

INTENTIONAL INTERNATIONAL SERVICE LEARNING DEVELOPS EFFECTIVE GLOBAL CITIZENS

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The McMaster Student Service Leadership Programs align directly with the mission of the McMaster school: to educate students for responsible citizenship. The McMaster School programs structure opportunities through practical experiential learning and academic research (O'Connell, 2007), thus supporting the College's mission to create a culture of engagement. The Service Leadership programs at Defiance College have created a developmental model that prepares students through service and co-curricular service learning for the demands of community-based research in the McMaster Scholars program. Defiance College has adapted the Bonner Foundation's student developmental model to shape the first two years in which students participate in the leadership programs. During the first and second years, our Service Leaders commit to a local agency and learn the difference between volunteerism and service learning. The structure of the program challenges them to conceptualize basic community needs, provide leadership in assisting community partners in day to day operations, and learn how nonprofit organizations operate. The experience of working with the community contributes to the intentional development of a student's character that can enable a student to see beyond education merely as certification and preparation for a job (Crosby, 2007).

The McMaster Service Leadership Program has introduced an international co-curricular service-learning experience. International service learning allows students to combine their academic interests and cross-cultural curiosity with substantive volunteer service to create a powerful dynamic between direct cultural exposure, service, leadership, and academics. Democratic learning communities create the framework for students to consider the service experience in both a cultural and disciplinary context. Learning communities are designed to intensify synergistic possibilities for meaningful service (Smith, MacGregor, Matthews, & Gabelnick, 2004). The learning community is implemented with five core practices in mind: community, diversity, integration, active learning, and reflection (Smith et.

al., 2004). As students work within the learning community and with the community partners on the ground, they begin to recognize community needs at a global level. International Service-Learning is not so much “life-enriching” but rather “complacency-shattering” (Grusky, 2000).

Interaction with a community provides the experiential learning about a community. Time in the classroom provides the space and time to consider why community conditions are what they are (Service Learning: Why do it?, 2006). The purpose of the international experience is to call students’ attention to the complex problems of the modern world and the difficulty of finding effective solutions to those problems (Crosby, 2007). For many students, participation in the McMaster Service Leadership programs provides excellent preparation for the challenge of the McMaster Scholars program.

FROM SERVICE TO ACADEMIC EXPLORATION

Since 1999 Defiance College students, faculty, and administration have been traveling to High Gate, Jamaica, to partner with Christian Service International (CSI). Students build a 10’x20’ house for a family in the rural community of St. Mary’s Parish while they immerse themselves in Jamaican



culture. Each group visits elementary schools, orphanages, church services, and shares meals with local Jamaicans. Students compare what they learned in the learning community to what they experience in-country.

Guided structured reflection allows students to process information that they gained in the learning community with their experiences in Jamaica and link this new knowledge to their academic interests. Students in the Jamaica learning community are expected to develop presentations for the annual McMaster Symposium that relate their personal experiences in Jamaica to academic research in their field of study. In January 2008, Chris Khoma, a junior Criminal Justice (CJ) major, was deeply affected by the statistics he read about the number of violent incidents and homicides that take place on the island. While talking with the people we worked with, he learned that the police system is perceived as corrupt and that only large cities, such as Kingston, have any real police presence. Upon his return, Chris researched crime in Jamaica and discovered that it has the largest number of homicides caused by stabbings than any other country. Most of these deaths occur because of domestic disputes, not drug incidents like he had predicted. As a CJ major, Chris recognized that a lack of an organized police force could be a contributing factor to some of these statistics. Chris hopes to integrate his experience and subsequent research of police corruption in the United States into his senior capstone project. Like Chris, most of our students return with new perceptions about service learning and global needs.

IMPROVING THE HUMAN CONDITION

Once students return from the trip, they are encouraged to apply to be McMaster Scholars. The McMaster Scholars program allows students and faculty to work together on academic research projects that address community needs with partners in Cambodia, Belize, and New Orleans.

During their international service-learning experience, students in the Service Leadership programs have recognized the global nature of the needs that they encounter. As McMaster Scholars, they have the opportunity to apply their academic knowledge to focus on those needs. In order to achieve such intellectual and experiential growth, students must develop a deeper sense of the problems they are addressing through their service work (Morris, 2006).

Kasey Carlisle, a Restoration Ecology major, was overwhelmed with the environmental issues that she witnessed while in Jamaica. She noted that there was no proper sewage system, no recycling programs, and evidence of deforestation, caused by an increase in commercial construction to support the large increase in tourism. Upon her return, Kasey researched the effects



that this was having on the island. Trees provide protection for many Jamaican people especially those living in rural areas. Deforestation contributes to soil erosion and less coverage during hurricanes (National Environment & Planning Agency, n.d.). For the people with whom our Service Leaders work, deforestation has a direct negative impact.

When Kasey returned to Ohio, she applied to be a McMaster Scholar. She will be planting Cyprus trees to facilitate the restoration of the Cyprus swamp surrounding New Orleans, which is the first line of defense for any hurricane that would come ashore. Kasey

hopes to educate people about the importance of trees and the effects of deforestation when she travels with the New Orleans Learning Community.

Allison Johnson, a Middle Childhood Education major, was affected by conditions in Jamaican schools. Prior to the trip, Allison organized a campus-wide drive to collect school supplies for the Jamaican Student Support Program. Many schools in Jamaica do not have the supplies they need for their classrooms, and many families cannot afford to buy supplies for children.

During her trip Allison visited with children and learned that these children had less access to educational opportunities than students in the United States. Jamaican students are required to pay for tuition, books, and uniforms. If children do not have the money for these things, then often they cannot attend school. Allison was inspired to learn more about education systems around the world. During her presentation at the McMaster Symposium, she provided data that demonstrated unequal access to education in countries around the world. Allison subsequently developed a McMaster Scholar proposal that will allow her to provide training to teachers in the rural areas of Cambodia. Allison will be traveling with the Cambodia Learning Community in 2009.

RESULTS

Since 2002, 78 students have been named McMaster Scholars. Twenty-seven of those students have been involved with the McMaster Service Leadership Programs. These programs have become an important preparation step in becoming a successful McMaster Scholar. The chart below shows the progression of this connection over the last three years.

	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009
Total Scholars	21	27	27
Leadership Students-scholars	2	8	12
Service Leadership/McMaster Scholar	10%	30%	44%

International service learning can bring students to a clearer understanding of the fundamental necessity for profound social change (Grusky, 2000). When we lead students to actively address real-world issues and problems, we help to bridge the understanding between charity and justice; thus, we support not only the development of more globally conscious students, but more effective global citizens. The McMaster School for Advancing Humanity has been able to develop a model that prepares students in the Service Leadership Programs to be actively engaged in addressing critical social issues in whatever professions they may choose in the future.



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