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A Revolution of Service Learning

A revolution is taking place all around us. It is occurring in the lives of young people who are living the gospel and reaching out in service. And it is making a difference—in the lives of these students, and in the lives of those they serve.

The heart of Adventist faith and practice is the belief that God is willing to live and love through us. As students get caught up in meaningful service, they learn that all of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that were sharpened in the classroom can be applied right now to achieve a positive and significant impact on the world around them. By actively engaging with their campus, local, and global community, their potential for learning and growth increases exponentially.

I have experienced this revolution as I have listened to students on my campus share their joy in being able to participate in the lives of those who need them. Students in Dr. Kendra Haloviak's "Jesus and the Gospels" course learn from the Gospel of Luke that Jesus was constantly interacting with those on the margins of society. Recently, half of the students in this course worked with at-risk youth in our local school district where more than 70 percent are from a minority population, 44 percent are identified as English-learners, and more than 50 percent come from low-income families. As our students describe the opportunities they have been given to serve, tutor, mentor, and guide these young people, their eyes light up, and they speak with conviction about how they are carrying on the work of Jesus today.

Another group of students in "Religion and Rationality," taught by Professors Cindy Parkhurst and John Ng Wong Hing, are studying the relationship between rational reflection and religious conviction. They apply this learning as they serve at a number of elder-care organizations. Students engage with adults and the elderly who, due to aging or other conditions such as Alzheimer's, may exhibit impaired rational and cognitive function. "One of our gentlemen clients is going blind, and is often delusional," remembers Barbara Porter, director of the Inland Empire Adult Day Health Care Center. "A young woman from La Sierra who spoke Farsi began interacting with him in his native language. He actually became much more verbal and outgoing, because his weekly interactions with her gave him so much self-confidence."

Our teachers integrate service into the curriculum of classes offered across the entire spectrum of La Sierra University's offerings. At present, 48 courses include service learning as a key component of their academic program, and last school year La Sierra University students and faculty logged some 45,000 hours of service to benefit others. In the process, these students have made friends for the Adventist Church and transformed lives in our community.

As you will read throughout this issue, you will see how Adventist education offers the world and the church the incredible resource of committed young people, full of vigor and vision, who long to make the world a better place and to share their hopes for their church. Students on the campuses of Pacific Union College, Union College, Andrews University, and Walla Walla University—all described in the following pages—represent only a small portion of the young adults who give Bible studies, hold evangelistic meetings, sell literature door to door, go on short-term and year-long mission trips, clean up streams and parks, sit with AIDS victims, and hold the hands of elderly Alzheimer's patients.

As members of the Adventist learning community, I hope you will join me in encouraging the development of service-learning programs in all of our educational institutions. Let's enable students to take the lessons they learn in our classes and apply them on campus, in the community, and around the world so they can experience the privilege of being part of God's revolution. And let us never forget, as Ellen White reminded us many years ago, "[True education] prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come" (*Education*, p. 13).

Randal R. Wisbey is President of La Sierra University in Riverside, California. The university was recently inducted into the President's Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll With Distinction and received the Carnegie Foundation's prestigious 2008 Community Engagement Classification in the category of Curricular Engagement.



Randal R. Wisbey