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## Against the Grain: A Philosophical Case for Requiring Service-Learning, Not Volunteer Hours, Among College Students

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# AGAINST THE GRAIN

A Philosophical Case for Requiring  
Service-Learning, Not Volunteer Hours,  
Among College Students

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Among College Students

I. Introduction

In the summer of 2004, Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger asked Californians for their input on a massive state overhaul plan, which included more than one thousand proposals running the gamut from government administration to education. One proposal in particular was met with strong criticism by the Los Angeles Times' George Skelton: a suggestion that students seeking a degree or certificate from any public university or college be required to perform at least sixteen hours of community service before their graduation. Speaking of the proposal's goals – which were to “draw students into a participatory citizenry,” and to “create a societal expectation that each individual has a responsibility to acknowledge the benefits provided them by society [and] accept responsibility to participate in the betterment of society and not rely exclusively on governmental institutions” – Skelton wrote that they read “like a mix of Soviet bloc big-brotherism, Jesuit philosophy and Heritage Foundation ramblings.” After providing evidence to condemn the proposal, Skelton concluded that while community service is excellent, ultimately it should not be required of college students (Skelton).

Twelve years earlier, parents in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania reached a similar conclusion, although they expressed it in a much more dramatic fashion. The parents claimed that in requiring their children to conduct community service hours, Bethlehem schools were in violation of the 13th Amendment, which prohibits coerced labor “akin to African slavery” (Anderson 5; Steirer by Steirer v. Bethlehem). Whereas Skelton merely objected to the

suggestion that students be required to engage in community service, the Bethlehem parents argued that such a policy is unconstitutional.

In contrast to Skelton and the Bethlehem parents, others have concluded that community service should be required of all students. Far from condemning it as unconstitutional coerced labor, some claim that community service instills a strong sense of citizenship and participatory engagement in students who otherwise would not volunteer. Still, others argue that community service should not be required, but rather encouraged among students.

Which, if any, of these perspectives should we agree with? Centrally, should students be required to engage in community service, or would that amount to coerced labor? If they should be required, how should educators go about doing that? What reasons do we have for thinking that community service is beneficial in the first place?

These questions are difficult to answer, and trying to provide good answers to them formed the basis of the present thesis. Through philosophical analysis, I have done my best to capture the complexities of the issue, beginning with the social crises that provide the initial motivation for doing community service, and ending with a well-developed analysis of two of the most-studied methods for requiring community service.

In what follows, I begin by outlining the scale of some of the most egregious human injustices and social crises – although, for the sake of brevity, I do not discuss their causes, since how they are ameliorated is more relevant than how they came to be in this context. I turn to considering who is responsible for addressing those crises, where I conclude that both governmental institutions and individuals share the responsibility to ameliorate them. At the intersection of institutions and individuals lies those institutions – namely, educational ones – which sometimes require their members to help address social crises and other needs. I establish

a method for discerning what educators should require their students to do and learn, then apply that to a discussion of the two most-studied methods of requiring service: mandated volunteer hours and service-learning. I establish that between the two, service-learning should be required of students, and that the best type of service-learning program to require is a justice-oriented one. I conclude that Western Washington University has a special opportunity to institute such a program, and that if the university is unwilling or unable to institute it, then its Honors Program has an obligation to do so.

With that in mind, let us begin by considering the scale of some of the most significant social issues that plague our local and global community.

## II. The Scale of the Issues

My foray into being concerned with helping others began when I started working with children in Whatcom County who have experienced some or several forms of severe trauma. During the early months of my volunteering, I was oblivious to the scale of the issues which had traumatized the children I worked with. I recall reflecting on the hurt which others had inflicted on some of the children I worked with: many of the children had been homeless, transferred countless times through the foster care system, and physically or sexually abused. One child's file was particularly heartbreaking. She had been neglected by educators and others for her autism, sexually abused by her father on a regular basis until she was removed from him into her mother's custody, and was only nine years old.

By my third year working with children who have experienced severe trauma, I learned that this child's story was not unique. In fact, the scale of issues like homelessness, neglect, and abuse is egregious not just throughout Whatcom County, but throughout the United States and

the world. Through trainings and independent research, I came to understand the quantitative breadth of the issues; by working with the many children I mentored and helped to connect and restore, I developed a sense of the emotional toll which they bear.

Perhaps most startling is the scale of the issues in Bellingham and its neighboring cities. Hundreds of people in Whatcom County are homeless, with many others lacking adequate housing (“Homelessness”). As well, the scale of sex trafficking in the county is startling. Not only is human sex trafficking persistent in both Whatcom and its sister county of Skagit, but with the advent of online trafficking, it is growing (“Human”). Said Gayle Kersten, chairwoman of the Skagit County Coalition Against Trafficking, “You can order a young girl like a pizza, and they will deliver, that’s how they do business. It’s the fastest growing illegal business... one of the things we face is that we live in an area that is beautiful and nice and where people don’t think anything is happening” (“Human”).

The problems only multiply at the domestic scale. Across the United States, the most-cited estimate of children at risk of commercial sexual exploitation ranges from 244,000 to 325,000 (Estes and Weiner, qtd in Clayton 42), with another source estimating the total number of juvenile prostitutes closer to 2 million (Stransky and Filkenhor, qtd in Clayton 41). The United States has become the second most-trafficked country in the world, with the annual revenue of the domestic human trafficking industry being around US\$32 billion, and with more than 3.5 million ‘johns’ buying sex in the United States every day of the year (“Human”).

At the global scale, the issues are nearly incomprehensible. For instance, while it is inherently difficult to assess the state of global homelessness – in part because definitions vary by country (“Global Homelessness”) – the most recent report on the issue done by the United Nations estimated that 100 million people were homeless, with more than 1 billion people

suffering from inadequate housing (Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights; “Global Homelessness”). Adding to the hurt, every day, people around the world are raped, beaten, and abused as slaves (“Slavery Today”). In 2016, it was estimated that 40 million people were victims of modern slavery (Global Estimates of Modern Slavery). Human trafficking of slaves generates about \$150 billion each year, with about two-thirds of that coming from commercial sexual exploitation (Sex Trafficking). As well, of those victims of the commercial sexual trade, 2 million are children (Sex Trafficking).

At all scales, the sum of the mere handful of critical social issues I have described is overwhelming. As philosopher and theologian Brian Stiltner notes, “For organizations working on global poverty, domestic homelessness, unemployment, drug addiction, and the educational achievement gap, the problems are massive and the human needs constant... human suffering is great and that suffering is likely to continue indefinitely” (Stiltner 261-2).

### III. Responsibility

Given the extent of human suffering in the world, one might wonder who, exactly, is responsible for ameliorating it. Surely, some of those afflicted by homelessness, drug addiction, and poverty bear at least some responsibility for their state of affairs, although they often cannot help themselves on their own. As for children and adults caught up in human trafficking, and under-represented minorities who are negatively affected by educational achievement gaps (Jordt et al.), they cannot be expected to by themselves overcome the systemic issues that afflict them. Rather, both governmental institutions and we individuals who have the means to help others in need have a responsibility – moreover, an obligation – to do so.



Governmental institutions have a moral and legal responsibility to help others in need. Their obligation is moral because in governing their members, governments must (at least) support the fulfillment of their members' basic biological and safety needs, including food, shelter, protection, and security. Those in need do not have their basic biological and safety needs fulfilled. So, governments have a moral obligation to ameliorate that.

Governments have a legal obligation as well because many have openly committed to helping those afflicted by slavery, homelessness, and other issues. Following the end of the atrocities committed against humanity during World War II, an international effort to address human suffering was met with substantial support among the world's nations. In 1948, three years after the War, the United Nations established the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which acts as "a common standard of achievements for all peoples and all nations. It [set] out, for the first time, fundamental human rights to be universally protected and it has been translated into over 500 languages" ("Universal").

Among the Declaration's 30 articles, the following three are especially relevant to this discussion, for they illuminate the commitment that many of the world's nations have made to address critical social issues:

- Article 4 – No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms
- Article 25.1 – Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

- Article 29.1 – Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible (“Universal”).

The United States government, for its part, has various agencies in place to fulfill the goals set by the Declaration as well as other goals. One such agency is The Department of Social and Health Services, which exists to transform lives so that people are “healthy, safe, [and] supported” (“About Us”, WA DSHS); two others are the Departments of Education and Housing and Urban Development (“Executive”).

However, with limited staff and taxpayer funds, there is only so much our governments can do. Despite the best efforts of governmental agencies in the United States and abroad, there is still much human need that goes unmet. It is here that the role of individuals resides, for like governmental institutions, individuals who have the means to help others have a moral obligation to do so.

All moral theories agree that those of us who have the means to do so (that is, those of us who are not experiencing notable suffering ourselves) should help others. Deontological theories of morality assess the rightness or wrongness of an action according to a set of rules. Religious traditions like Christianity and Confucianism have historically been associated with rules for their adherents, including rules that imply that their adherents should serve others. One reading of Kant’s ethics, another deontological theory, produces the same conclusion. A formulation of his Categorical Imperative says that we should never treat humanity as a mere means, but always as ends in themselves. So, we should value individual people in our local and global community as important in themselves, helping them when they are in need.

Virtue ethics, which ascribes moral evaluation to agents’ character traits and dispositions, has long hailed engaged citizenship as a virtue. In fact, it is a kind of remedy to one of the seven

capital vices, sloth (DeYoung). Whereas the slothful care for no one and deject themselves from the presence of others, the engaged citizen cares significantly for others and acts on their disposition to care by helping those in need. As well, by serving others, a person can come to flourish by developing virtues of care, respect, perception, relating, and purpose (Stiltner 247-8).

Another branch of moral theory, consequentialism, derives the same conclusion for different reasons. One type of consequentialism, maximizing utilitarianism, says that maximizing the well-being of ourselves and others is our duty. While it is characteristically difficult to pin down what exactly constitutes a person's well-being, surely being exempt from maladies like abuse and homelessness are parts of it. So, on the utilitarian view, we should maximize the well-being of others by ensuring that they do not experience homelessness, etc. A good way to do this is through community service. So, we should serve others in need.

Aside from the conclusions of individual moral theories, there are many theory-neutral reasons for thinking that we should serve people, one being that service and volunteerism leads to social flourishing. Historical examples attest to this. For instance, some have argued that many American institutions, professions, and social events have been changed for the better because of volunteerism (Ellis and Campbell). The volunteer sector has been analyzed as nothing less than a force to connect our societies internally (Billis and Harris). With it playing a notable role in social development in the United States around the seventeenth century, in Britain following World War II, and in China starting around 600 BCE with Confucius, volunteerism has produced positive social change for hundreds of years (Halsall et al.).

As well, not only do the people we serve benefit as a result, but so do we. We directly benefit from the work we do to enhance our local communities by building safer, more socioeconomically sustainable locales. Serving others in our community challenges our

egocentrism by demanding that we take action to actively care for the welfare of other people (Chickering). Additionally, there is some evidence for thinking that helping others can help you live longer; make you happy; help with chronic pain; lower your blood pressure; promote positive behaviors in teens; give a sense of purpose and satisfaction; and encourages others to help others as well (“Seven”).

There is, too, the fact that we can directly help ameliorate those moral dilemmas with which we have experience. Unsurprisingly, many of the peers I worked with during my time volunteering with children had either experienced trauma as a child themselves, or knew close family members or friends who had. By working with the children, they were able to help themselves recover from their own past trauma.

Aside from informal volunteering – like when someone offers to clean up their neighborhood’s litter, or watch a friend’s pet – a significant way in which people can formally volunteer is through non-profit organizations. There are more than 1.5 million non-profits registered with the Internal Revenue Service (McKeever), many of which rely heavily on the involvement of dedicated volunteers. For instance, several Bellingham-originated nonprofits are – with the help of volunteers – serving those in most need of help in our community. Lighthouse Mission exists to provide food and help to the homeless in a loving, supportive way (“About Us,” Lighthouse Mission). Others focus on benefiting children and families, with Skookum Kids working to repair the broken foster care system (“About - Skookum Kids”), Brigid Collins seeking to end child abuse and neglect (“About Us – Brigid Collins Family Support Center”), and Rebound of Whatcom County seeking to restore children and families who have experienced severe trauma (“Our Mission”).

For its part, the United States government provides significant support to non-profits – both directly with grant funding, and indirectly through tax incentive programs. It provides ample grants and other funding to non-profits, so much so that “it is fair to say that, without government support, many charities would not be able to serve as many people as they do” (Stiltner 253). As well, tax incentive programs have allowed for both individuals and corporations to deduct breaks on their taxes via charitable contributions to non-profits since 1917 (Stiltner 252).

#### IV. Education Requirements

The support for thinking that individuals should volunteer to help others on their own is strong; however, some have proposed that this entails that we should be required to help others, which is much less agreed upon. In particular, numerous educators and policymakers have argued that given the overwhelming benefits of volunteerism, students should be required to volunteer in their local communities.

However, the fact that individuals, including students, should help others does not, on its own, entail that they should be required to do so. Such an argument form would entail that students should be required to be kind to their mothers, since they should do so on their own. But this should not be required. So, whether students should be required to volunteer or not must depend on other factors aside from their responsibility to do so.

Arguments for and against requiring volunteerism will be discussed in-depth throughout the next two sections. The intent of the rest of this section is to outline what a sensible criterion could be for mandating a certain requirement for students in the first place. Given the academic

nature of education, surely any school requirement must instill new knowledge and/or skills in students, or be expected to.

While it may not seem obvious what, beyond that, should be required of an education requirement, the following criterion sensibly outlines what else should be required: for any curriculum (call it X), schools should require X if and only if and because: (i) students should learn/do X; (ii) by doing/learning X, students can be expected to benefit as people; (iii) by doing X, students can be expected to gain new skills/knowledge that they otherwise would not have gained.

One reason for thinking this criterion succeeds is that it fits well with current education requirements. For instance, across universities, undergraduate students are required to undertake multiple general education courses as part of their undergraduate degree. By taking a broad range of courses in various fields of study, students are highly likely to learn new skills and knowledge as a result, thus fulfilling condition (iii). In addition, the mission of implementing general education courses is to train undergraduate students to be critical, creative, and well-rounded thinkers, which benefit them as people (fulfilling condition (ii)). Finally, students should learn about standard general education topics like history, mathematics, science, and others because they are essential for many intellectual and professional pursuits (thus, fulfilling condition (i)).

Another reason is that it incorporates reasoning that has been used by education theorists and policymakers throughout the literature. Many writers have agreed that students should only be required to do things that help them learn new skills and/or knowledge, but not all have agreed that they must benefit as individuals. Nor have all agreed that students should do or learn what they are required to do/learn. So, at worst, the criterion I have outlined is limiting in what should be required, as opposed to being all-inclusive. Therefore, if a curriculum should be

required according to the criterion I have described, then it almost certainly should according to others' criteria as well.

With the criterion outlined, we turn now to considering which, if any, of the most-studied methods of requiring student service meet its conditions. Many methods have been used to require volunteering of students, including:

- Requiring students to perform a certain number of hours of community service
- Requiring schools to provide students with service opportunities
- Providing particular project-based service requirement(s) for which students receive academic credit
- Offering a required or non-required course, such as Introduction to Service, in which students learn about the history of service and complete one or more service projects
- Offering a required or non-required course in the core curriculum, using service-learning as a method of teaching
- Providing multiple required or non-required courses in the core curriculum, using service-learning as a method of teaching, integrating it into the overall school climate, and providing a meaningful curriculum and reflection opportunity
- Offering volunteer service activities organized by student clubs or other school groups, or elsewhere by neighborhood or community-based organizations, with no curriculum component (Anderson 3)

However, among these seven methods, two have been most frequently studied in the literature, especially among high school and undergraduate college students: mandatory volunteer hours, and service-learning incorporated into a course curriculum. For sake of

coherence, I will focus primarily on considering evidence based on studies done on college students and draw conclusions on whether college students should be required to engage in volunteer service in some form. This, of course, will be based on whether they align with the criterion just described above.

## V. Mandated Volunteer Hours

Regardless of which method of required community service we are examining, we can be sure that condition (i) of the criterion will be fulfilled. As described in section III, everyone who has the means to serve others in their local community has a moral obligation to do so. Students, especially college students, who are autonomous adults and are often, but not always, financially supported by others, have the means to do so. So, students have a moral obligation to serve others (i.e. they should do so). In this section and the next, I will be considering whether requiring community service of students can be expected to benefit them as people, and whether requiring it can be expected to add to their skills and knowledge base.

In her 1999 synthesis of the state of education policies surrounding mandated volunteerism, Susan Anderson outlined some of the most common arguments that have been offered in favor of mandated volunteer hours, several of which are relevant to conditions (ii) and (iii) above. These include:

- 1) Community service is an excellent way to train young people for citizenship by engaging students in active civic participation
- 2) Service is a way to explore careers and gain work skills
- 3) All students benefit from the lessons learned through service, and mandating service is the only way to reach those who would never participate voluntarily



- 4) Participation in community service looks good on a college application
- 5) Policies requiring community service are fairly easy to implement
- 6) Community service meets or reduces community needs
- 7) Service requirements help schools align with standards
- 8) Public schools require other types of coursework or experiences for graduation, such as math homework or gym classes; therefore, schools can require community service  
(Anderson 4)

Some of these arguments reflect reality more than others. Regarding the first, it is unclear how, precisely, students can be expected to engage in active civic engagement if they are merely required to do volunteer hours. While some students might be inclined to commit their volunteer hours to helping ameliorate one of the social crises mentioned in section II, or to helping raise awareness to vote (both of which have clear civic engagement elements), other students might be interested in merely raking their neighbor's leaves. There seems to be no sure connection, then, between requiring volunteer hours and fostering a sense of active civic engagement.

The second argument is somewhat accurate. Speaking anecdotally, by spending three years volunteering with disadvantaged children, I became keenly aware of the fact that I cherish any opportunity to work alongside other people. On the job, I can be highly communicative and personable, and I have only come to realize this through volunteering with children. However, again, requiring students to conduct a certain number of volunteer hours without guidance might lead some to simply rake their neighbor's leaves, giving them no sense of awareness of new career opportunities or work skills.

The third argument has merit. For instance, in a 2003 report in the New York Times, one high school student, Emily Fried, contributed over 300 hours of community service because her high school required 40. “If it was not mandatory, I never would have looked into doing it,” she said. “But once I started, I liked it. And I have continued doing it because I realize how important it is to help other people. It has been very fulfilling for me.” The Times author also wrote that Fried “believes community service should be mandated at all high schools because “most kids don’t even consider doing it on their own”” (Ain).

While Fried fell in love with volunteering because of her school requirement, other students despise the requirement. As mentioned in section I, several parents in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania argued in court against mandated volunteer hours for their children. The Institute of Justice defended the parents and students in court (Anderson 4), although the courts ruled in 1993 that mandatory community service does not violate students’ free speech rights acts, nor does it constitute involuntary servitude as per the 13th amendment (Steirer by Steirer v. Bethlehem). The Supreme Court has since denied the Bethlehem parents’ urges for an appeal on multiple occasions (Anderson 5).

The nature of mandated community service aside, scholars have found that in contrast to establishing long-lasting engagement that meets community needs, mandating volunteer hours tends to lead to less volunteering in general. As psychologist Mark Sobus notes, “The research discussed in this article strongly suggests that using external constraints to compel behavior can have the boomerang effect of actually decreasing the desired behavior when the constraint is removed. Such a result would be antithetical to the goal of encouraging students to become involved in their community and could undermine the goal of building good citizens” (Sobus). Another study concluded that among student subjects, those who were required to engage in

community service hours volunteered less after graduation than they otherwise would have (Yang).

Even so, there may still be a good case for requiring volunteer hours of students. We can turn to the fourth argument described by Anderson, that “participation in community service looks good on a college application” (Anderson). While it is true that community service tends to enhance high school students’ college and scholarship applications, this should not be a reason to require it. High SAT scores and a high GPA look good on a college application, too, but those should not be required of all high school students.

Only one other argument that Anderson notes is worth considering: argument (6), that mandating volunteer hours successfully addresses community needs. However, as expressed earlier, it cannot be guaranteed that requiring unguided volunteer hours will lead to any specific type of service, since some students might end up simply raking the leaves off their neighbor’s yard to fulfill their service requirement. Because of this, we have no reason to think that requiring unguided volunteer hours necessarily addresses community needs. In fact, the opposite is likely.

Without having the guidance to walk students through reflecting on the service they are doing, students can develop a so-called “charity mentality,” whereby they come to believe they are helping others, but are not ameliorating any real need and are only ‘helping’ for their own personal gain (Heffner and Beversluis). Such a mentality tends to develop in circumstances where a volunteer commits relatively little time to volunteering, and when they do not spend time reflecting on the context of their service (Heffner and Beversluis), which is in line with the nature of school-mandated community service hours.

While this provides a good reason to object to mandated volunteer hours among students, some arguments are less well-considered. For instance, it is common to quip that students are too busy to devote time to volunteering. College students, in particular, often take a full credit load, involve themselves in clubs and sports, and have an active social life; requiring them to volunteer would put an undue strain on the rest of their life's balance. However, this is mistaken for two reasons: for one, if students were required to commit time to volunteering, they would reprioritize their schedules to accommodate the requirement (just as they do with regular curricular requirements like classes). Second, busy students tend to handle volunteering best: among college students, volunteer rates are highest among those who work 1-10 (46.4%) and 11-15 (35%) hours per week (Dote et al. 2).

Another objection that fails is the claim that since many students have no desire to engage in mandated community service hours, they should not be required to do so. Yet we would not permit this same reasoning to be applied to other student requirements, such as mathematics or history. To use this argument commits one to thinking that if students had no desire to learn mathematics or history, then students should not be required to learn those. But of course, students of all ages should be required to learn at least the fundamentals of mathematics and history. So, this objection fails.

Anderson describes several other objections, including:

- 1) Community service requirements “make work” for young people and do not involve meaningful service experiences
- 2) “Caring” cannot be mandated
- 3) Service mandates pose logistical problems in terms of record keeping, transportation and liability insurance

- 4) Mandating service undermines the sincerity of the many students who already volunteer on their own (Anderson 5)

The fourth argument here has found some support among educators and policymakers who argue against mandated volunteer hours. Said one public school district superintendent, volunteerism – not required community service – is the “purest form of community service” (Ain). Another put it, “Voluntary dedication is an important factor in motivating people to participate in public life, and when you make something mandatory, you lose or undermine the feeling” (qtd in Sobus). Regardless of whether voluntary service is ‘purer’ than required service, both thinkers have a point: by requiring students to log a certain number of community service hours and not fostering a clear, well-founded spirit of engaged citizenship and community, schools do a disservice to those students and individuals who, by themselves, commit time and effort to meeting the needs of their community.

With all this said, we are now ready to make a determination as to whether schools should require their students to engage in community service hours. In this light, we turn to the criterion stated earlier, which states: for any curriculum (call it X), schools should require X if and only if and because: (i) students should learn/do X; (ii) by doing/learning X, students can be expected to benefit as people; (iii) by doing X, students can be expected to gain new skills/knowledge that they otherwise would not have gained.

As was stated near the beginning of this section, condition (i) is automatically fulfilled because students should, morally speaking, devote time toward serving others in their community. As for condition (ii), it is debatable whether this condition is fulfilled. In some ways, students can be expected to benefit, as people, by doing community service. Such involvement looks good on their resume, for instance. However, students can be expected to volunteer less as

a result of being required to do community service hours, benefitting no one. Whereas other school requirements – like general education requirements at universities, which foster creative, critical, and broad thinking in students – benefit them as people, requiring community service hours cannot be expected to benefit students in a similar way. Finally, students cannot be expected to gain new skills or knowledge from being required to engage in community service that they otherwise would not have, so condition (iii) is not satisfied. Given that not all three necessary conditions of the criterion are satisfied, community service hours should not be required of students.

Readers may have noticed that I stressed that this method of requiring community service is unguided. Truly, I made that qualification because the next method of requiring community service has as its central focus guiding students through their service experience. Whether this method, service-learning, succeeds where mandated volunteer hours fails is the focus of the next section.

## VI. Service-Learning

The University of California-Los Angeles' Higher Education Research Institute defines community service-learning as “a form of experiential learning where students and faculty collaborate to address problems and issues, simultaneously gaining knowledge and skills and advancing personal development” (qtd in Seider et al. 599). As Anderson puts it, service-learning is a response to a genuine need by a student that is integrated into a thoughtfully organized curriculum, accompanied by regular reflection, and makes use of partnerships between school and community (Anderson 3). Whereas requiring students to engage in a certain number of volunteer hours gives them no chance to reflect on their service, service-learning programs aim

“to equally benefit the provider and the recipient of the service as well as to ensure equal focus on both the service being provided and the learning that is occurring” (Furco 7, qtd in Seider et al. 599).

In general, service-learning programs have tended to have positive impacts on students. “More than 200 studies of service-learning experiences have been conducted over the past two decades, and many have demonstrated positive effects upon participating college students” (Seider et al.). For one, service-learning helps students place classroom material in a “meaningful context” (Cohen and Kinsey). Far from being a mere academic exercise, service-learning allows for students to apply and contextualize the information they are learning in the academic setting to the real world.

The guided reflection component inherent in service-learning tends to benefit students. For example, one scholar found that among university-level ethics students, those who engaged in service-learning as part of their class requirement made “greater gains in their moral reasoning” than those who did not participate in a similar program (Boss). As Scott Seider and others have noted, other scholars have found similar effects in service-learning integrated with journalism courses (Cohen and Kinsey) and psychology courses (Bringle and Kremer).

Aside from the reflection component which is lacking in required volunteer hours, service-learning has other benefits over the alternative. Student participation in a service-learning course is a stronger predictor of intention to pursue a service-related career than participation in unguided community service hours (Vogelgesang and Astin). Plus, service-learning tends to lead students to volunteer more after their requirement is fulfilled, unlike required volunteer hours. According to a study conducted by Jones and Abes, “four years after a university- based service-learning experience, participants still attributed the experience with having strengthened their

commitment to doing socially responsible work and the development of their ‘caring self’” (Jones and Abes 160).

Other benefits of service-learning on students abound. As Seider and others note, service-learning has been documented as increasing students’ racial and religious tolerance (Barber et al.; Myers-Lipton), reducing their stereotypical perceptions of the poor and elderly (Boyle-Blaise and Kilbane), altering their beliefs about social responsibility (Kendrick), increasing their confidence in their ability to help ameliorate social issues (Giles and Eyler), and increasing their empathy (Eyler et al.) All in all, most scholars conclude that service-learning has positive effects upon the students who are required to engage in it.

There are, however, some drawbacks to service-learning programs depending on the conception of citizenship that frames them. Every service-learning program is, whether explicitly or implicitly, founded on one of three conceptions of citizenship that forms the basis for the program’s mission and goals. The three include “the personally responsible citizen, the participatory citizen, and the justice-oriented citizen” (Kahne and Weisthemer; Seider et al. 599). The first two conceptions of citizenship have tended to have some issues when put into practice. Regarding the participatory citizen framework, while some scholars have found a positive relationship between such a service-learning program and civic attitudes and behaviors (Eyler and Giles; Vogelgesang and Astin), others have concluded that there is little evidence linking service-learning participation and civic behaviors like voting, contacting public officials, or becoming engaged in community affairs (Kirlin; Perry and Katula).

The personal responsibility framework has been somewhat problematic as well. For instance, Jerry Miller reported that “undergraduates participating in a service-learning psychology course at the University of Michigan demonstrated significant declines in their



beliefs about their capacity to make a difference in the world” (Miller, in Seider et al. 602). On the flip side, a personal responsibility approach to service-learning can “encourage students to think that their individual actions are enough and that focusing on larger structural issues is not necessary” (Walker 186).

Surely, neither a personal responsibility nor a participatory citizen conception of citizenship fails to benefit students; however, each of these conceptions seems to fail to foster the correct attitude in their students. Participatory programs aim for their students to be more civically engaged, however the opposite seems to happen. Personal responsibility programs aim for their students to foster a mature sense of social responsibility, although this seems to not happen.

However, the third conception of service-learning – the justice-oriented conception – has tended to form an excellent basis for service-learning programs, since programs rooted in that conception have tended to instill the best attitude in their students. The University of San Diego’s service-learning program provides the ideal example of a justice-oriented service-learning curriculum. It consists in a year-long course in philosophy and theology where students meet twice a week for lecture and discussion. As well, students choose among 50 community service commitments, and spend 10 hours a week serving in their chosen commitments (Seider et al. 598).

The mission of the University’s program “is to educate our students about social injustice by putting them into direct contact with marginalized communities and social change organizations and by encouraging discussion on classic and contemporary works of philosophy and theology. Our goal is to foster critical consciousness and enable students to question conventional wisdom and learn how to work for a just society. We accomplish this by helping

our students make relevant connections between course material and experience with community service” (Seider et al. 598).

In one study of the program, students who participated came away with a “stronger belief in the importance of community service and a deeper sense of responsibility for the wellbeing of struggling fellow citizens,” and exhibited “statistically larger increases in public service motivation over the course of [their] academic year than their classmates in the control group” (Seider et al. 608). As the authors noted, “Similar to the ethics students in Boss’ study who participated in service-learning, the combination of philosophy and community service enabled this study’s [program] participants to reflect upon the social issues they encountered at their service placements and the role they envisioned themselves playing in addressing these issues” (Seider et al. 614).

The authors attributed the success of the University of San Diego’s service-learning program to its justice-oriented framework, through which the program’s “faculty and students synthesized the program’s assigned readings and service experiences” (Seider et al. 618). Some elements that made the University’s program successful included a useful interplay between readings and service; framing service as a responsibility rather than a good deed (readings like Privilege, Power, and Difference, along with philosophy and theology readings helped establish this); improving students’ awareness of the history and scope of crises (increasing their “critical consciousness”); and, given the University’s role as a public Christian university, portraying service as a core component of their relationship with God (Seider et al.).

Truly, the last point formed the ultimate basis for the justice-oriented conception of the program. The University of San Diego’s mission is like most Christian educational institutions: “Most Christian colleges have a legacy of service and see education for service in the world as

central to their educational mission” (Heffner and Beversluis). While this allows for the University of San Diego to firmly establish its justice-oriented conception of citizenship in clear values, secular universities feel less able to do the same. “By virtue of its positioning within a Jesuit university, the [University of San Diego’s] program was able to frame its philosophy, theology, and community service through an unambiguous, justice-oriented lens. In contrast, secular institutions that situate their service-learning in a similar justice-oriented framework risk being accused of “attempting to deliver a very specific and highly political notion of the truth under guise of neutral pedagogy”” (Butin 486, in Seider et al. 619). Fearful of such accusations, “A vast majority of school-based service-learning and community service programs embrace a vision of citizenship devoid of politics... these programs privilege individual acts of compassion and kindness over social action and the pursuit of social justice” (Westheimer and Kahne 243).

While secular universities have been hesitant to develop values to ground justice-oriented service-learning programs, this is possible to do. “For service-learning programs on secular campuses... it is crucial that these programs take on the challenging task of articulating the values they are seeking to promote as well as the framework (or frameworks) through which they intend participants to make sense of the service-learning experience. Such articulation is by no means easy; however, this study of the [University of San Diego’s] program suggests that a service-learning program guided by a clear set of values and interpretive framework can significantly impact the public service motivation of participating students” (Seider et al. 619).

Clearly, service-learning programs benefit students. Even so, should schools require their students to engage in service-learning? As we did in the last section, we must consider whether requiring service-learning fulfills the three necessary conditions of the following criterion: for any curriculum (call it X), schools should require X if and only if and because: (i) students

should learn/do X; (ii) by doing/learning X, students can be expected to benefit as people; (iii) by doing X, students can be expected to gain new skills/knowledge that they otherwise would not have gained.

The first condition is, of course, satisfied for the same reason it was satisfied by mandatory volunteer hours. As for condition (ii), this section has illuminated many reasons for thinking that students can be expected to benefit, as people, by engaging in service-learning – especially a justice-oriented service-learning program. Finally, students can surely be expected to gain new skills and knowledge from engaging in a service-learning program that they otherwise would not have gained, through both their class material and service experiences. With all three conditions fulfilled, it naturally follows that schools should in fact require their students to engage in a service-learning program, ideally a justice-oriented one.

## VII. The Role of Western Washington University

Given that schools should require their students to participate in a service-learning program, it seems that Western Washington University should, if possible, require its students to do so. For its part, Western has long encouraged active participation within the Whatcom County community, and has been amply recognized for doing so. The campus has been selected for the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll with Distinction award four separate times ("President's"), an award "which recognizes higher education institutions across the country that reflect the values of exemplary community service and achieve meaningful outcomes in their communities" ("Western"). Most recently, in 2014, Western was nominated for its Center for Service Learning, Compass to Campus, and its Human Services programs.

However, if my analysis is correct, then Western would likely benefit its students and surrounding community to an even greater extent than it already does by requiring students to participate in service-learning. In fact, unlike many other secular universities, Western has a unique opportunity to implement the best kind of service-learning program: a justice-oriented one. This is because its strategic mission and goals read like values which could form the basis of a justice-oriented framework for service-learning. Consider, first, Western's mission:

- Western Washington University is a public comprehensive institution dedicated to serving the people of the state of Washington. Together our students, staff, and faculty are committed to making a positive impact in the state and the world with a shared focus on academic excellence and inclusive achievement.
- As a community, we uphold certain basic values. These include:
  - Commitment to student success, critical thought, creativity, and sustainability
  - Commitment to equity and justice, and respect for the rights and dignity of others
  - Pursuit of excellence in an environment characterized by principles of shared governance, academic freedom and effective engagement
  - Integrity, responsibility and accountability in all our work (“Strategic”)

Next, consider Western's strategic goals:

- 1) Western will provide a transformational education grounded in the liberal arts and sciences and based on innovative scholarship, research, and creative ability
- 2) Western will advance a deeper understanding of engagement with place

- 3) Western will foster a caring and supportive environment where all members are respected and treated fairly
- 4) Western will pursue justice and equity in its policies, practices, and impacts (“Strategic”)

Here, we see a strong commitment to justice, equity, and respect for others in the community, among other values that could form the basis of a justice-oriented service-learning program.

Even if despite its best efforts, Western Washington University is (for whatever reason) unable to require its students to participate in a justice-oriented service-learning program, a department which has more flexibility in creating requirements for students should try to develop such a program. The Honors Program at Western comes to mind here, for a few reasons. For one, Honors students are among the most hard-working students on campus, and may be specially suited to contribute positively to their community through service-learning. Their work ethic is reflected in the requirements for Honors: students are expected to maintain at least a 3.5 GPA during their last 90 credits of coursework at Western (“Requirements”). As well, Western Honors has a fruitful history of developing new seminars and colloquia with non-Honors faculty and departments who are best suited to teach various topics. One faculty member at Western, Liz Mogford, would be well-equipped to teach a justice-oriented service-learning course on behalf of Western Honors.

Information on service requirements throughout Honors programs and colleges throughout the United States is readily available, with about 38% of them requiring students to serve a set number of volunteer hours, and about 49% of them having a service-learning course

as a required or non-required part of their program (National). The University of Alaska-Anchorage has an exemplary service-learning Honors course. Titled 'HNRS A310, Community Service: Theory and Practice,' the course "explores questions of service, community, and self, and includes guided volunteer service with a cultural organization, social service organization, or government agency" ("HNRS A310"). Said one student of her experience in UAA's Honors Program, "Of all my Honors courses, HNRS 310 challenged me the most because it allowed me to actually go out and work in the field that I'm majoring in" ("Honors Core").

A previous Western Washington University Honors student, Elise Aylward, has considered methods for incorporating service-learning into Western's Honors curriculum. She argued that introducing a new "Innovator" or "Changemaker" track with a service-learning component in Western Honors could be beneficial, as could offering an optional service-learning colloquium (Aylward). However, she noted that based on a trial service-learning colloquium run by Mary Metzger in spring of 2016, it would be crucial for the service-learning instructor to inform their students early on about the amount of work to expect in the course, for students must be willing to commit a substantial amount of time to their service project to have the best experience (Aylward).

Finally, there is an internal benefit to requiring service-learning among Honors students. Students could fulfill their service requirement by involving themselves in one (or more) of three volunteer opportunities within Honors: the Student Honors Board, the Honors Outreach to Past and Prospective Students (a.k.a. HOPPS), or Honors Peer Group. The Student Honors Board exists to enhance the Honors student body by offering events and community-building opportunities for students. HOPPS exists to connect current Honors students with high school juniors and seniors interested in attending Western. Honors Peer Group exists so that Honors

upper-classmen can mentor new and incoming Honors students about class schedules, university life, and so on. Having been intimately involved with all three organizations, I can honestly say that my involvement has been as fruitful to me – if not more so – than it has been for the students I have served; instituting a required service-learning course in Honors would be likely to bring new members into each of these three organizations, benefitting themselves and Honors greatly.

## VIII. Conclusion

There is a strong case for requiring a justice-oriented service-learning program across schools. In particular, universities and university Honors programs and colleges have the flexibility to implement an excellent service-learning course well, and their students have the autonomy to engage with the material and their community best. Regarding mandatory volunteer hours, while students should volunteer on their own, they should not be required to do log a certain number of volunteer hours by educational institutions. The scale of the issues that afflict others is immense, and the needs of our communities are constant. These needs must continue to be met by governmental institutions and individuals around the world, and through service-learning, educational institutions can and should play their own role in addressing critical social issues through a justice-oriented lens.



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