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## *The Essentials of Preparation*

"Service without training is like throwing a 12-foot rope to someone in a hole 20 feet deep. Sure that person may jump up to the rope, but why take the chance?"

— Kahlil Baker '96

I have just finished eight straight days of training with 14 students in preparation for our summer day camp, tutoring and mentoring programs. I am more convinced than ever that of the many challenges facing our campus service program, training — that is, effective preparation and education for students doing service work — still ranks as number one. Are the Berea Buddies volunteers really prepared? Can my new student managers design and lead fall trainings? Do I have the time to really "train the trainers" during the impossibly busy first week of school? Why aren't people using the new training manual we spent all that time creating? Having made pleasing progress with program development, community partnerships, financial stability and reflection, I still fret over training.

My goal here is to offer practical information in a variety of contexts to help faculty, students and campus service personnel understand some of the why, what, when, who and how of training. My students offered some of their thoughts on training to be shared here, for which I am most grateful.

### **Why?**

"Trainings are not the first step in service work. They come before that first step, to inform one of the situation so that one does not step off the precipice of well-meaning, but false, ideals." —Monica Miller '96

Why train? Because students need it and the community needs it. Training is absolutely necessary if we are serious about serving the community. With training we have the opportunity to help students grow in respectful attitudes towards "the served," to understand that service is a two-way street, that a "missionary" attitude may do as much harm as good. Our communities deserve our very best. Whenever I think about my students driving a van load of energetic elementary age kids home from a field trip, I am reminded of the sacred trust given to us by parents, family members and other members of our community.

Training is also crucial if we are serious about our responsibility to students. It is irresponsible to send forth unprepared students into environments or experiences requiring sensitivity or special skills. Teaching a 35-year-old working father to read or serving someone who is dying of AIDS are profound commitments, requiring extensive preparation and ongoing support. Training also helps our students to learn management skills, such as facilitating a meeting, to better understand leadership, group dynamics, and the social, economic and environmental contexts in which our service work is performed.

### What?

"Training prepares students for situations they might encounter. Not only does it heighten their leadership skills, but it also teaches them to listen and to take constructive criticism. Training is second only to experience."

—Julie Isaac '98

What is training? For one thing, training occurs not only during "training sessions" but also during any activity or influence that prepares students for their work. Having a one-on-one meeting with a student to help him or her understand a community problem or manage an inconsistent volunteer is actually the best form of training. Students also "train" each other in countless small and large ways, through shared formal and informal reflection, through community-building activities that run the gamut from cookouts to weekend intensives. One of the very best ways for students to understand the value of the community is to build community among themselves.

There are so many varieties of service programs and experiences that we have to begin to define training in different contexts. A student might tutor a child in math, write a brochure for an agency, perform action research for a community organization, assist a teacher in the classroom or renovate a house. They might work on campus, off campus, in agencies, on their own, singly or in groups, in one-time or long-term placements. So what kind of training is appropriate and necessary in each context? Who is responsible for it? How do we do it effectively when the responsibility lies with us? Clearly, training means different things in different contexts.

### Who?

"Training stretches us, teaches us about ourselves and prepares us for effective service."

—Jennifer Kempthorne '98

Here are three broad categories of service that appear on college campuses in which training needs can be discussed with some relevance to the questions posed.

- **Service Learning Center/Volunteer Clearinghouse:** A campus office that places students directly in community agencies, with or without faculty involvement.

A center of this type should provide a brief and basic orientation to service, to the center itself and to the agency chosen. This can occur during or subsequent to the "intake" interview that determines a student's interest, ability and level of commitment. Hopefully, the agency chosen will provide its own orientation and training for students. Agencies that depend heavily on volunteers — like Hospice or Adult Literacy — are the most reliable, and typically require a thorough and lengthy training and certification process. But many agencies, especially those who use volunteers sporadically, provide minimal or no orientation (or supervision) for students. An agency may or may not respond positively to a request for better training and supervision of students. Here we must be sensitive. Are we dealing with the United Way or with a tiny battered women's shelter short on staff and struggling to stay alive? Either the center or the college class will need to help with basic orientation and training in this case.

- **Service Learning/Curricular:** Service as part of a college course.

Professors integrating service into their courses have several options. If available they can refer students to volunteer or service learning centers. Many smaller campuses and communities do not have centers like this. They can also directly place students in agencies with which they have (hopefully) cultivated strong

relationships. Or have students contact agencies on their own, or encourage students to design and develop their own projects, either singly, in groups or as a whole class. The training needs and the professor's responsibility will vary in each case. Obviously, the stronger the center or the agency, the less responsibility the faculty member will have for training. I believe, having experimented with all of the above, that faculty

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do have a responsibility for sensitivity training and orientation in the classroom, whatever the type of project or training provided by the agency. Luckily, our students are smart, flexible and resilient.

Even with minimal training things

usually work out okay if agencies give a brief orientation and are available for guidance as questions arise.

- Campus-Based/ Student Led: Service programs run by the college or by students.

In campus-based or student-led service projects, the campus organization or project is the "agency." The training challenge is greatest here, and completely the responsibility of the community service director, "green dean," or student program or project manager. Consider what an effective student program manager must accomplish over the course of an academic year, while also handling a full course load, perhaps a job and all the complexities of social or family life, of identity exploration and formation. She must set goals, plan, recruit, train, make match-ups, supervise peers, evaluate the program and pass the torch to new students

if the program is to endure. That's huge! And it deserves a lot of training and support.

Large service events like building a house, running a food drive or sandbagging the river to prevent flooding raise special issues. Obviously, specific skills training is necessary in many cases, especially where tools and risk are involved. But often the subtler aspects of training are overlooked. "Send off" talks and programs should be thoughtfully planned and let students know why this work is so important, alerting them to the fact that they are entering the life of the community, if only collecting food in the neighborhood.

### When?

"Training helps our volunteers to feel that they know what they're doing even if they don't. It lets them know that if something comes up that they can't handle, we're behind them. In many ways it is a crutch for them to lean on, until they feel able to walk, or in some cases fly."

—Roy Young '97

We have experimented with a variety of training plans over the last few years and are pretty happy with the current training schedule. The beginning of the academic year, when most of the training occurs, is always hectic, and we must be very intentional about making sure that adequate training is built into our programs. It is easy to let training slip in programs that are campus-run, but a quality service experience for students and the community depends on ensuring that it doesn't.

Background: During the academic year, we have 30 student staff working 10 to 20 hours a week, managing five regular programs — literacy, tutoring, mentoring, environmental, drug prevention — and several special projects. The entire staff is divided into five teams corresponding to the programs. Of the 30

student staff members, three are overall student directors. Each team has a manager and assistant manager. The remaining 17 students are service leaders in training, team members and service providers. Our budget is small, and half of it goes for transportation. We can't afford to hire anyone to help with training. I do almost all the training for student staff. They do almost all of the training for their volunteers.

### **Training Schedule:**

*Late August:* Program manager and student directors retreat to set goals, plan, design trainings, bond and get geared up. Half day.

*Early September:* Overall Students for Appalachia (SFA) retreat for all student staff — a general orientation to service, SFA, teams, community building and workshops. Weekend.

*Mid-to-late September:* Fall program trainings by student managers and staff — an orientation to service, sensitivity to served, skills development and nuts and bolts. Two to 12 hours.

*September to December:* Weekly staff meeting (1 hour) and weekly team meeting (1/2 hour) include ongoing training, reflection, speakers, community building and problem solving.

*January:* Mid-year meetings and retreat — a month of evaluation, training, reflection, community building.

*February:* Spring program trainings by student managers and staff, for new volunteers. Two to 12 hours.

*February to May:* Weekly staff meetings (one hour) and weekly team meetings (1/2 hour) include ongoing training, reflection, speakers, community building and problem solving.

*May:* Closing retreat, to celebrate, evaluate, reflect. Two hours.

*Early June:* Retreat and training, to build community, develop a strong staff structure, plan the day camp (food, transportation, curriculum, activities, field trips) and develop

other summer programs. Eight days.

*Mid-August:* Closing retreat, to celebrate, evaluate, reflect. One day.

### **Workshops:**

Here is a sampling of workshops we've done or do regularly at Students for Appalachia, during retreats or weekly staff meetings:

- Community Building (Scott Peck model)
- Decision Making and Empowerment
- Community Voice
- Effective Meetings and Facilitation
- Three-Minute Speeches
- Conflict Resolution
- Personality and Leadership (Myers-Briggs)
- Balance and Burnout (stress management)
- Diversity
- Strategies for Social Change
- Life Stories (from YouthBuild)
- Ethical Leadership
- Train the Trainers
- Volunteer and Program Management

**A Basic Two-Hour Training:** To help our students design brief but effective trainings for volunteers in our tutoring, mentoring and environmental programs, we developed this model:

1. *Intro:* Facilitator welcomes, introduces self and team, briefly explains history, mission and values of program. Ten minutes.

2. *Introductions and Icebreaker:* Group introductions (name, year, major, hometown and why you want to do this kind of service work). A short icebreaker is effective here. Fifteen minutes.

3. *Orientation and Service Overview:* To SFA, its history, mission, expectations and to the campus service tradition and movement, to society and social problems. Ten minutes.

4. *Skills and Sensitivity Training:* Understanding and developing the empathy and ability to

do the work. Experiential activities like role plays, small group work and short videos are good here. Can be longer depending on the complexity of skills to be learned. Sixty minutes.

5. *Nuts and Bolts*: Staying in touch, logs for reporting and reflection, expectation, supervision, problem solving and other details. Ten minutes.

6. *Closing Circle and Evaluation*: Brief reflections, closing words, short written evaluation. Fifteen minutes.

### How?

"Training prepares us for a future full of understanding and strength."

—Jeremy Dixon '96

If I could hire another staff position, it would be primarily devoted to training. But I can't, so my students and I do nearly all of it. Training — good training — takes a fair amount of preparation and a certain amount of nerve, as good teaching does. But it is not rocket science. Although some people are more gifted than others, almost anyone can do it and do it well. The right attitude is important: You must be much more concerned about the audience than you are about the material. That is the number one qualification for good training. The best learning may come from the tough question that takes things in an unexpected direction.

Rule number one: Don't confuse teaching with training. In normal classroom teaching, the material is all important, and the student must simply measure up. Some do well and some don't. In training, everybody has to get it, because they might be tutoring a dyslexic child next week. Covering the material is less crucial (though still important) than making sure everyone gets it. Lots of question-and-answer and discussion is the rule here. Whatever you

do, don't talk too much. When in doubt, shut up and ask the group a question.

### Some Basic Tips:

- Do something early on that helps everyone relax — turn to a partner, introduce yourself, tell them what you hope to get from this training or why you want to do this service work. Take a few examples from the group.
- Practice the one-third presentation/two-thirds participation rule. Try different activities like pairing/sharing, small groups, role plays, icebreakers, whole group discussions or round robin reporting.
- Use a flip chart for presentations and discussions.
- Stay focused but flexible. When things start to lag, refocus the group in a skillful way. Others feel the lag, too, and appreciate it when you move things along.
- Have students help with the training. Training is a fabulous leadership and personal development experience for students.
- Be prepared.
- Smile and laugh.
- Stand up there, full of respect and appreciation for the students who are giving themselves to service, and go for it. People are very forgiving when your heart is in the right place and you are decently organized.

### Last Thoughts

"Training isn't fun; it isn't cool. You're at each other's throats, then you realize that the other person is right too. Then you know how to do your job." —Angie Campbell '97

As seriously as I take training and as much of it as I do, I always have doubts as to its effectiveness — I learn so much more from experience myself! I wonder how much even a beautifully-delivered, twelve-hour literacy training will be retained by someone who has not yet sat down in that awkward silence to teach an adult to read. But as assistant director of Students for Appalachia Sheila Lyons says, "It does give them the courage to sit down and try... Then the real training begins." Of course we have to train up front. But information is really retained only after a powerful "need to know" has been established. That is, in fact, why service learning works. Training is a form of service learning.

Having said all this, I love to train. I love to

watch the anxiety evaporate and the confidence rise in a volunteer who must mentor a difficult child. I love the phone calls from parents who are thrilled with the progress their son or daughter is making. I love to watch a student manager who's scared they will "lose it" speaking in front of a group bubble with excitement after training 20 new tutors and reading positive evaluations.

Campus organizations for whom excellence in service to the community and excellence in service to students are serious standards train, and train well. Effective training will help insure that the campus service movement we believe in can achieve the sterling integrity it needs to flourish and continue to positively affect higher education.

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*David Sawyer is the director of Students for Appalachia, a community service program at Berea College that has won several national awards. He writes, speaks and conducts trainings and workshops on campuses around the country and for organizations such as Youth Service America, the Corporation for National Service and the Points of Light Foundation. David is also a member of Campus Compact's Invisible College and a teacher of a service learning course titled, "Leadership for Social Change."*