



The Ripple Effect

My Vision for an Engaged UCI

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4/20/2010

In a time of vast economic turmoil, America is facing some of the greatest challenges of our generation. Dwindling resources and mounting social injustice is amplifying the demand on social services. As a part of our democracy, we rely on social services and its volunteers to fill the needs of communities that the government does not provide. There are a tremendous number of nonprofits or other organizations that tirelessly work to address the extent of need in our world, yet these efforts are inhibited by lack of resources and support. In a Call to Service, our President Barak Obama called “for the active citizenship of Americans of all ages and walks of life” (Obama 2008). President Obama encourages us all to give back to our communities and support our nation. With opportunities such as the Service Initiative Fund, Social Investment Fund and the expansion of governmental service organization like AmeriCorps and the PeaceCorps, there is more emphasis on community service than we have seen in generations. Human service agencies rely on volunteers to enable administrators to sustain services and expand the scope of services provided without exhausting the agency’s resources. Volunteers provide essential support offering assistance and maintaining the quality of life to all citizens. It is through this service that volunteer’s strength the fabric of our society.

Higher education in this country has a history of perusing moral and civic principles in its endeavors while on the forefront of debate on critical issues. Universities are a place where faculty strives to provide students with the foundation for analysis, critical reflection, and participation in the democracy (Campus Compact). However, currently there is concern that active participation in democracy is declining as voter

registration continues to decrease (Putnam 2000). Public apathy and cynicism about government is increase among youth, even as their participation in service activities increases (Mann & Patrick 2000). Institutions such as UCI should strive to prepare us to face the multidimensional problems in the world both in the US and internationally. Higher education institution in cooperation with its students, faculty, and staff can be a driving force in this effort. We have the intellect, expertise and resources to be actively engaged in addressing community issues.

UCI is an oasis of learning both inside the classroom and out. The school is network of committed students, faculty and staff all busy pushing the bound of knowledge, the scope of the known and the dept of truth. Our commitments are not only to each other, but also to the greater society in which we live and will pass on for generations. Our passion for education can be a boundless resource for the community in which we reside and to the global society we all claim stake. UCI as an engaged campus will be one that is consciously committed to bolster community involvement in all aspects of its campus life. Each one of us in the UCI community can be the ripple effect that causes positive change around the world, and it can start here at home.

As students perusing higher education, we are the beginnings of a new generation of movers and shakers. We hold the power the become drivers of change and the betterment of society. We are inheriting an uncertain world, filled with economic turmoil, disaster, famine, war, diminishing privacy and expanding poverty. A pessimist might shy away from these swelling troubles, but we as leaders of tomorrow are arming ourselves with the research, knowledge and power to face these issues head on. As a student, there is an innate disposition of curiosity to learn more about the world, knowing that there is a

vast amount of knowledge beyond your starting scope. We have the passion and UCI can kindle that fire.

There are already an array of clubs and organizations on campus for students to get involved. From Anteaters for Humanity to UNICEF at UCI, the students have shown their commitment and dedication to causes locally and globally. Liked willed people will always find each other and these organizations will continue to be sustained by the motivated and caring students that UCI attracts. However, as involved as we are, there are so many others who either don't know how or what to get involved with. All it takes is that one connection with a cause to get hooked. Engagement within our community should be a requirement of all students at UCI. Coincided with curriculum, engagement in the community can ground theory to practicality.

As a part of an engaged UCI, students experience in education should involve service learning. By integrating community service into curriculum, we as students are given the opportunity to improve our citizenship skills while simultaneously addressing the concerns, needs, and hopes of our community. By doing so we will learn that we are not just located within a specific locality, but are intimately connected to the public purposes and aspirations of life at home and abroad. Service learning opportunities should be available from a local setting to international placement. Each discipline on this campus can relate what is learned in the classroom to addressing a need globally. With creative and innovative ideas, student can develop their own service learning projects with funding and support from the University. Imagine the experiences we can have helping in another part of the world we might never have known, feeling intimately

connected as a result. Building bridges across waters can begin the ripple effect of activism.

As researchers we have the resources and knowledge to be the best aid for community services. Whether it is for the environment, health, social services or any other organization for a cause, we can help. Community-based action research can be the saving grace for non-profits and NGOs alike. Partnerships with community leaders and members can identify problems or areas of improvements and with our experience in research; we can develop a collaborative effort to be solutions to the problems. As an engaged campus, we should be unable to separate our unique responsibility for the development of knowledge from the basis for social progress and human equality.

This commitment to engagement must reach every aspect of campus life for the commitment to withstand. To our leaders, this mission takes shape as a deep commitment to and articulation of the importance of community engagement throughout our rhetoric. For faculty and professors, a call to sharing knowledge to help their students learn from the community. For our staff, we need the creation of a department committed to building collaborative community relationships based on mutual respect. Finally, it is sharing our campus with the community in physical and economic resources of the campus.

An engaged UCI to me means that we begin the ripple of change. That in our studies, research and campus life we embark on the mission to reach out beyond the University. We need to open our doors to the community and provide the support and assistance they so desperately need. Our mission should involve the lending of our hearts and minds to the common goal of human justice and equality at home and overseas. Education will not end at the conclusion of a lecture or discussion, we will take what we

know and evolve it with the help of our community partners. I envision our campus as committed to responsible citizenship to both deepen education and improve the quality of societal life challenging each of us to make civic and community engagement a priority. UCI is one drop in the pool of difficulty, but we can be a powerfully effective ripple of change.

Works Cited

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