

Service Pays Off

Your group benefits from volunteering

By Catherine Smith

Community service may seem like grueling unpaid work, with the only benefit being the warm fuzzy feeling that comes from giving back to the community. But service projects offer your group or organization a myriad of benefits beyond the philanthropic aspect. Volunteers can build relationships, receive awards and scholarships, enhance their resumes, create social unity, and even make career and life-long decisions. Service projects don't have to be forced upon volunteers or viewed as drudgery.

The Tie That Binds

Community service projects let volunteers work together as a group and therefore enhance friendships and build new relationships. "The structure [of community service] opens up shyness," says Circle K International District Administrator David Womack. Working in a group environment for the benefit of others builds unity among members. Circle K at the **University of Alabama at Birmingham** earns funding by cleaning the football stadium, which lets participants get to know one another and build relationships, Womack says. "We all pitch in and work together to clean [the stadium], and then, we all receive the benefit of the funds, which are used to sponsor other service projects."

Relationships between volunteers from differing organizations grow along with community interactions. In Maryland, the **John Hopkins University** chapter of Alpha Phi Omega, a co-ed service fraternity, strives to create and enhance relationships within the organization along with building ties to the community. "Spending an evening together gets everyone to work as a team, even if they don't really know each other at the start of the project," says Chirag Patel, former president.

APO also has improved its reputation in the community because of its projects. This has allowed the group to build connections with the local police department and other service-oriented organizations. "APO has truly built a name for itself, both on campus and beyond," Patel says. APO won the Homewood Award for the 2000-01 school year, which is presented annually to groups for outstanding service to the student body and university.

A Good Ol' Time

At the **University of South Florida**, former president Richard Dudley of the Beta Theta Pi fraternity was called upon to come up with ideas for new community service

projects. He quickly discovered that getting a bunch of college guys up early on a weekend morning to do "dirty" jobs was impossible.

Dudley decided the best way to get his brothers' support was to get their input. "Instead of mandating that they show up at this clean-up on this day, we brought up discussions in our meetings of what they would want to participate in," he says. The members began helping out at the Ronald McDonald House, "Zoo Boo" at Lowry Park Zoo, and retirement homes. "I also tried to attach a pool party, barbecue, or some kind of party following the community service activity. This made our members much more willing to wake up early and work so they could party later," he says. By revamping the service projects into social events, community service brought the members together and provided a sense of group unity.

Dishing Out Awards

All freshmen at the **University of Arkansas at Fort Smith** are required to take a "foundations" seminar class, during which they must complete 10 hours of community service. Resume-building early on was one reason for this initiative. Community service shows commitment, involvement, and a wider range of knowledge.

When you apply for grad schools, scholarships, and fellowships, volunteer experience will help you outshine those who haven't made the effort. "In our Student Advisory Council club, we sponsor practically all events on campus," says Marie Higginbotham, SAC president at UA Fort Smith. "Many times, the events are community service oriented, and the students getting involved and working with us receive points toward scholarships."

Because one of the national awards for the Beta Theta Pi fraternity requires applicants to have at least 10 community service hours to be eligible, Dudley made sure all of his chapter's members were volunteering.

For Sarah Kureshi, a **University of Central Florida** grad, volunteer work paid off when she submitted an autobiography as part of her application to **Mayo Medical School** in Minnesota. "Community service impacts college students in immeasurable ways," she says.

A Life-Long Venture


Above all else, community service can affect the life-long goals and future careers of the group members who participate in volunteer work. Kureshi had always wanted to be a doctor, which gave way to her desire to help others. As an undergrad, Kureshi worked at the homeless clinic in Orlando, helped with the Special Olympics and Habitat for Humanity, coordinated numerous food and clothing drives, and worked with Oxfam Harvest to organize Volunteer UCF's annual Hunger Banquet. "After my experience with community service, I now aspire to be a doctor working in public service to help government organizations, educational institutions, and



COURTESY CHIRAG PATEL

Chirag Patel seeks to improve Johns Hopkins' status in the community by participating in numerous service projects.

nonprofit agencies to assist the community," she says.

Kureshi fulfills that desire through her volunteer work at a refugee clinic on the Thailand-Burma border, as a tutor for Somali kids, as a Sunday school teacher at the Rochester Islamic Center, and as founder of a weight management clinic. "It is through my [community service] that I have truly learned the meaning of citizenship—to balance the benefits and responsibilities of being part of a community," she says. 

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