



Service-Learning Center

Calvin College

Spring 2010

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Accounting Students’ Win-Win at UCOM

By Elise Ditta, S-LC Research Coordinator

The small whiteboard in United Church Outreach Ministry’s (UCOM) meeting room is cluttered with hastily written reminders about signatures and shredding for tax returns, but what stands out on the board is the cheerfully written note at the top “250 returns filed this year!” This note refers to the number of tax returns that volunteers from the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program (VITA) have completed this tax season at UCOM. VITA is a partnership between the IRS and non-profit organizations who agree to host volunteers in their buildings to assist low income residents with their tax returns. These volunteers go through a special training program to assure that they can adequately assist clients with specific tax refunds and other needs. This year there are more than 12,000 VITA sites throughout the country.

UCOM, along with other VITA sites in Grand Rapids, have Ray Slager, a Calvin business professor, to thank for many of the volunteers that complete tax returns at their organizations. For the past ten years Slager has encouraged Calvin Accounting and Business



students to participate in the VITA program as tax preparers.

In early February each year, Slager recruits 25-30 students to participate in the program, organizes a Saturday morning training session, and then places the students at non-profits around the city. After completing the Saturday morning training on tax law and an online test from the IRS, students can begin to work at non-profit organizations, processing clients and filing their returns. Slager notes that students usually work two to three hours a week, and about 25% of students take part in the program for more than one year; others find paid jobs as tax preparers after working with the VITA program.

Slager notes that this program is beneficial for all involved. For the students, this is an opportunity to learn about struggles endured by the clients they assist. He says that the unemployment

and financial hardship that the clients sometimes face is often new for the students and is an “eye opener” for them. In addition, Slager notes that the experience builds the students’ knowledge of the tax system and is a great addition to their resume’. The agencies appreciate the training the students receive and benefit from the long-term partnerships that Calvin has with them. In summary, Slager says, “It’s a win for the people you’re helping and a win for your job skills as an accountant.”

This is Slager’s last year coordinating the tax program since he’s retiring at the end of the semester; next year Sheri Geddes of the business department will be taking over. Slager is convinced that the VITA program is important for the students he works with and looks forward to seeing it continue, saying, “This is something that you can give back to a community that you don’t know much about; this is a place that you can show God’s compassion and at the same time build your own skills.”

Partnership Spotlight: Healthy Homes Coalition

By Rebecca Garofano, Lead ABSL Coordinator



The Healthy Homes Staff

Healthy Homes Coalition (HHC), a relatively young non-profit situated in the Baxter neighborhood and serving the broader Grand Rapids community, fills a particular niche in our city. Emerging from the Get the Lead Out! program, HHC works to ensure healthy home environments for local children and families. This includes educating around and empowering community members to respond to hazards such as lead, radon, carbon monoxide, mold, pests and rodents. Over the past few years, through strong Academically-Based Service-Learning (ABSL) partnerships, site visits, on-campus speaking engagements, and conversation, Calvin College has had the

opportunity to observe and learn from the work they do.

Professor Sergio de Silva's Psychology 151 and 354 classes are currently learning about grassroots efforts through direct experience canvassing city neighborhoods. Paul Haan, executive director of the organization, was excited about the work that these students were doing, and he was grateful when, in one day, they identified 140 households interested in receiving some of the information and resources HHC provides.

As a student who has worked in the Service-Learning Center for two years, I have grown to appreciate the initiatives that HHC is taking in Grand Rapids.

They have partnered with the Service-Learning Center through many projects, from StreetFest to the classroom and even formal presentations, and Haan sits on the S-LC's community advisory board. Their focused efforts have helped me better understand environmental concerns facing local residents. It is only recently, though, through a Calvin internship course, that I have been able to observe HHC from within. This perspective has reinforced some of my earlier insights. Healthy Homes Coalition is a unique organization empowering families and building relationships amongst various constituencies, with both consistency and care. The Service-Learning Center values their partnership!

Award-Winning English Professor Gives "Written Rhetoric" Students Something to Write About

By Jeff Bouman, Director of the Service-Learning Center



Professor Fondse instills in his students the value of reciprocal exchange.

Professor Jerry Fondse knows something about being new in a sometimes intimidating community. After 25 years of teaching in a local Christian high school, Fondse joined the Calvin College faculty part-time in 1994, and then full-time in 1999. He has made this transition with good humor and played an important role connecting Calvin College with local K-12 students through creative service-learning assignments in his sections of English 101, a required course in "Written Rhetoric." For several years now, Professor Fondse has engaged his students in an assignment that requires them to spend 10-15 hours per semester in a tutoring relationship with students at Homework House, an after-school

program for students in the Roosevelt Park neighborhood on the southwest side of Grand Rapids.

In the process of teaching his students to write, he takes care to teach them that there are important things to write about in some places where they might least expect it. Like in a second-graders' thoughts on how it feels to be learning English in a new country, or in a fifth-graders' ability to imagine beautiful worlds. Professor Fondse instills in his students a strong sense of the value of a reciprocal exchange in these tutoring placements, teaching from the perspective that it is through interaction with these schoolchildren that Calvin students are provided insights into important challenges for our society, and

are able to develop voices for change as a result. His is by far the most commonly cited source of student satisfaction with Calvin College's academically-based service-learning program among first year students.

For his depth of engagement with the local community over several years of thoughtful academically-based service-learning in partnership with Homework House and other local placements like Campfire USA, Dickinson Elementary School, and Neland Avenue Christian Reformed Church, Jerry recently accepted the 2009 Faculty Community Service-Learning Award from Michigan Campus Compact.

Michigan Blood: Empowerment Through Blood Donation

By Rachel Young, ABSL Coordinator for Education

I can't exaggerate my fear of needles. Like many people, I've dreaded getting vaccinations and blood drawn since childhood. Unlike most people I know, I have a very strong physical response to my fear. I am predisposed to fainting and vasovagal episodes, which essentially look and feel like seizures. Both reactions are pretty uncomfortable and a bit embarrassing. For these reasons, I avoid the doctor like the plague and have never volunteered myself to donate blood. Nevertheless, my friend and co-worker, Kelly DeVries, helped me to schedule an appointment to give blood for the first time at Michigan Blood's spring blood drive at Calvin College.

The day of my appointment, I drank the prescribed 8 cups of water and anxiously waited for my appointment time. A close friend assured me that I did not have to give blood, but that she would be with me if I decided that was what I wanted to do. I decided to at least try, and so we walked to the fieldhouse together. I filled out the paper work, answered the questionnaire, and let the nurse give me a basic physical examination. She measured my pulse, blood pressure, and blood cell to plasma ratio to make sure I was in good health. Five minutes later I was on the

table, my arm swabbed with iodine, trying to entertain a nurse who claimed she never smiles. She tried my left arm first, but couldn't pin my vein down. This was the most unpleasant part of the experience, but once we switched arms, I was done in under ten minutes. I survived my first blood donation with two small pricks and one small bruise. I decided to say the bruise was from a cat fight and the nurse suggested I tell people some chick bit me (this is when she smiled).

I don't think giving blood makes you a good person, even though I know many good people who give blood. The truth is that I donated my blood for a selfish reason. I didn't do it because of the profound good one pint of blood can do, statistically. I did it because the day before my appointment with Michigan Blood, I was intimately reminded of what those statistics mean.

Loss is a normal part of life, but that fact does not make it any easier to accept the losses you experience. It is hard to accept the reality that we are largely powerless to prevent people from hurting. But action can provide a sense of stability and empowerment. This action may take the form of

prayer, worship, or reaching out to a church community.

I didn't expect to feel empowered after donating blood, but that was the effect it had on me. The action of giving blood expressed what I couldn't articulate with words. There's no doubt that donating blood is important to the people who need blood transfusions, but I left that day feeling humbled, knowing that blood donation can touch both recipient and donor.



Rachel Young



Giving Blood—Saving Lives

This spring's blood drive was a huge success. 265 people signed in and donated 212 pints of blood. There were 40 first time donors. That's 636 lives potentially saved! Thanks to all to students and staff who helped to make this blood drive a success.

Calvin Students Learn and Serve over Spring Break



Houma, Louisiana



Grand Rapids, Michigan

In general, this year's S-LC trip was phenomenal. The Grand Rapids trip was the perfect balance between a relaxing break from school and a meaningful community opportunity. It was amazing to see how God used us to work in the lives of others and how He used others to work in our lives.

-Alex Versept, Trip Leader to Grand Rapids



Galveston, Texas



Knoxville, Tennessee



Knoxville, Tennessee

I learned that serving does not always have to be big, huge, obvious acts, such as building a new house or tearing down a wall. Serving happens in little ways and sometimes when we don't even notice it or plan to serve! For instance, our group painted the exterior of Martha's house. Martha is an elderly woman with some health problems so she tended to stay inside and would periodically come outside to talk to us. On the last day she was so appreciative of what we'd done, and in her thanking us she said that throughout the three days she had been able to hear our talking and our laughter (since the walls of her house are pretty thin). She said that our laughter was like music to her and she loved to listen to it everyday! This is something completely accidental, we weren't even trying to do something nice for her, but it just shows how people can be blessed by little things and that God works in amazing ways!

-Callae Yonker, Trip Leader to Galveston, Texas

From Schultze-Eldersveld to Boston and Back

By Becki Levad, Schultze-Eldersveld Resident Director

This March, a group of 12 residents, former residents and the resident director (RD) of Schultze-Eldersveld (S-E) went to Boston to serve and learn with the Boston Project ministry.

After a van ride full of life-stories, we arrived at our host church in Dorchester, a culturally diverse neighborhood in Boston. Our hosts had graciously arranged opportunities for us to work with various members of the community throughout the week, including a chaplain who ministers to people from all over the world as they stop at the Boston harbor and a woman who “rescues” food and lumber that would otherwise be thrown away, and uses it creatively to meet needs in the neighborhood. In the afternoons, we worked at an after school program, and in the evenings, we learned about racism and economic injustices through structured discussions and simulation games.

Throughout the whole week, we discussed big questions as they arose, such as: What are the long-term effects of this particular ministry? Can social change happen without politics? (And is social change even the point?) What is our role this week? What does it mean to love God and love people? What do people in the neighborhood think about our group coming here? How does my racial identity affect the way people

interact with me? How does this experience affect my future vocation? My life right now in Grand Rapids? We also talked about unpredictable questions that just came up naturally in conversation, such as: What things give a person value? Are some people more “special” than others? What does God think about gender roles? What does it mean to be sexually pure?

Each morning we spent time alone with God and together in worship. In the late evenings, we partook in spontaneous dance parties, impromptu singing/ and drumming circles, and group games.

For one week, we all lived a well-balanced communal life, with time set aside for devotion to God, service to others, fellowship with one another, thoughtful reflection and learning, and fun! Could our everyday lives ever achieve this balance? What could that look like? One great blessing of going with a group from SE is that we still see each other often and can remind each other of the lessons we learned and the vision of community that we shared for a week in Boston. My prayer is that this shared experience continues to build our vision for how we could be living together well, with our residence hall neighbors, our campus, and our community and world.



Boston, Massachusetts

“For one week, we all lived a well-balanced communal life.”

-Becki Levad



Boston, Massachusetts

Getting From Point A to Point B

By Tina Bolt, Transportation Coordinator



Did you know the Service-Learning Center has a transportation service? The S-LC understands the difficulty students have in finding rides to their service locations. In order to combat this problem there are three different options of travel:

riding The Rapid, mileage reimbursement, or using the S-LC transportation service. The transportation service employs nine Calvin students: Ben Den

Houter, Calvin Joustra, Greg Vondiziano, Johnathan Loritsch, Kevin Rauwerda, Tina Bolt Megan DeMaagd, Mitch Groenenboom and Rachele Wunderink.

The drivers enjoy their experience of transporting students to their service-learning placements. Johnathan Loritsch notes, "I love being present during the pre-volunteer and post-volunteer moments. I always get to see people getting kind of nervous before they

head in and get real excited after they come out of their volunteering experience. Also, I get to help them process those moments to a certain extent." Calvin Joustra, states, "I love being able to drive around Grand Rapids. I also love the fact that I am helping bring people to places where they are helping out people. I am part of that. Not directly, but I help the person get there who otherwise would not be able to go."

We Practice

By Savannah Gruesbeck, Communications Coordinator

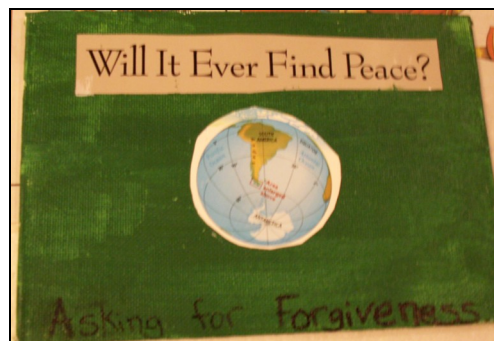
Every Fall the Service-Learning staff spends 3 hours working together to come up with a covenant. This covenant establishes what we value as an office and helps guide the direction we want our work to go for the up-coming school year. This year's staff chose nine themes that we value. We believe that these themes are building blocks for pursuing shalom. Each theme builds off of one another. In the fall, we built our staff meetings around these key phrases. Every meeting applied the words to our work here at the Service-Learning Center. This covenant is valued by each and every member of our staff. We have enjoyed practicing these values together!

2009-2010 Staff Covenant

Rooted in the hope of what can be together with conviction and humility, We practice:

- Crying Out
- Asking For Forgiveness
- Engaging
- Educating
- Challenging
- Hospitality
- Building
- Joy
- Faithfulness

Rooted in the hope of what can be together with conviction and humility, We practice.



S-LC Staff members created a visual representation of each word in the covenant.

Out of the Dorms and Into the City

Each year the Service-Learning Center forms and maintains service-learning partnerships between Calvin's residence halls and local non-profit organizations in Grand Rapids. We interviewed Emily Wolffis, a student who helps sustain this partnership by serving as a Community Partnership Coordinator (CPC) in Noordewier-Vanderwerp (NVW).

S-LC: Tell us a little about your partnership.

Emily: We work with Campfire USA, specifically Camelot Woods. Camelot Woods is an after-school program for kids. This year we also added the food truck, which is sponsored by Church of the Servant. We go and help two Saturdays a month.

S-LC: What do you appreciate about your partnership?

Emily: I appreciate that it is close to Calvin's campus. It is only a mile down the road but it vastly different from Calvin. I think people are always surprised by the number of immigrants or that people are living in poverty so close to our school. It makes me appreciate where I came from.

S-LC: What have you learned from experience as a CPC?

Emily: I like that it makes me get off-campus more. I love hearing the kids' stories. They are always so excited to see us. What we do is so small but they really appreciate it. It is a really eye-opening experience.

S-LC: What kind of feedback have you received from other service-learners?

Emily: When we walk back from the food bank there is a lot of time for students to talk and reflect about their experience. It is really interesting to hear them process their experiences. They will say things like, "I can't believe they gave me a hug," "They were so grateful." "They didn't have

gloves so I gave them mine." It is great to see students recognize the need and process what they can do to help.

The service-learners at Campfire can gain a greater love for kids. Most of them enjoy being around kids and that is why they help. Many of them find this experience more challenging than other experiences working with children. Despite the challenge, they still greatly appreciate their experience.

S-LC: What do you enjoy most about being a CPC?

Emily: I enjoy getting others to experience something that I really enjoy. I love showing students an area outside of Calvin. I enjoy showing people Grand Rapids. It is a great way for them to see the area where they live.

I have also really enjoyed working with the other student leaders in my dorm. It is great to connect with them and have discussions about how to further help our agency. They have been a great support whether it is through prayer or using their position to help get others involved.



Emily Wolffis,
Noordewier-Vanderwerp CPC



Students at Campfire USA



Service-Learning Center Staff



Front Row: (from left to right): Noah Kruis (Associate Director), Jeff Bouman (Director), Becca Timmermans (CPC Coordinator), Rebecca Garofano (ABSL Natural Sciences), Scott Hofman (ABSL Natural Sciences), Savannah Gruesbeck (Communications Coordinator), Tina Bolt (Transportation/Data Entry)

Middle Row: Elise Ditta (Research), Tu Danh (Technology), Rachel Young (ABSL Education)

Back Row: Karen Van Dyke (Pre-College Programs Liaison), Megan Kruis (Associate Director), Kelly DeVries (Special Projects), Danielle VanderEnde (Spring Break Trips), Angela Svaan (ABSL Languages),

StreetFest 2010

StreetFest 2010 will be here before we know it. This summer, Christina Crider, our StreetFest Coordinator and Karen VanDyke, our office assistant, will be busy coordinating this annual event. Keep your eyes open for information about StreetFest 2010 or visit our website: www.calvin.edu/slc



CALVIN

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