

**An Ethic of Service and Learning  
 Student Participation in Service and Community-  
 Based Learning Initiatives at Notre Dame**

by Jay W. Brandenberger and Thomas A. Trozzolo

The 1990s brought a renewed focus on the social mission of higher education, highlighted by increased student participation in service and service-learning initiatives on campuses across the nation (see Rothman, 1998; Eyler & Giles, 1999). The University of Notre Dame, building on a longstanding ethos of service and social action rooted in Catholic social tradition, has developed a variety of initiatives to enhance student involvement and social responsibility. The Center for Social Concerns, celebrating its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2003, is a visible sign of the University’s commitment to “create a sense of human solidarity and concern for the common good that will bear fruit as learning becomes service to justice” (University Mission Statement).

This Report—a response to multiple requests—examines overall trends in Notre Dame undergraduate student service participation, situating findings in historical and national contexts. The goal is to provide a broad overview of participation in curricular and extracurricular domains to guide educational development and further research.

Data were collected through an annual survey of over 90% of the senior class (in collaboration with the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA) and a broad measure completed by 698 students from the sophomore, junior and senior classes (see the Center for Social Concerns website for further information on research methods).

**Student Involvement**

Notre Dame students are significantly engaged in service and social action initiatives. Figures 1 and 2 show that in 2001, approximately 22% indicated frequent engagement in volunteer

**Figure 1. Frequency of service participation of Notre Dame seniors and national comparison group (in percentages)**

	Notre Dame Seniors					All 4-Year Colleges
	1993	1995	1997	1999	2001	2001
<b>Frequently</b>	19%	25	20	22.1	21.9	16.6
<b>Occasionally</b>	59%	56	59	59.9	63.2	56.6
<b>Not at all</b>	22%	19	21	18.0	14.9	28.6

Source: College Student Survey, Higher Educ. Research Institute (ND samples range from 1747 to 1886)

Item: How often did you engage in the following in the past year: **volunteer work**

Note: National comparison group is four-year colleges/universities sampled by HERI

work (compared to 16.6% at four-year comparison colleges). Another 63% cite occasional volunteer service. Reported participation rates have increased over the last decade, with the percentage of non-participants declining from 22% in 1993 to 15% in 2001.

A similar survey item provides another lens with which to examine participation. Figure 3 indicates that approximately 39% of undergraduate students participate in service activities on a weekly basis. Figures 2 and 3 together suggest that over 85% of undergraduates participate in some form of volunteer or service activity at least a few times per year. In comparison, national estimates range from 71% across all 4-year institutions surveyed by HERI in 2001 to 28% of students at Campus Compact member institutions (2001).

Fifty-four percent of Notre Dame seniors (2001) reported volunteering from 1 to 2 hours in a typical week, with an additional 13.6% spending 3 to 5 hours (data from students at four-year institutions nationally were 40% and 9.9%, respectively). Service is only part of active lives: Notre Dame students report studying, watching television, exercising, socializing, and working more often each week than volunteering; they indicate volunteering more frequently than engaging in private prayer or reading for pleasure.

**Figure 2. Frequency of service participation at Notre Dame by gender and college (in percentages)**

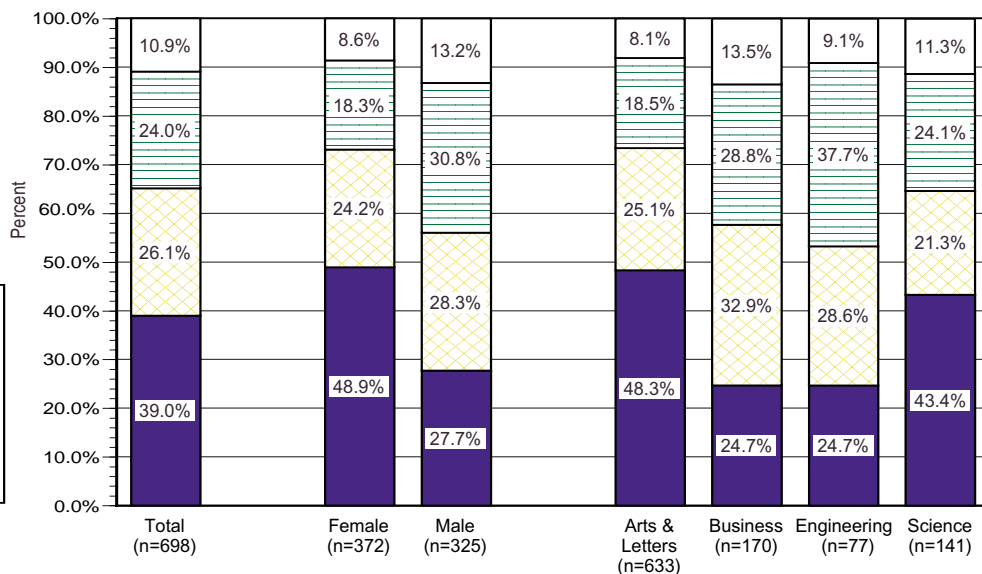
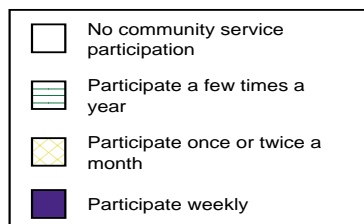
Notre Dame Seniors	All	Males	Females	A&L	Business	Engr	Science
<b>Class of 2001</b>							
Frequently	22	16	28	30	14	10	24
Occasionally	63	66	60	57	72	64	63
Not at all	15	17	12	13	14	26	13
<b>Class of 1995</b>							
Frequently	25	17	36	33	16	10	30
Occasionally	56	59	51	52	60	61	55
Not at all	19	24	13	15	24	29	16

Note: A&L = Arts and Letters, Engr=Engineering.  
See Center for Social Concerns for data on School of Architecture  
Source: HERI CSS administered to Seniors at ND in spring (samples > 1800)

Females show greater service involvement on many indicators, consistent with national trends (see Figures 2 and 3). By college of enrollment, Arts and Letters students show more frequent involvement, followed by the College of Science.

Community involvement continues a trend begun for many students in high school: 96.6% of those entering Notre Dame in the fall of 2002 (and 90.2% of first year students nationally) indicated volunteering in the previous year. Students report fairly consistent involvement across the four undergraduate years, with a slight decline during the senior year.

**Figure 3. Percentage of Notre Dame undergraduates who participate in community service activities, by gender and college**



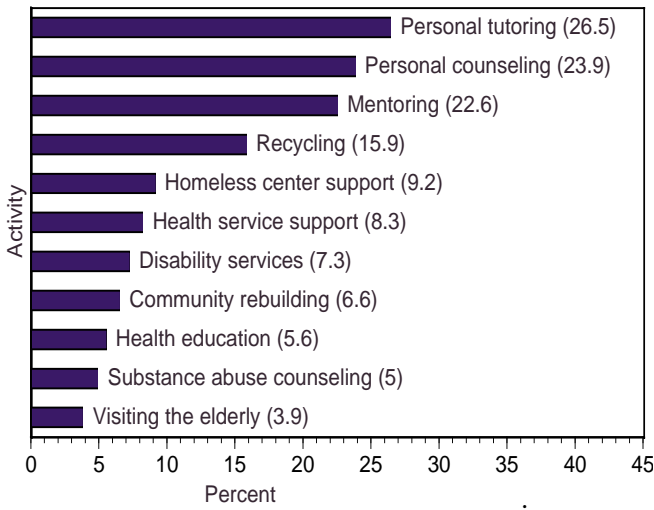
NDSL Survey:1999, Question 15

## Where Do Students Serve?

Figure 4 shows that tutoring and mentoring, most often with youth, are frequent forms of service. Students are also involved in health services, environmental concerns, and various community building initiatives.

In addition, students participate in occasional events such as Christmas in April, a one day large-scale initiative that involves over 1000 students each year in repairing homes in the local community. Others fast during one lunch period weekly in an effort to raise consciousness and funds for world hunger. Additional data on service contexts is available from the Center.

**Figure 4. Service Activities: Percentage of Notre Dame undergraduates who volunteer in these activities at least monthly**



NDSL Survey, Question 15, n=698

## Student Service/Action Groups

Student involvement is often facilitated through a rich tradition of student-led service and social action groups supported by the Center for Social Concerns. Over 3300 students are currently active in 43 such groups, up from 1300 students in 25 groups fifteen years ago (see Figure 5). Some groups have increased in size (e.g. Habitat for Humanity), while others have seen shifts to new opportunities (e.g., recent tutoring and mentoring initiatives have drawn from the longstanding Neighborhood Study Help Program). The Center works with student group leaders to facilitate reflection and social analysis with respect to issues raised in service contexts.

**Figure 5. Student service and social action groups at Notre Dame: 1988-2003**

	1988-89	2002-03
<b>Number of Groups Overall</b>	25	43
<b>Number of Active Participants - All Groups</b>	1317	3338
<b>Student Participants in Sample Groups (estimated)</b>		
Amnesty International ND	20	50
Arnold Air Society (Service by ROTC cadets)	65	35
Big Brothers/Big Sisters	50	80
Circle K	30	200
Foodshare	60	28
Habitat for Humanity	40	350
Neighborhood Study Help Program	300	28
Pax Christi	12	20
Right to Life	20	70
World Hunger Coalition (Weekly Lunch Fast)	225	1000

Sources: 1988-89 data are from K. Maas Weigert report to Provost (June, 1989)  
2002-03 data are from survey of student group leaders (conducted October, 2002)

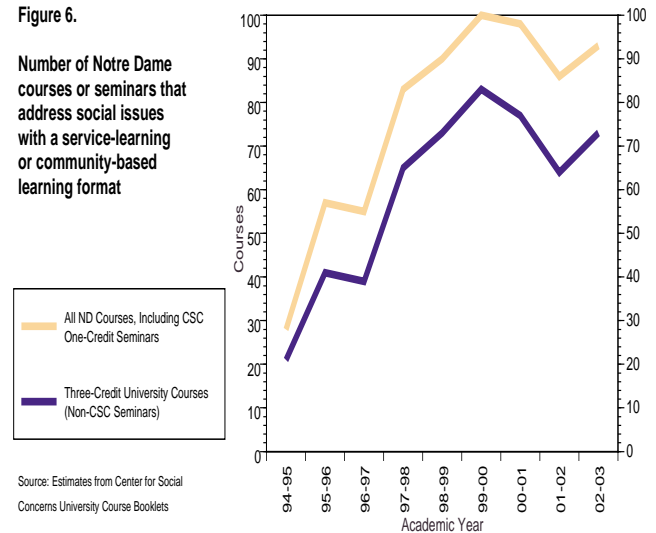
Residence halls also facilitate service and social action activities. A social concerns commissioner in each hall coordinates a variety of opportunities, from tutoring to an annual service immersion during fall break.

## Academic Opportunities: Courses & Experiential Seminars

While involvement may begin for some students through extracurricular opportunities, the University's diverse academic resources and Catholic mission offer unique

**Figure 6.**

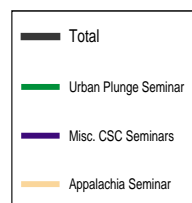
**Number of Notre Dame courses or seminars that address social issues with a service-learning or community-based learning format**



Source: Estimates from Center for Social Concerns University Course Booklets

Figure 7.

Student enrollment in Center for Social Concerns Seminars since 1980 (one-credit courses; excludes Summer Service Projects)



Source: Center databases

potentials to integrate service within the curriculum for specific educational purposes. This is indeed a growing trend in higher education, one that Notre Dame is at the forefront of nationally.

An increasing number of courses (see Figure 6) at the University, from approximately 20 in 1994 to over 70 currently, incorporate a service-learning or community-based learning component (Campus Compact, 2001, notes that the average number of such courses for member institutions nationally is 27). Such courses are offered through a variety of disciplines as well as the First Year of Studies, which facilitates a set of composition courses that include service-learning coordinated by the Center for Social Concerns.

Faculty at the Center offer discipline-based three-credit courses that model service-learning and a focus on justice. Since 1983, over 1500 students have participated in courses such as *Theology and Social Ministry*, *Leadership and Social Responsibility*, and *Restoring Economic Vitality to the Inner City*.

The Center’s Summer Service Learning course initiatives (see Research Report 1) provide eight-week learning experiences for over 230 students annually. Since 1980, over 2,600 have participated in over 200 cities and 20 countries. In recent years, summer service internships focusing on not-for-profit business initiatives, minority leadership development, and worker justice have been developed.

In addition, the Center collaborates with the Department of Theology and others to offer a unique series of one-

credit Social Concerns Seminars built around a national or international immersion. From the *Church and Social Action*—known as the Urban Plunge and begun over 30 years ago—to a new *Haiti Seminar* with the College of Engineering, approximately 20 such Seminars are offered annually. Through these experiential Seminars approximately 700 students each year (see Figure 7) explore such topics as the challenges of poverty, the role of not-for-profit organizations in social change, international development, and the complexities of AIDS preven-

tion. Often, alumni/ae of the University participate or assist with the educational immersions on site. Student interest in the Seminars continues to outpace availability: in the spring of 2003, 315 students applied for 203 Seminar openings.

## Curricular Integration

Given the increases in academic service-learning and curricular opportunities, how can we understand the locus of service performed by Notre Dame students (documented in Figures 2 and 3)? On a 1995 survey, 25% of seniors reported that their community service was performed as part of a course. In 2001, over 41% of seniors (CSS data) indicated they had taken at least one service-

*Two principles have guided the development of service programs at Notre Dame. First, the service project or program must be meaningful to the community, state or nation. Second, we expect that service be integrated with learning. Meaningful community service must provide opportunities for faculty and students to reflect on their experiences and to explore the root causes of social problems. It is this critical thinking that provides participants with the skills and insights necessary to make real change.*

— Rev. Edward A. Malloy, C.S.C., University President

Excerpts from Testimony Regarding National and Community Service to the United States Senate Committee on Labor and Human Resources (June 8, 1993)

# S o c i a l I n d e x

## Service • Learning • Civic Engagement

Percentage of Notre Dame undergraduates who volunteer at least a few times per year	85%
Number of volunteer/service hours contributed annually by Notre Dame's 8000 undergraduates (estimate)	225,500
Percentage growth in participation in student service/social action groups since 1988-89	100%
Number of service-learning and community-based learning courses offered annually at the University	90+
Percentage of Notre Dame seniors who have participated in at least one service-learning course (2001)	41%
Number of participants in <i>The Church and Social Action</i> seminar (The Urban Plunge) since 1974	6596
Number of participants in one-credit <i>Social Concerns Seminars</i> annually	700+
Number of Summer Service Learning Internship participants since 1980	2653
Number of student participants in three-credit courses taught by Center for Social Concerns faculty since 1983	1500 +
Annual percentage of Notre Dame students that enter postgraduate service initiatives for one or two years following graduation	8-10%

Source: Center for Social Concerns Data Archives

learning course. In reflecting on the impact of such courses, 57 percent of Notre Dame students (compared to 45% at colleges and universities nationwide) indicated that the service-learning component enhanced their understanding of academic course material (2001, College Student Survey data). Service-learning courses also raise ethical issues that can be addressed in class contexts (in 1995, over 50% of seniors indicated that six or more of their Notre Dame courses examined moral and ethical questions).

In order to foster links between the service involvement and academic initiatives, the Center funds eight Community-Based Learning Coordinators at local agencies. The CBLC's consult with faculty on course development, facilitate learning opportunities germane to the work of each agency, and offer educational initiatives linking community and University. Building on such networks, the Center for Social Concerns provides mini-grants for community-based research addressing local needs.

## Postgraduate Service

The ethos at Notre Dame prompts many students to choose postgraduate service opportunities. Over 700 Notre Dame graduates have enrolled in the Peace Corps since its founding in 1961. Many participate in faith-based initiatives for a year or two after graduation, including Holy Cross Associates (over 700 participants since 1978) and the Alliance for Catholic Education (approximately 500 participants since 1994). Ten percent of students surveyed (1999, n=698) planned full-time volunteer service for at least a year following graduation. A future report will examine postgraduate service trends.

*In collaborating with governmental agencies, regional associations, and other universities, whether public or private, Catholic universities should give corporate witness to and promote the Church's social teaching and its moral principles in areas such as the fostering of peace and justice, respect for all human life, the eradication of poverty and unjust discrimination, the development of all peoples and the growth of human culture.*

— United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae: The Application to the United States*

## Summary and Conclusions

The data above suggest that Notre Dame students demonstrate consistent service and social action in multiple contexts. Such participation has increased over the last decade, and is highest for females and students from the College of Arts and Letters.

Service involvement is increasingly initiated or sustained as part of courses and curricular initiatives. The Center for Social Concerns continues efforts to engage students of underrepresented groups, and to collaborate with faculty and community leaders to offer new forms of engagement (e.g., community-based research) that build on the University's strengths.

Service and community engagement, both curricular and beyond, provide important educational and developmental opportunities to enhance students' understanding of and response to social and moral issues. Consistent with Notre Dame's mission, efforts to integrate service and social action initiatives across the curriculum should be built into departmental and University planning.

This Report provides context for future research. Subsequent Reports will examine the trends outlined above in more detail, and assess the impact of student involvement on academic, civic, and moral development.

## References

Campus Compact: *Annual Service Statistics, 2001*. Retrieved from [www.compact.org/newscc/stats2001/](http://www.compact.org/newscc/stats2001/)

Eyler, J. & Giles, D. E. (1999). *Where's the Learning in Service Learning?* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Higher Education Research Institute. Data retrieved from [www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/heri.html](http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/heri.html)

Rotham, M. (Ed.). (1998). *Service Matters: Engaging Higher Education in the Renewal of America's Communities and American Democracy*. Providence, RI: Campus Compact.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. (1999). *Ex Corde Ecclesiae: Application to the United States*. Retrieved from <http://www.nccbuscc.org/bishops/excorde.htm>

## Center Research Report Series

This report is part of an ongoing series published by the Center for Social Concerns and its partners at the University of Notre Dame. Research at the Center focuses on the role and impact of higher education with respect to the development of social responsibility, leadership, ethics, and faith.

### Previous Reports

1. Summer Service Learning Participation: 1980-1999
2. Religious Commitment and Prosocial Behavior
3. Summer Service Learning – What Distinguishes Students Who Choose to Participate? (Part One)
4. Summer Service Learning – What Distinguishes Students Who Choose to Participate? (Part Two)

Future reports will examine motivations for service participation, the effects of engaged learning, moral and civic development, and related topics.

### Reports are available for downloading at:

[http://centerforsocialconcerns.nd.edu/sub\\_research.html](http://centerforsocialconcerns.nd.edu/sub_research.html)

### Center Research Faculty and Staff

Jay W. Brandenberger, Ph.D.  
Series Editor  
Director, Experiential Learning & Developmental Research

Mary P. Beckman, Ph.D.  
Associate Director for Academic Affairs & Research

(Rev.) William M. Lies, C.S.C., Ph.D.  
Executive Director

Thomas A. Trozzolo, M.A.,  
Andrews Research Fellow

### Center Research Advisors

Mark Gunty, Institutional Research  
George Howard, Department of Psychology  
Felicia LeClere, Laboratory for Social Research  
F. Clark Power, Program of Liberal Studies

**The Center's research is supported by the Office of the Provost and a grant from the Kathleen Andrews Family.**

For more information, contact Jay Brandenberger, at [Brandenberger.1@nd.edu](mailto:Brandenberger.1@nd.edu)

### Center for Social Concerns

Phone: (574) 631-5293 Fax: (574) 631-4171  
<http://centerforsocialconcerns.nd.edu>

**University of Notre Dame**  
Notre Dame, IN 46556-0766

