the common good. Linking service with education can help.

By Hugh Bailey

Hugh Bailey is senior program officer for the Learn and Serve America program of the Corporation for National Service. The following is adapted from a speech he delivered at the Campus Complete National Center for Community Colleges' national conference, "Financing Leadership," in Seaside, OR, May 31, 1996.

Let me get right to the point and give you a sense of why the Corporation for National Service sees community colleges as such critical partners in our effort. Your students across the country have been engaged in community service for many years. Indeed, during the past decade we have seen a resurgence of grassroots activity that helped catalyze the issue of service onto the national agenda. Now we are asking institutions of higher education and their students to continue their leadership and involvement.

One reason why we envision the participation of community colleges in national service is that we want participants to reflect the diversity of America. As is illustrated by the challenge of redefining the role of higher education in a new century democracy. A thriving democracy with education that is developed not only through specialized training in the professions and disciplines, but also through leadership development and service. We need leaders who are prepared to build community and to work, for the common good. Linking service with education can help.

But we also believe that there is a crisis in our society that is linked to the crisis in education. It is a crisis of the imagination. And to address this crisis, we need leaders with imagination. In this context, we see the Corporation as a leader in our efforts to develop leaders who can help to create a new century democracy.

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