

As Learning Becomes Service to Justice: Postgraduate Service Participation

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Introduction

During Commencement Weekend at Notre Dame, approximately 200 graduating seniors participate in a send-off ceremony honoring their commitment to full-time, postgraduate service for the coming year or two. A highlight of the ceremony is a procession of students to the microphone where they share their name, affiliated program, and location of service. This litany of commitment has grown significantly since Notre Dame's first postgraduate service relationship with the Peace Corps in the 1960s. In 1978 the Congregation of Holy Cross initiated the Holy Cross Associates program, and in 1994 the Alliance for Catholic Education was founded on campus.

Currently, about 10% of each graduating class at Notre Dame (see Figure 1) enters a range of full-time service initiatives at over 100 sites across the nation and world. The graduates are fulfilling, in concrete ways, the University mission to foster "learning [that] becomes service to justice" (University Mission Statement).

Who volunteers, and why? This Report examines historical participation rates, notes trends in postgraduate service, and analyzes how participants differ from non-participants. We have drawn data from various sources, including surveys facilitated by the Center for Social Concerns and the Office of Institutional Research.

Figure 1 Annual Notre Dame Postgraduate Service Participants

	1991	1993	1995	1997	1999	2001	2002	2003
Total Postgrad Volunteers	104	154	172	180	186	186	197	203
In Secular Programs	17	23	28	15	47	25	51	39
In Faith-Based Programs	87	131	144	165	139	161	146	164
Holy Cross Associates	12	17	24	28	9	16	12	18
Alliance for Catholic Education	x	x	42	51	47	49	45	44
International Programs	22	38	42	19	45	25	52	49
Total of ND Grads	1908	1731	1770	1854	1907	1945	1971	2094
Percentage of Graduates in Postgrad Service Programs	5.5%	8.9%	9.7%	9.7%	9.8%	9.6%	10.0%	9.7%

Postgraduate volunteer service is defined as full-time engagement for at least 10 months, usually accompanied by a small stipend and living expenses. Categories on left are not mutually exclusive (e.g., the Holy Cross Associates program in Chile is faith-based and international).

Source: Center for Social Concerns records of confirmed postgraduate volunteers. Totals likely represent an undercounting since the Center may not be aware of some graduates' entry into service programs.

Developmental Context

The college journey is one of challenge and potential. Students of traditional college age, while negotiating both new freedoms and responsibilities, feel the potentials and callings of young adulthood, and search for something of enduring value worthy of their commitment.

A call for the provision of meaningful service for young adults is not new. Early in the 20th century, William James outlined a vision (1910) for promoting the “moral equivalent of war” among young adults. As an alternative to military conscription, James proposed enlisting youth in challenging community efforts to promote justice while enhancing their own growth: “The military ideals of hardihood and discipline would be wrought into the growing fibre of the people” (pp. 24-25) without dependence on war-based stimulation or adventure. Similar educational visions were inherent in early conceptions of the Peace Corps (originally conceptualized as an additional fourth year among five college years).

[The current] generation ... is indeed wearied by the enormous pressures they face economically, politically, socially, and psychologically. At the same time, they are energized by a desire to enjoy the good life and make their corner of the world a better place. This is a generation in which hope and fear are colliding.

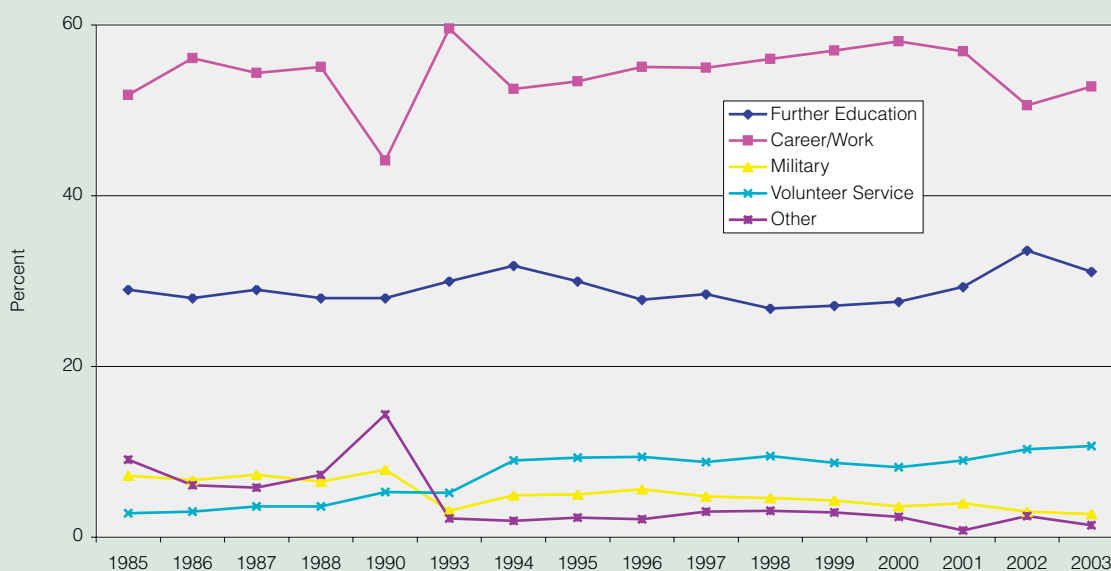
— A. Levine and J. Cureton, (1998, p. 17)

The work of Sharon Parks (1986, 2000) emphasizes the critical role the college years can play in fostering a search for meaning and commitment. All persons, especially young adults, seek to understand the larger world, examine their potential roles, and discover what may be worthy of their time and talents. Parks describes this as a search for faith, with a small *f* (though for many it involves identified religious conviction).

This is an active process involving both cognitive and affective change: “A central strength of the young adult is the capacity to respond to visions of the world as it might become. This is the time in every generation for renewal of the human vision.” (Parks, 1986, p. 97)

Similarly, college life and the early adult years are salient periods for identity development. Chickering and Reisser (1993) outline the potential for higher education to foster competence, purpose, and integrity (among other positive aspects of identity). They suggest that “Finding meaning in life is a by-product of *engagement*, which is a commitment to creating, loving, working, and building.” (p. 264)

Figure 2
Future Plans of Notre Dame Graduates (in Percents)



Source: Institutional Research surveys. Data not available for 1989, 1991, and 1992.

Commencement (aptly named) is, then, an opportunity for channeling one's developing identity and sense of purpose into initial commitments. Postgraduate service can serve as a natural continuation of important developmental and educational paths.

Historical Trends

While Notre Dame graduates have found many ways to serve throughout the years, data regarding postgraduate volunteer trends is most thorough and reliable beginning in the 1990s. Figure 1, based on Center for Social Concerns' records, documents the number of confirmed postgraduate volunteers (serving full-time for at least 10 months beyond graduation) over the last 15 years. It demonstrates an 80% increase from 1990 to 2003 (though records for earlier years may involve some undercounting).

Similar data is presented in Figure 2 (based on the University's Future Plans Survey conducted the week before Commencement), which outlines service in relation to other planned pursuits of graduates. Again we see an increase (this survey measures the intention to volunteer) from 2.8% of graduates in 1985 to 10.7% in 2003.

There are many potential explanations for the long-term increase: modeling of returning graduates who share positive experiences; earlier and more direct recruitment by an increased number of affiliated programs; the creation of teaching programs (like the Alliance for Catholic Education) that attract an increasing number of participants; and the commitment of the Center for Social Concerns to foster discernment through a Senior Transitions Coordinator and an annual postgraduate service fair.

The percentage of volunteers does not seem to ebb and flow with job market conditions (see Figures 1 and 2), suggesting that other factors are at work in attracting graduates. For the past 10 years the

percentage of Notre Dame students committing to service has remained near 10% of the graduating class. We are not aware of such a high rate of participation at other colleges and universities (though an increasing number place students in postgraduate programs). Notre Dame has developed an ethic of service that extends beyond graduation.

Secular and Faith-Based Opportunities

Notre Dame students enter full-time programs facilitated by a variety of service organizations, both faith-based and secular. Some of the more popular secular initiatives include the Peace Corps and

Teach for America, as well as AmeriCorps, ACCION International, the Emerson Hunger Fellowship, and the Public Interest Research Group (the two later programs provide opportunities for policy studies and community organizing).

Consistent with Notre Dame's Catholic identity, approximately 75% of graduates choose to enter faith-based programs (for more information, consult the Catholic Network of Volunteer Service, an umbrella organization for over 200 faith-based programs:

<http://cnvs.org>). The tenets of such programs usually include living in community, simple lifestyle, and integrating faith reflection with service experiences. Two such programs, headquartered on the Notre Dame campus, are the Holy Cross Associates and the Alliance for Catholic Education.

Holy Cross Associates

Holy Cross Associates (see Figure 1) provides an opportunity for Notre Dame graduates to serve in collaboration with Notre Dame's founding religious order, The Congregation of Holy Cross. Since the

For a college, sending its graduates into volunteer work at home or abroad can affirm its mission, whether based on religious faith or a sense of citizenship. For students, volunteerism can provide a strong foundation for their lives ... or unmatched preparation for graduate studies. ... A student who has spent a year volunteering has gained a very valuable set of skills. They've gained a community or national or international perspective, and then go into the work force or return to school much better prepared than they would be following a year of entry-level work in a 'typical' job."

—Jean Seigle, quoted in *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* (2002)

initial 5 volunteers in 1978, over 480 Notre Dame graduates have entered the program. HCA now draws from many colleges, and offers opportunities in the U.S. and Latin America for one or two years of service in parishes, agencies, and communities.

A 1995 follow-up survey by the HCA office provides a starting point for future research examining the impact of postgraduate service. A majority of prior participants were in careers focusing on education or social service. Two survey items are of particular interest: Over 79% of the respondents agreed that “Participation in HCA was one of the most significant formative experiences in developing my faith,” and approximately 72% of the respondents agreed that participation “was one of the most significant formative experiences in developing my vocation.” Contact the HCA office for further information (www.nd.edu/~hcassoc).

ACE: Teaching as Service and Learning

The Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE), founded in 1994, accounts for approximately a quarter of Notre Dame graduates who commit to service programs in recent years (see Figure 1). ACE brought a new model as a teaching program, incorporating a master’s degree (now offered by Notre Dame’s Institute for Educational Initiatives). Participants (see Figure 1) teach for two academic years in under-resourced Catholic schools located

in over 50 cities, and attend intensive summer courses. Since 1994, over 500 Notre Dame graduates have entered ACE. Other teaching-based programs that draw Notre Dame graduates include the Inner-City Teaching Corps, Maryknoll China Teaching Program, the New York Teacher Service Program, and Red Cloud Volunteers.

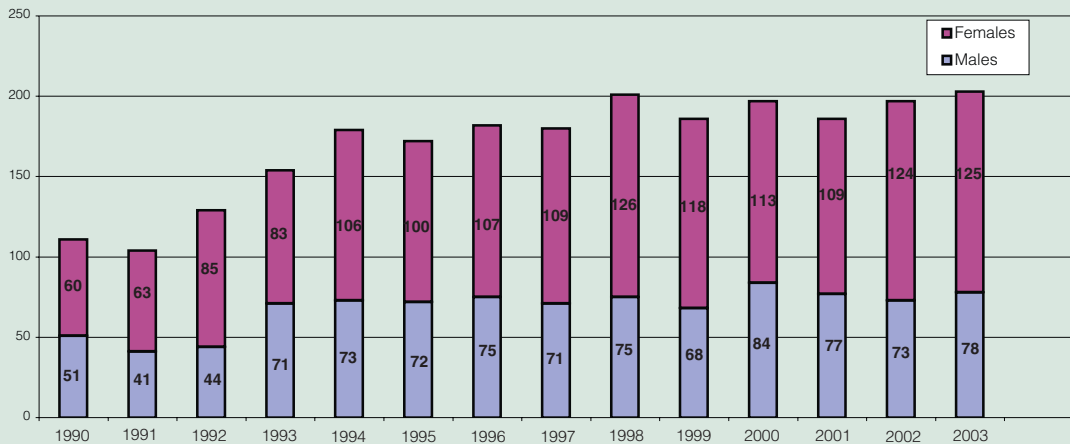
Domestic and International Programs

While a majority of graduates participate in domestic initiatives, about 20 percent serve internationally, often for a two-year period (see Figure 1). Some observers may be surprised to see that the percentage of international volunteers since the events of 9/11 has risen to all time highs in 2002 and 2003 (27% and 25% respectively). Perhaps such commitment to build conditions of peace throughout the world is a positive response to a sobering challenge.

ND in the Peace Corps

Through Fr. Theodore Hesburgh’s initiative, Notre Dame was one of the few non-governmental organizations involved in the founding of the Peace Corps, and sent volunteers from the start. From 1961 through 2003 a total of 755 graduates of Notre Dame have entered the Peace Corps, an average of seventeen per year, and more than any other Catholic college or university.

Figure 3
Annual Number of Postgraduate Service Participants by Gender



Who Serves

What prompts students to serve full-time following graduation? The following analyses allow us to make some observations and predictions.

Gender

Figure 3 demonstrates a relatively stable pattern of participation with respect to gender: 60% females, 40% males. Such a trend is consistent with national data, and with greater female participation in service and community-based learning initiatives during the undergraduate years (see Research Report 5). Male postgraduate volunteer participation is higher in international programs, and in teaching programs.

College

Figure 4 presents a measure of postgraduate service intentions by college (measured during late spring by the Future Plans Survey). The College of Arts and Letters shows the highest percentage intending to serve full-time, followed by the College of Science, then the College of Engineering. Further information on rates for specific majors is available from the Center for Social Concerns.

Previous Service Experience

Anecdotal evidence and interviews suggest to us that previous service and service-learning engagement primes students to choose more intensive service upon graduation. To examine this empirically, we utilized two large data sets. A study of two ND graduating cohorts (see Figure 5) revealed a strong relationship between frequency of undergraduate service and specific plans to serve full-time following graduation ($p < .05$). Similarly, those who planned to volunteer more often cited previous service and social action experiences as the strongest influence (among five potential influ-

Figure 4
Percent of Students Planning Postgraduate Service, by College, 1995-2003

	1995	1997	1999	2001	2002	2003
Arts & Letters	16.1	17.6	15.8	15.8	19.8	18.6
Architecture	0.0	0.0	0.0	2.4	5.3	1.9
Business	1.7	1.2	2.5	2.7	2.7	1.9
Engineering	4.1	2.4	4.2	2.5	3.5	4.2
Science	7.8	5.9	7.7	8.4	5.6	11.5

Note: File expanded to include dual degrees. Source: Future Plans Survey, Institutional Research (CIR126L.sps). The Future Plans Survey is administered the Thursday & Friday before May Commencement.

ences presented) on their “thinking about faith and morals” ($p < .05$). Further, in an analysis done in 2001, 32% of confirmed postgraduate volunteers had completed a Center for Social Concerns Summer Service Project Internship, and 39% had participated in one or more service learning seminars offered by the Center. Levine and Cureton (1998) note that while many undergraduates are involved in service and social action, “They also need to find ways to sustain or better yet, enhance their sense of hope, responsibility, appreciation of differences, and efficacy after college.” (p. 167)

Attitudes and Values Associated with Postgraduate Service

To further examine what prompts postgraduate service, we drew from the Notre Dame Student

Life Survey, a broad sample of 698 Notre Dame sophomores, juniors, and seniors. Participants were asked (in 1998) about postgraduate plans: 9.9% overall, and 10.1% of seniors indicated intention to volunteer upon graduation, consistent with actual trends. We then performed a logistic regression and chi-square analyses to examine which variables in the survey would predict or explain such intention. Here we highlight a few of the most relevant results (most significant at the .01 level).

The University [of Notre Dame] not only sponsors a volunteer fair but integrates the idea of service into its curriculum and into campus life. It offers frequent chances to meet alumni who have performed postgraduate service, and maintains the Center for Social Concerns, which matches students with volunteer opportunities. The result: Ten percent of all graduating seniors sign up for a year or more of full-time volunteer service, according to Andrea Smith Shappell, director of the Center's Senior Transition Programs.

— Except from
“How Colleges Prepare Seniors for Postgraduate Volunteerism,” H. Joslyn in
The Chronicle of Philanthropy (2002)

Students who more highly rated the life goal “being well off financially” were less likely to express intention to volunteer, as were those who gave themselves higher ratings with respect to the skill of “thinking about the future,” thus confirming some parents’ concerns. Similarly, students who ranked “that a Notre Dame degree will get me a good job” as more important than other students (in the context of important attributes of Notre Dame) were less likely to plan postgraduate service.

Conversely, students who agreed that “I feel that I have a personal role to play in efforts aimed at the betterment of humankind” were more likely to plan postgraduate service. Note as well that students who suggested that their motivations for current, undergraduate volunteering were “To test out future career plans” or “To learn how to be effective in the area of social change” were more likely to intend postgraduate service”. Finally, students who planned to serve after graduation were less likely to agree with the statement: “Realistically, an individual can do little to bring about changes in society.”

Such findings seem logical, and suggest that the intention to serve coheres within a larger frame of students’ sense of self, meaning, and purpose.

Life Goals

To provide context for the overall study, and to highlight that there are many ways to contribute, here we provide information on Notre Dame students’ overall life goals (as measured by a national study facilitated by the Higher Education Research Institute). Figure 6 presents the life goals ranked most important (from a list of 20 goals) by entering Notre Dame students since 1991, and recent comparisons to a norm group composed of other private, selective universities. The two most

Figure 5
How often were you involved with volunteer service or social action activities during your undergraduate years?

	1994	1994	1995	1995
In Percents	PostGrad Serv Participants	All ND Respondents	PostGrad Serv Participants	All ND Respondents
Once a week	55.8%	22.8	51.9	27.4
Twice a month	17.5	10.3	17.3	12.9
Once a month	9.2	9.1	9.8	9.5
Few times a year	16.7	44.9	20.3	38.8
Not at all	0.8	12.9	0.8	11.3
Totals	120	1701	133	1804

PostGrad Serv Participants = Graduates entering various faith-based or secular programs
 All ND Respondents = baccalaureate degree recipients who responded to the national College Student Survey. Sources: IR Reports #94-30 and #96-11: Values, Goals and Opinions of Students Involved with the Center for Social Concerns

important goals of Notre Dame students—“raising a family” and “helping others in difficulty”—have remained the same since 1994. Students from comparison schools also highly ranked these values, while indicating greater importance for “being very well off financially,” and less for “integrating spirituality into my life”.

While data cited above is for first year students, an analysis of our ND Student Life Survey (1999, n=698) shows a similar pattern for sophomores, juniors, and seniors, with some increases for goals associated with social action. Another study (*What Matters at Notre Dame?*, IR Report 94-01) suggests that service work is associated with (or predictive of) significant changes in life goals. These are topics for future research.

Discussion

How do we interpret the findings described above, and what can we learn about, and from, the Notre Dame students who commit to full-time service upon graduation? First, it is essential to note that postgraduate service is not the only, or necessarily a preferred route for Notre Dame students to contribute their talents and energies to the common good. Many graduates begin paid work at nonprofit agencies, others embark on graduate school in the helping professions, and many enter

their chosen careers determined to integrate what they have learned about ethics from faculty and mentors in their majors. Many seniors (over 500 in 2004) sign a Pledge of Social Responsibility, committing to explore and enhance the social, humanitarian and environmental consequences of jobs they enter.

Second, both our survey data and interviews we have conducted suggest that postgraduate service is not a direct function of the job market, or seniors needing to find something to do on short notice. The intention to serve following graduation shows up early, and at about the same rate as the subsequent percent of enrolled participants. Postgraduate volunteer work provides excellent opportunities for young adults, especially those in broad, less linear career fields, to take significant responsibility and build upon their learning in a human laboratory of service and civic life.

While females and students from the College of Arts and Letters constitute the largest group of volunteers, graduates of each college find relevant opportunities. Our interviews indicate that students may increasingly choose service engagement following graduation as a means to enhance specific skills consistent with their career goals.

Let your educated mind and heart be alight in the darkness of the world. Be bridge builders over the chasms that separate people, the young and old, the rich and poor, the black and white, the ignorant and the learned. Go out from here as one who knows and loves, one who has cherished wisdom and built character, and, above all, one who has learned to give of self.

— Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C.
President Emeritus,
University of Notre Dame

The high percentage of Notre Dame students entering postgraduate service seems to be a natural extension of the University’s ethos of service and varied community-based learning offerings. As its graduates spread out in service and social action, they represent the University positively, performing “good work” where “excellence and ethics can meet” (Gardner et al., 2001). Such efforts, and what we learn from returning volunteers, contribute to a vision of the “university as citizen” outlined by Notre Dame President Edward Malloy and colleagues (Bringle, Games, and Malloy, 1999).

Figure 6
Most Important Life Goals of Notre Dame Students: 1992-2002

Goals (among 20 overall) rated as Essential or Very Important by more than half of incoming first year ND Students (and norm group for 2002)

	In percents						Norm-Group 2002
	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	
Raising a family	82%	82	83	83	86	84	74
Helping others in difficulty	70	71	70	71	72	71	66
Integrating spirituality into my life	na	na	na	na	72	68	45
Becoming an authority in my own field	70	70	67	62	66	62	66
Developing a meaningful philosophy of life	63	61	59	58	62	57	53
Being very well off financially	62	63	65	61	64	60	66
Keeping up to date with political affairs	63	57	51	45	47	50	47
Obtaining recognition from my colleagues for contributions to my special field	53	54	54	47	50	48	56

Source: Institutional Research at Notre Dame, and Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey. "Integrating spirituality into my life" was added in 1999 to original 19 goals. Norm group is defined as "Private University High Select", and includes institutions such as Emory, Stanford, Vanderbilt

Future Research

Many further research questions intrigue us. What are the roles of parents, faculty, and peers with respect to students' intention to volunteer? How do students understand the call of vocation, broadly conceived? And, importantly: What is the impact of postgraduate volunteering on young adults and their career/life development? We have begun short-term and longitudinal research toward such ends, and welcome collaboration from interested colleagues and input from alumni/ae.

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