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The Impact of Andrews' Community Service Assistantship Program on Students, Andrews University, and the Local Community: An Interim Report

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Mr. Goodwin Liu, Program Officer
Corporation for National and Community Service
1100 Vermont Avenue N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20525

Dear Goodwin:

Please find enclosed the report I said I'd be sending you. Keep in mind that it is a preliminary report and that the research is still in progress.

Sincerely,

Sten LaBianca, Professor
Department of Behavioral Sciences

SL/pi

closure
The Impact of Andrews' Community Service Assistantship Program on Students, Andrews University, and the Local Community: An Interim Report

Introduction

The original objective of this research project was to determine the short and long-term impact of Andrews University's Community Service Assistantship Program (CSAP) on college students' attitudes toward civic responsibility and volunteerism. The study also sought to examine the broader impact of the program on students' academic performance, its impact on Andrews University as a whole, and its impact on the local community. The following is an interim report on findings relative to these objectives.

Methodology

To examine the impact of CSAP on college students' attitudes toward civic responsibility and volunteerism, in-depth interviews were carried out with 30 current CSAP students and 20 veterans of the program (see Appendix A). The purpose of these interviews was to obtain a preliminary data set for use in preparation of this interim report. In addition, study sought to identify insights and items required to develop a survey instrument for use in collecting statistical data on attitudinal and behavioral changes in students involved in CSAP.

To examine the impact of the program on students' academic performance, data from Andrews University's institutional research office was combined with record information obtained from our CSAP office (see Appendix B). The institutional research office provided information about high school GPAs (grade point averages) and
college graduation GPAs of CSAP and non-CSAP students. The CSAP office provided information about the number of hours logged by students in the program.

To examine the impact of the program on Andrews University as a whole and on the local community, a variety of lines of evidence were combined to help put together a picture of the impact of CSAP on campus and beyond. These lines of evidence include records of official actions taken at Andrews regarding community service; outcomes of surveys of agencies served by CSAP; media coverage of CSAP; and in-depth interview responses (see Appendix C).

Civic Responsibility and Volunteerism

What emerges from analysis of the 50 in-depth interviews with present and former CSAP students is the impression that CSAP has significantly influenced attitudes toward volunteerism and civic responsibility. To the question, "Has CSAP involvement influenced your willingness to volunteer," the vast majority or about 90% indicated that it had.

What CSAP involvement did for participants is summed up in the following responses:

"CSAP helped me see that there are a lot of people who need help, and it's only when people volunteer that those in need get help."

"I have realized that really, you don't get satisfaction just by being paid for what you do. Indeed you gain a lot by just sharing with others out there."

"CSAP has not made me aware of volunteerism, but it has made me more willing to contribute."

Interesting differences are detectable in the responses of American students, on the one hand, and foreign students on the other. For a lot of the American students CSAP has led to a new vision of the contribution which volunteerism can play in making America a better place to live. Said one student: "If America is to be cleaned up, then it must be done by everyone lending a hand, by everyone giving of their time, talents and means."
For many of the foreign students, the experience of working in CSAP opened their eyes to the potential of community service as a way to overcome ethnic strife. For example, a student from an African country noted that whereas volunteerism at the family and village level was a way of life for people from her country, the idea of people reaching out in service across racial and ethnic lines was a new and exciting idea to take home from her experience in America.

**Academic Performance and Careers**

Prompted by a University of Michigan study which detected a possible link between community service involvement and academic performance, an attempt was made to see whether such a link could be found here at Andrews as well. To this end, a computer-assisted comparison by Dr. Jerome Thayer was undertaken of the academic performance scores of students who had CSAP involvement with those who had not. The basis used to determine CSAP's impact on academic performance was GPA improvement between students' last year in high school and their senior year in college.

Out of 91 students who had graduated with CSAP experience (many more have graduated with CSAP experience, but we had trouble matching their records), 59 could be found for whom both required GPAs were available. These 59 students' performance was compared with an equal size and composition control group with no CSAP experience.

On the basis of this modest sample, a link between CSAP involvement and GPA improvement could be demonstrated only in the case of students who started at Andrews with high school GPAs ranging between 2.41 and 3.00. These students appear to have experienced definite academic improvement as a result of their involvement with CSAP. Significantly, within this group, the greatest gain was experienced by those who contributed 75 or more hours of service to CSAP involvement. As for students who came to Andrews with GPAs below or above the 2.41 - 3.00 range, no significant improvement could be demonstrated.
Our in-depth interview data suggests that CSAP involvement has a particularly salutary impact on Afro-American students. To a greater degree than Caucasian and foreign students, these students pointed to the good which CSAP was doing for their self-esteem. In answer to the question "how does your CSAP job compare with other campus jobs you've held" a student who previously had worked in the cafeteria and in the library said: "I just feel more responsible now, and that boosts my self-esteem." Said another: "The LOFT made me feel needed, and this was a good feeling." In the coming year, we want to follow up and see if this boost in self-esteem which community service provides may explain why such service helps many students get better grades.

There is evidence in the interview data that CSAP is having long-lasting effects also upon students in other ways as well. This is especially true when it comes to choice of majors and careers. The opportunity to assist Benton Harbor agencies in meeting the needs of the needy is opening up new vistas of academic study and career opportunities for many students. Indeed, since the start-up of CSAP, at least half a dozen students have landed full-time jobs working with Benton Harbor human service agencies and schools.

The University as a Whole

Not only has CSAP changed attitudes toward volunteerism and civic responsibility among its student participants, it is having an impact in this regard on the University as a whole as well. Over the years that CSAP has been in place, a mutually transforming partnership has evolved between Andrews University and Benton Harbor. As a consequence, Andrews' corporate culture--the complex web of mutually reinforcing beliefs, attitudes, and norms which ultimately shape the actions of members of an organization--are changing. Today, a strong support for and commitment to the idea of civic responsibility and volunteerism on campus exists whereas than was the case seven years ago.

A major reason for this, I believe, is that CSAP has helped to uncover an array of new opportunities for students and faculty to
get involved and make a difference in addressing the needs of people. A good example of this is the Genesis Single Parent Program. As Andrews faculty and students came into contact with single parents in Benton Harbor through CSAP, they discovered that many of the young women they came into contact with were eager to be empowered to go to college.

In an attempt to do something about this, Desiree Ham Ying (then CSAP Executive Director) and Dr. LaBianca (CSAP founder) approached Andrews administrators and the Berrien County Social Service Department about creating a special cooperative program for single parents and their families, including a special tuition package, housing, child care and counseling. Currently, over 80 students from all over the U.S. are enrolled in this program, which has now become fully institutionalized here at Andrews (see brochure). Because of the success of programs such as this one, there has been a steady increase in institutional commitment to community service of all kinds among administrators, faculty and students at Andrews.

For example, CSAP itself has also become an integral part of the operating budget of Andrews University. Three years ago the university began assuming responsibility for the expense of maintaining a full-time CSAP executive director position, a part-time CSAP secretary and office expenses.

While most of the funds for student stipends continue to come from external sources, the demand from students and agencies for volunteer hours has contributed to short-falls in the externally funded account out of which student stipends have been paid. This short-fall has been picked up by the university. This present school year an action was voted by the administration which sets aside $50,000 for student wages. This action was taken so as to put all parts of the program on solid financial footing--administration and student wages--so as to avoid unanticipated shortfalls in the future.

But there are many other ways in which the university is committing itself to helping in the local community. For example,
a number of student organizations, including the Andrews University Student Association and the Society of Andrews Scholars, have made getting students involved in voluntary service a priority these past two years. Both organizations have been assisted by our CSAP office in implementing this agenda.

There is also an increase on campus in the number of faculty members who are involving students in service as a part of earning credit for courses they teach. Indeed, one of the topics dealt with in the university-wide faculty orientation last September was service learning. Presently, the Core Curriculum Committee of the College of Arts and Sciences is giving study to making a certain number of hours of community service a core requirement of an Andrews undergraduate education. Community service has also been introduced as an explicit vision statement in the university's new strategic plan.

There are many more subtle ways in which an ethic of service and community involvement is becoming a part of the corporate culture of Andrews University. This is seen in articles which appear in the Student Movement, the student paper at Andrews; in community service events planned and carried out by various ad hoc student groups and organizations; in the sorts of views and opinions being expressed by students and faculty in classes and campus conferences; and in the priority which is being given to community concerns in general. This ethic is by no means attributable to the impact of CSAP alone, but almost anyone you ask on campus would admit that CSAP has been a significant factor in catalyzing and facilitating this change in the corporate culture.

The Local Community

CSAP's impact on Benton Harbor and the local community in general has been subtle and varied. I think that the bottom line is that today, Andrews University--its faculty and its students--are viewed as an active partner in the cooperative effort to revitalize Benton Harbor (see appendix). This was not the case seven years
Perhaps the most important way in which CSAP has helped this effort get underway and gain momentum is in having empowered many of Benton Harbor's grass-roots leaders and organizations to carry out their agendas. For example, CSAP students played a crucial role in helping NISE succeed as a fledgling neighborhood self-help organization seven years ago. Today, NISE has a solid track-record of achievement and has thus earned a reputation as being a major player in the revitalization effort in Benton Harbor. Incidentally, the author of this study is volunteering his time as a member of NISE's Advisory Board.

Other Benton Harbor organizations which have benefitted in similar ways from the services of Andrews students are described in the CSAP Five Year Report which was published two years ago. To the organizations mentioned in this report, many others have been added. A major reason for CSAP's success--over 130,000 hours of service volunteered to more than 50 agencies by more than 500 students--is no doubt the fact that the program has sought to affirm existing grass-roots organizations and leaders. The program has thrived because it has avoided becoming embroiled in the jockeying for recognition and control which inevitably occurs when a "new player" is introduced on the block. The secret of CSAP's success is that it has always partnered with existing players.

Report prepared by Sten LaBianca, November 1993