Academic-Service Learning Prepares Students to Change the World and Enrich Their Communities

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Theology Professor Clarice Curry believes that the rich, deeply-rooted tradition of Christianity, service, and compassion are firmly embedded in the educational experience of every St. John’s University student. Through Academic Service-Learning (AS-L), a classroom-based program that involves students in some form of required community service activity as a means of understanding course concepts, her students are learning to relate classroom theories to civic engagement and reflection.

A trained Social Worker and Bereavement Counselor, Professor Curry teaches courses in Moral Theology of Catholic Healthcare and Spirituality and Mysticism in the Christian Tradition in St. John's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.

“I implement AS-L in all the classes I teach. It’s very important and adheres to the Vincentian mission of service,” says Professor Curry. “Through AS-L, students prepare to change the world, enrich their communities and their futures.”

Students work at various community sites including nursing homes, hospices, soup kitchens, children’s agencies and homeless shelters. They offer direct service through personal interaction and shared conversations, serve meals and perform other tasks.

“Christian spirituality is a key element to knowing that you’re a child of God,” adds the Theology Professor. “We must all use our knowledge and talents to assist those less fortunate in our communities.”

According to Professor Curry, students are required to maintain a journal of their day-to-day activities, describe how the experience has affected them as well as how it has enhanced their academic career. Many of the clients at these community sites are in need of one-on-one attention. They want someone to talk to, someone to listen to them and treat them with dignity and respect.

St. John’s student Reshma Lakhram gained first-hand knowledge about the impact her interactions had on the
residents at the Ozanam Nursing Home. They were able to talk to someone about their life stories and experiences.

“The AS-L program at St. John’s is magnificent. My volunteer experience has changed my life. At the nursing home I learned to take care and appreciate the elderly community. I heard such marvelous stories. This experience has confirmed my career path to become a doctor.”

“These students are proud to be a part of the AS-L experience,” explains Professor Curry. “I see their excitement and how they relate the experience with spirituality and the concept of living out their values not only as a student of St. John’s but in the real world.”

Professor Curry credits the Office of Academic Service-Learning for its support and financial contribution. By applying for an AS-L stipend from the University, faculty members obtain student assistance to help with AS-L paperwork and project coordination.

A Difference One Person Can Make
St. John’s College student Nicholas Doyne likens his AS-L experience to that of a big brother. “It gives me great happiness to feel like an older brother to younger kids. By volunteering outside of the classroom, I not only became a mentor but developed an understanding of others that has helped enhance my academic career.”

Sabino Curcio, a Liberal Arts student, reports that “AS-L was a foreign concept before attending St. John’s. The notion of linking classroom theories and direct community service is a wonderful idea that gave me the opportunity to reflect on my experiences. I have newfound admiration for people who give their life over to serving others. It makes me feel good to know I have made a difference in someone’s life.”

“I owe my service-learning experience to the efforts of Professor Curry,” says undergraduate student Kimberly Khan. “Academic Service-learning has changed my way of thinking. My service to disabled children has allowed me to see that it is not always about my wants and needs but that by simply helping others I am making an impact in their lives.”

VISA
Academic Service-Learning enhances the educational experience of St. John’s students and is a major component of the University’s 2009-2013 Strategic Plan. It’s also a part of the Vincentian Institute for Social Action (VISA), which was launched by the University to more visibly embed St. John’s Catholic and Vincentian mission into the educational experience of its students. VISA provides an organizational focus for a variety of new and ongoing programs through which faculty and students can work together to explore the causes of and develop solutions for poverty and social injustice throughout the world.