



The year two thousand and one will be remembered as one in which many Americans reflected upon their goals and values, only to change their priorities and perspectives.

Now many are asking themselves,
“What can I do to make sure
such events will
never happen again?”

by Laura Moretz

Service Learning, Learning Service

Wake Forest's liberal arts curriculum has traditionally placed a high value on volunteer and service learning. Many students have had the opportunity to compare book learning with experiences in the world around them, either locally or globally. During the winter break, eleven students volunteered at a homeless facility in Mexico City through the City of Joy Scholars program. Others went to Honduras to restore houses and repair roads destroyed several years ago by Hurricane Mitch. A group of Catholic students went to Costa Rica to work with Nicaraguan refugees. Others have given of their time closer to home, building houses for Habitat for Humanity or preparing and delivering meals to shut-ins.

The Volunteer Service Corps place students—as part of coursework or as an extracurricular activity—in the community to tutor children, help at nonprofit organizations, and learn the value of helping others. Through these experiences, students learn firsthand about the needs and problems of the community outside the University, and they often develop a taste for service and a desire to do more after graduation.

The Academic and Community Engagement (ACE) Fellowship program encourages faculty members to introduce service learning into their courses. The Pro Humanitate Fund for Service Learning in Action offers incentives to faculty who incorporate volun-

desire to “make the world a better place” is being felt on college campuses such as Wake Forest, where placement officers have seen a spike in the number of students deferring lucrative careers in exchange for an opportunity to serve humanity. But volunteer and humanitarian service are not new concepts at Wake Forest; they are time-honored traditions that bespeak the essence of the institution and embody the spirit of Pro Humanitate.

Tara West ('94), is one alumna who “wanted to do something to make things better.” After graduating with a degree in health and exercise science she headed for Washington, D.C., to find nonprofit work. She spent a year at the National Recycling Coalition doing environmental education and eventually became a VISTA volunteer in a Washington literacy project, Communities in Schools.

“That’s why I’m teaching today,” said West, who is an English-as-a-second-language teacher for two schools in Portland, Oregon. “I saw what it did for the kids, just that extra bit of attention. After having worked in a nonprofit job, I think it makes it easier to appreciate the things you do have, and it makes you resourceful. You don’t take things for granted, because you know how hard you had to work to get that paper for the kids to write on. And then there’s the purely selfish reason of how good it makes you feel.”

The trend toward service work after college has been building for several years, thanks in part to the popularity of service learning, or incorporating volunteer work into the curriculum. William C. Currin ('60), director of Wake Forest's Office of Career Services, has noted a surge of interest in service careers. “It’s reoriented thinking in a more positive way. It has, with some people, realigned goals and planning.” Each year the office works with recruiters from service organizations such as the Peace Corps, AmeriCorps, Teach for America, and Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA). Wake Forest students, with their strong academic preparation, motivation, and sense of values, are highly recruited for these positions, Currin says.

Ben Dunbar, a Peace Corps recruiter who visits campus annually, says he is struck by the number of alumni who have worked for the Corps in relation to the size of the institution. His count stands at one hundred alumni and twenty-two nominees from the student body.

His experience in the Peace Corps ignited a love of service work for Arthur Orr ('86) that led him to leave a law partnership to volunteer overseas again. Orr graduated with a degree in English and earned a law degree from the University of Alabama in 1989. While his classmates were interviewing with prominent law firms, he applied to the Peace Corps and was assigned to Nepal.

He describes his decision to serve as “the least I could do.” In Nepal, Orr

trained teachers and lived in a mud hut two-and-a-half-days’ walk from the nearest road. There was no running water and no electricity most of the time. “I don’t like bathing in streams and going without toilet paper, and all that, but people have been living like that for centuries. I can do it, too, for a few years.”

In 1991 he resumed his life as a lawyer in Decatur, Alabama, but in 1996 he felt pulled to serve again. “I felt like God wanted me to go back and help the poor in any way I could.” He looked at his privileged life and couldn’t find a reason not to give up his home and his partnership. “I couldn’t rationalize it. God put me in this position where I can go now. There are other people who have a big mortgage, three children. There’s no reason I had not to go.”

This time, he became a new country developer for Habitat for Humanity, earning \$400 a month. He started in Sri Lanka, helping the organization with legal problems. Then he opened an office in Bangladesh, where he was given a budget and told to make it happen. After that, he became Habitat’s lawyer for all of Asia and the Pacific.

Jess Hood (’01) accepted an offer from AmeriCorps this year. She had played volleyball at Wake Forest and couldn’t find much time to volunteer. During spring break her sophomore year, she met some AmeriCorps members on a Habitat for Humanity building project, and after that, she thought about joining AmeriCorps. In November, Hood and her AmeriCorps team were in Tennessee, building a portion of the Cumberland Trail, an Appalachian Trail alternative.

Once bitten by the service bug, many students want to pursue service careers. Currin said he knows of many students who, after an undergraduate internship with a nonprofit, return for full-time work. Currin himself spent eight years in the nonprofit sector, as director of the Winston-Salem Housing Foundation and the North Carolina Housing Development Corporation. Nonprofits offer excellent hands-on experience for recent graduates, he said. “I think, quite frankly, that experience in a nonprofit is good for any field.”

Kathryn “Kat” Haines (’95) said that her experience as a Peace Corps volunteer in Mali led to her decision to get a graduate degree in urban planning. Haines, a French major, was a small business development volunteer in the town of Diamou, where she helped set up a credit agency. Now she works at the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs in Chicago. Her job, helping grassroots organizations in Chicago neighborhoods, is similar to what she did in Mali. She takes her cues from the organizations’ members and helps with strategic planning, research, and grant-proposal writing.

teer work into their courses and to students who take on special community projects. The fund offers mini grants to faculty and students who develop service learning as part of a course, which often involves about 20 hours of volunteer work with a local organization. The fund also offers incentives for expanding international service programs, for international service learning and independent study, for community-based research, and for service projects that address specific community problems or disasters. The ACE program is partially funded by a grant from the Atlantic Philanthropies based in New York City. Bob Mills (’71, MBA ’80), associate vice president for University Advancement, said that the donor wants volunteer service to become an integral part of the school’s mission and to reflect its motto, Pro Humanitate.

Through the ACE Fellowship program, Linda Howe, an associate professor of Romance languages and the director of Latin American studies, has taken students to Cuba for a six-week summer program for four years, and she hopes her students will find ways to serve in other countries in Latin America. “One of the first things people involved with service learning say is that it’s fun,” she says. Service learning also brings academic material to life. “They get to see that the things we talk about in the classroom are not divorced from reality,” says Katy Harriger, associate professor of political science who was one of the first faculty to incorporate service learning

into her courses. "It also makes them more critical readers of the theoretical readings."

Angela Hattery, assistant professor of sociology, requires service in a 100-level course, "Marriage and the Family." "A lot of people will tell you it's the best part of the class," says Hattery, whose students volunteer with Big Brothers, Big Sisters and programs run by Family Services Inc. "It helps them connect the academic material with something in the real world. A fair number of students stick with the service placement after the course," she says, "which makes me feel really good about their development as citizens."

Students in "U.S. Social Welfare Policy" are asked to volunteer with governmental and nonprofit organizations and learn how they deliver services. "I think it helps them come away with a much more complicated understanding of what we're studying," says Andrew Rich, assistant professor of political science. "Seeing how policy is applied helps students avoid a simplistic approach and learn that 'we can't come up with quick answers to problems.'"

Emphasizing the reciprocity of service work is important, says Howe. "Many who volunteer feel that they have gained as much or more than the people they help. If you go in and say, 'we are going to help them,' you're making a big mistake," she says. "You look at yourself as a student. Those who serve are also learners."

—Laura Moretz

Marty Richwine ('63) joined the Peace Corps almost forty years ago and spent

two years in a barrio of Quito, Ecuador. "Other than marriage and having children, it's probably one of the most life-changing experiences one could ever have. You learn a lot about yourself and the culture that you're living in," he said. "It helps you appreciate what you've got, but what other people have as well."

"It was definitely a life-changing experience," says Joe Bourke (PhD '74). After earning his doctorate he wanted to travel before settling into a career and accepted a position with the Peace Corps teaching biology at the National University of Malaysia. "It's an eye-opener any time you leave the United States. You don't realize the tremendous opportunities and privileges we have here," says Bourke, who earned an M.D. at Northwestern University and is a gynecologist in Martinez, California.

Teach for America (TFA) has been sending liberal arts graduates into poor communities since 1990 to take teaching jobs that would otherwise remain unfilled. Twenty-four Wake Forest graduates have joined the program, which strives to provide all children with access to an excellent education. In 2001, TFA placed six Wake Forest graduates. Rebecca Horner ('96) said that she first wanted to teach when she was a child but that her career direction solidified at Wake Forest. During a semester in Vienna, she taught English to second- and third-graders. A teacher there told Horner to ignore a few students who were sitting in the corner. "She explained to me that they were incapable of learning," Horner said. "I determined that those kids were going to succeed in my portion of the class." They did.

Horner returned to Wake Forest and took "Foundations of Education" taught by Scott Baker, an assistant professor of education. She was fascinated with the material and became convinced that "all kids in our country are not getting an equal opportunity." She talked to Baker about opportunities after graduation, and he encouraged her to apply with TFA. She taught for two years in a special education classroom in La Place, Louisiana, and is now executive director of TFA's New Jersey region.

Laura Wilson ('96) spent four years after graduation on service work, first with TFA and then with the Peace Corps. Now she is working on a master's degree in public policy at Harvard University's Kennedy School. Her experiences as a primary school teacher in East Palo Alto, California, and as a teacher in a small village in Namibia, fulfilled her sense of a "dire urgency to know the classroom firsthand. I wanted to experience it on the other side, and really see what it took and what I could contribute back to society."

When Wilson finishes her degree, she hopes to work on a management team for an international development organization. "I was born in this amazingly wealthy country," she says, "and I can only feel right by contributing to the welfare of others."

Jessica Jackson ('00) had never heard of Uzbekistan when the Peace Corps offered her an assignment there. But when the Peace Corps told her last September 22 that she and all the other volunteers in countries that border Afghanistan would be evacuated, Jackson said that leaving was one of the hardest things she has ever had to do.

Fond Farewell

After almost a year, she had surrendered to life in Asaka, a village in the Andijon region of the Ferghana Valley. She missed the comforts of her life in the United States, but her host mother, a traditional Uzbek, had become one of her best friends. "I started thinking of it as my actual home," she said.

For the first ten months of her assignment as a primary English teacher, Jackson felt like she was battling the strangeness of life in a foreign culture. The economy of the former Soviet republic is dismal; when foreign investors flocked to Russia and the former Soviet republics, Uzbekistan remained isolated. Even McDonald's had not set up shop. The government, controlled by former communist party leaders, is rife with corruption and bribery. Women, although not veiled, are restricted socially. Girls are often married to strangers at fifteen or sixteen years old, and by twenty, they are considered old maids.

But Jackson made her peace with the differences. "I just started to get the rhythm of the life over there. I no longer viewed the people around me as strange and foreign." She and another volunteer had collected over 1,500 books from friends, family, and members of Phi Beta Kappa and they planned to open a library on October 1.

On September 11, she was at her host family's home when her host sister called on the telephone to say, "America is on TV." Jackson had heard this often, but her host sister insisted she watch. "It's really bad," she said.

Uzbek television only has a few channels, and the broadcast was on every channel.

"What I was seeing was a picture of New York City, but I didn't recognize it as New York City," Jackson recalled. She had lived and worked within a few blocks of the World Trade Center during the summer of 1998, but now could not recognize her old neighborhood. "It was the most surreal night of my life. I couldn't depend on the news, because I knew they make a lot of mistakes. For example, they said that eleven planes had been hijacked."

Because the telephone at her host family's home worked only locally, she sought out another Peace Corps volunteer. Together they went to the post office, called the Peace Corps office in Tashkent, and were told to stay put. Later that night she was able to call her mother at home and ascertain that her father, who often had business at the World Trade Center, and other family members were safe.

She had two days' notice before she left. Once she was gone, a local group and her host family opened the library Jackson helped organize. "It's now running and has over 100 members attending classes and using the library," she said.

Jackson has not abandoned the idea of returning to Uzbekistan and renewing her friendship with a people and culture she has come to love. She hopes to return as a humanitarian aid worker with valuable language skills in Uzbek and Russian.