

COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING, RESEARCH, AND SERVICE AT NOTRE DAME: Student Engagement From 1983 to 2008

BY Jay Brandenberger

An ethos integrating student service and community engagement with learning has been building for decades at the University of Notre Dame. In 1983, Notre Dame President Theodore Hesburgh argued that a Catholic university must provide means for scholarship, service, and faith to come together in student life and beyond. He championed an initiative to link existing service and experiential learning initiatives to form the Center for Social Concerns, which opened in 1983 (see Hesburgh, 1993).

This report documents student participation trends at Notre Dame during the subsequent twenty-five years. What percentage of students engage in service opportunities within and outside of courses? How many invest their time and talents through community-based learning and research courses? What areas and initiatives have grown or declined across the years as student interests, and social contexts, have shifted? This report addresses such questions, updating a similar report done in 2003 (see Research Report 5). Sources include national surveys of which Notre Dame is a part and data collected by the Center for Social Concerns.

Fig. 1

Percentage of students in the ND class of 2007 who performed community service as part of a class or in an activity or organization outside of class during their:

	As Part of a Class ¹	Outside of Class ²
First Year at Notre Dame	30.3	80.3
Sophomore Year	26.9	82.1
Junior Year	26.6	78.0
Senior Year (or fifth)	26.6	74.8

1. 49.4% of seniors in 2007 reported taking at least one class during their college career that included community service.

2. Some students likely served both as part of and outside of classes.

SOURCE: Data from 2007 College Senior Survey (self-reported estimates during senior year); *n* > 1900



SERVICE ENGAGEMENT:
CONTEXTS AND FREQUENCY

There are various ways for Notre Dame students to engage as well as a variety of means to examine the rates of participation. By each indicator, significant percentages of students are involved.

Figure 1 presents data from the College Senior Survey (CSS) facilitated by the Higher Education Research Institute. Seniors in 2007 reported serving both within class—49.4% indicated that they took a class that involved community service during their undergraduate years—and outside of class. They indicated that their service engagement was highest in their earlier years on campus—80.3 percent participated during their first year—yet consistent over the four years.

Figure 2 presents historical and national comparisons. Another item from the College Senior Survey shows that 73.1% of Notre Dame seniors in 2007 indicated they frequently or occasionally performed volunteer work in the previous year, compared to 61.4% of students at all four-year colleges sampled nationally. After peaking in 2001, service engagement, as indicated by this item, has dropped some in recent years. In comparison, statistics gathered from member institutions of Campus Compact (2007), an association of colleges focused on the civic mission of higher education,

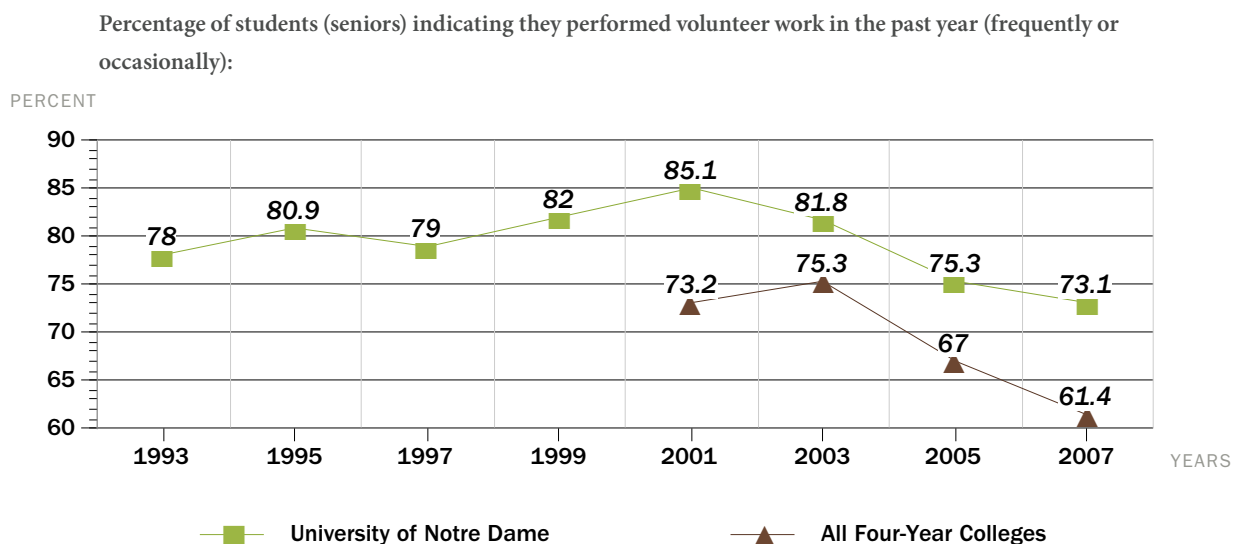
showed that in 2006 the average percentage of students engaged in community service was 32% nationally.

How often do students volunteer weekly? While the average Notre Dame volunteer reports spending approximately one hour in a typical week, 18.1% of seniors in 2007 indicated they spent three or more hours weekly, compared to 15.3% for seniors nationally (Data from CSS of the Higher Education Research Initiative, 2007).

Notre Dame students are quite active, and there is competition for the volunteer hour. Seniors in 2007 reported spending less time volunteering than studying, exercising, working on campus, watching television, surfing the internet, socializing, and career planning, but more time in service than playing video games, working off campus, talking with faculty outside of class, and commuting.

Female undergraduates at Notre Dame are more likely than males to engage in service and community-based learning, consistent with national trends. This difference may narrow for within-class service participation: in 2007, similar percentages of males and females reported taking a service-learning course during their Notre Dame undergraduate years: 48.1% of males compared to 50.9% of females (data from CSS). By college of enrollment, students of the College of Arts and Letters show more frequent service engagement, followed by those in the College of Science.

Fig. 2 Frequency of Service Participation of Notre Dame Students and Students Nationally



Source: College Student Survey (Higher Education Research Institute) Item: How often did you engage in the following in the past year: volunteer work
Note: National comparison group includes students at four-year colleges/universities sampled by HERI, $n > 20,000$. ND samples: $n > 1600$

STUDENT GROUPS, RESIDENCE HALLS, AND BEYOND

A longstanding venue for creative student engagement is a variety of service and social action groups, some of which date back decades. These groups are supported by the Center for Social Concerns, yet are student directed, providing opportunities for leadership development. The number of student groups has increased from 25 in 1988 to 40 currently: see Figure 3. Clubs traditionally focused on direct service activities: serving people with disabilities, tutoring, and assisting the homeless. New student initiatives have often emphasized mentoring: LEAD-ND and Teamwork for Tomorrow are groups begun in recent years that foster sustained mentoring relationships among ND students and local youth.

In recent years, clubs have shown a strong interest in advocacy and education with respect to specific social issues. Examples include a new campus chapter of the Children's Defense Fund, and the Africa Faith and Justice Network. Such groups provide the campus community concrete ways to take action to alleviate injustice and poverty in local, national and international communities. For example, the newly created group ND-8 raised \$18,000 in 2006/07 to provide protective bed nets for Malaria No More, and hosted a week of educational activities focused on eight millennium development goals.

Residential housing at Notre Dame also provides an important means to foster service and social action among students. Each of Notre Dame's 27 residence halls facilitates community service initiatives ranging from one-time opportunities (e.g., assisting seniors in home repair) to collaborations with local agencies in projects sustained over several years. Such work is supported by a Commissioner in each hall who serves as a liaison with the Center for Social Concerns. Collaborations across contexts are frequent: Social Concerns Commissioners work with the World Hunger Coalition to educate the campus about hunger and implement an extensive canned food drive for the Food Bank of Northern Indiana.

Student engagement is also enhanced through the Robinson Community Learning Center that the University opened in 2001. One salient initiative at the RCLC is Take Ten, a violence prevention initiative. Through Take Ten, over 80 Notre Dame students annually learn about models

Over 89% of eligible ND undergraduates reported voting in the 2004 national election.

Fig. 3

Student Service and Social Action Groups at Notre Dame (1988–2007)

	1988-89	2006-07
Number of Service & Social Action Groups	25	40
Number of Participants in Sample Groups (estimated)		
	1988-89	2006-07
Amnesty International ND	20	20
Arnold Air Society (<i>Service by Air Force ROTC cadets</i>)	65	30
Circle K	30	300
Foodshare	60	45
Habitat for Humanity	40	250
Right to Life	20	75
World Hunger Coalition (<i>Weekly Lunch Fast</i>)	225	300
Neighborhood Study Help Program (<i>tutoring</i>)	300	7
LEAD ND (<i>fostering nontraditional youth as leaders</i>)		30
Teamwork for Tomorrow (<i>mentoring</i>)		40
LOGAN Center (<i>service to disabled individuals</i>)		85
Notre Dame Peace Fellowship		15
Students for Environmental Action		30
ND-8 Millennium Development Group		100
Africa Faith and Justice Network		20
Domers Mentoring Kids		100
Take Ten Violence Prevention (<i>via Robinson Community Learning Center</i>)		80

SOURCES: 1988-89 data from report to Provost (KMW: June, 1989).
2006-07 data is from CSC online survey of groups leaders, and other sources.

of violence prevention, work with youth in schools across the area, and contribute to evaluation efforts.

The Center for Social Concerns also encourages student participation in political realms to foster understanding of democratic principles and processes informed by Catholic social teaching. NDVotes'08, a nonpartisan education campaign of the Center, works with academic departments, student groups, and residence halls to encourage voter registration and informed political engagement of ND students. Over 89% of eligible undergraduates reported voting in the 2004 national election (see Research Report 9).

GROWTH IN ACADEMIC OPPORTUNITIES

The University mission statement calls for the promotion within students of a “disciplined sensibility to poverty and injustice.” Indeed, the social mission of higher education has received renewed emphasis in the last decades. Consistent with such a focus, curricular offerings that integrate community engagement are longstanding, and increasing, at Notre Dame.

Two of the most salient initiatives of Center for Social Concerns—offered in collaboration with various departments—are the three-credit Summer Service Learning programs and one-credit Social Concerns Seminars.

SUMMER SERVICE LEARNING

The Summer Service Learning Program (SSLP) emerged from the Summer Service Project whose roots date back to the 1960’s: Father Edward Malloy, the 16th President of Notre Dame, was an active participant as an undergraduate, and wrote about the impact of the experience on his life path (Malloy, 1990).

The SSLP course begins in the spring semester and concludes with class meetings and written analyses in the

fall. During the eight-week summer placement, students serve and learn in various contexts, from health care to advocacy for homeless individuals, and increasingly through participation in research initiatives that serve the community good. Since the opening of the Center in 1983, over 3600 students have completed the course.

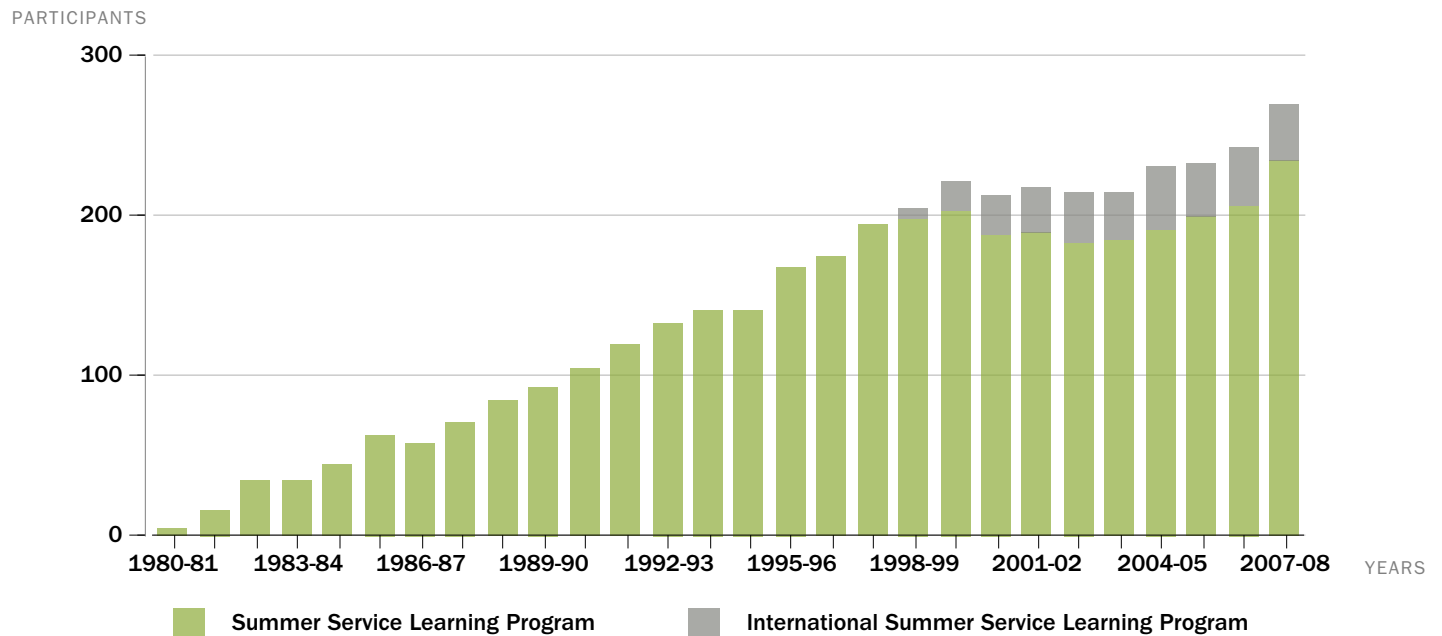
The Center began the International Summer Service Learning Program (four academic credits) in 1998, and sends up to forty students annually to sites in fourteen developing countries. ISSLP students work with international non-governmental organizations such as the Salvadoran Foundation for Health and Human Development, and faith-based organizations such as Catholic Relief Services, Maryknoll, and the Congregation of Holy Cross. The course is in high demand: 245 students applied for 38 spots for the summer of 2008. Since 1998, 324 students have participated in the ISSLP. Other summer initiatives following a similar model (including the Latino Leadership Internship, and ACCION for business majors) involve 18 students per year (2007).

Figure 4 shows the growth in summer programs over the years. Participants from all of the Colleges and the School of Architecture are represented. For more information, see earlier Research Reports focused on summer initiatives.

2008 ISSLP SITES

- Brazil
- Ecuador
- El Salvador
- Guatemala
- Honduras
- Mexico
- Peru
- Senegal
- Ghana
- Uganda
- Tanzania
- Cambodia
- India
- Thailand

Fig. 4 Student enrollment in Summer Service Learning Courses since 1980



SOURCE: Center for Social Concerns databases and Office of the Registrar

SOCIAL CONCERNS SEMINARS

The Center’s Social Concerns Seminars integrate the University’s academic strengths and national/international network. Currently, the Center facilitates approximately twenty one-credit Seminars annually, built around an immersion at sites nationally or internationally. Through contact with church leaders, governmental officials, community members, and local organizations students learn first hand about a current question of justice or social concern.

Two of the most popular Seminars are *The Church and Social Action* (known as the Urban Plunge) and the *Appalachia Seminar*, both of which date back to the start of the Center (see Figure 5). Recently developed Seminars include *Environmental Justice and Human Rights* (begun in response to Hurricane Katrina), and the *Youth and Violence Seminar* (a partnership with the Indianapolis Peace Institute). Each Seminar includes class meetings before and after the immersion—during which students discuss relevant texts and policy implications—and written analyses. Figure 5 documents the growth of student participation in the Seminars, up 33% since 2001-02. Currently, over 800 students participate in the Seminars annually.

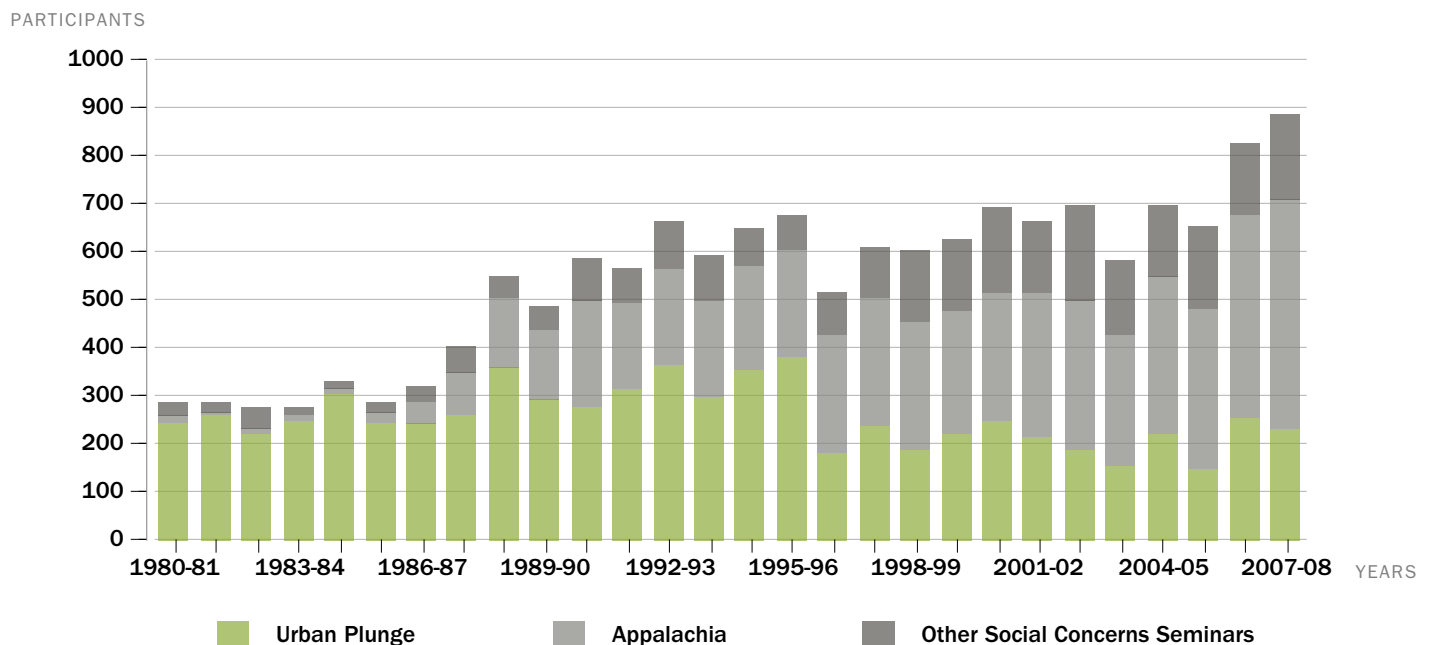
COURSES ACROSS THE DISCIPLINES

Faculty at the Center for Social Concerns offer three-credit courses in disciplines such as Economics, Psychology, Theology, and Political Science that involve community-based learning and/or a focus on justice concerns. Such courses often build on existing student involvements, offering opportunities for advanced students to explore issues arising in service contexts, and to enhance their ongoing work. Since 1983, over 1700 students have participated in the courses offered.

The Center also consults with departments across campus to create community-based learning courses taught by faculty (and occasionally graduate students) in each of the Colleges at Notre Dame. In addition to over 20 courses offered via the Center (described above), over 75 such courses (most are for three-credits) are offered annually across campus, ranging from composition seminars through the First Year of Studies to a course in the College of Science that examine levels of environmental toxins in the local community. Campus Compact (2007) statistics indicate that the average number of such service-learning courses on member campuses across the nation is 35.

To support faculty in developing and sustaining such courses, and to enhance links between academic and

Fig. 5 Student Enrollment in Social Concerns Seminars since 1980



SOURCE: Center for Social Concerns databases and Office of the Registrar
 NOTE: Social Concerns Seminars are one-credit, immersion-based courses cross-listed in various departments.

community initiatives, the Center funds Community-Based Learning Coordinators at six to eight local agencies. The CBLC's collaborate with faculty members to design community placements that enhance student learning and course objectives.

COMMUNITY-BASED RESEARCH COURSES

A recent trend, supported by the Center for Social Concerns, is to foster undergraduate research opportunities across the curriculum. The Center offers course development grants and other support to faculty to foster community-based research courses within the Colleges. Community-based research addresses a research question germane to the community, and yields information that serves community purposes. In 2006-07, 108 students participated in nine such courses and related initiatives. One course that incorporates this model engages students in anthropological research methods to learn about breast cancer, HIV/AIDS, and substance use.

Since 2006 the Center has received funding through the Corporation for National and Community Service as part of a CBR Networking Initiative designed to build infrastructure for community-based research. Notre Dame is one of six schools within the network cited for a preliminary investigation of the learning that results for undergraduates enrolled in CBR courses.

POSTGRADUATE SERVICE

A salient portion of Notre Dame graduates—approximately 10%—carry forward the emphasis on service and justice they encounter at Notre Dame by entering full-time service for at least a year following graduation. Figure 6 documents the increasing interest among seniors in such full-time volunteer initiatives.

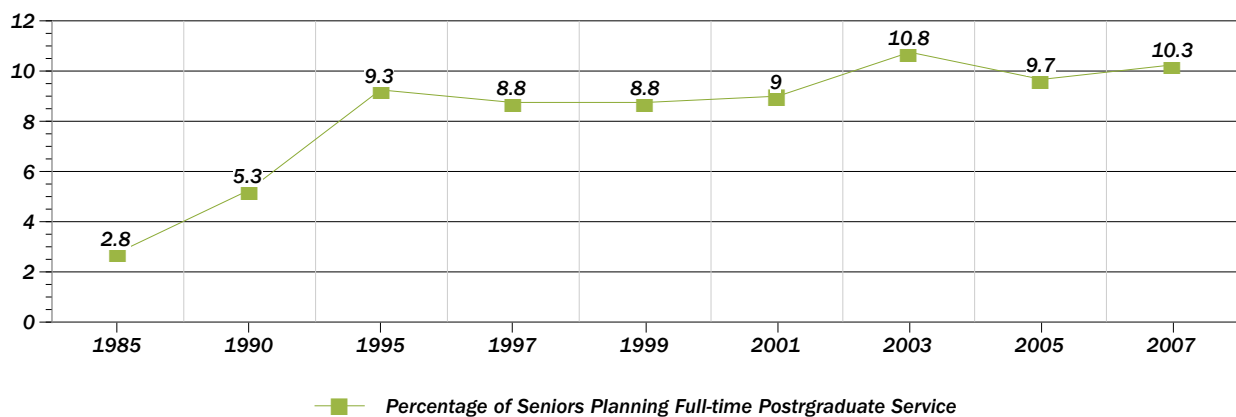
In 2007, 207 of 2025 graduating seniors (10.2%) entered programs ranging from the Alliance for Catholic Education to the Peace Corps. Many graduates (119 of the overall total of 207 in 2007) enter faith-based programs that are sponsored by churches or religious organizations and integrate prayer, reflection, and community living. For further information on postgraduate service trends, see Research Report 7.

The Center for Social Concerns also collaborates with the Notre Dame Alumni Association to support service by alumni and students across the nation. Alumni of the University play a significant role in facilitating service-learning engagements for students and serve as co-educators during placements. In 2007, for example, 116 Notre Dame Alumni clubs supported one or more Summer Service Learning participants by facilitating room and board, funding tuition scholarships, and prompting dialogue and reflection.

"What gives purpose and direction to our intellectual endeavors and our academic life is our commitment as a Catholic university to a view of human life as grounded in love of God and of neighbors. That is why service—in the community, the nation, and the world—is both preached and practiced at Notre Dame."

—Rev. John, I. Jenkins, C.S.C. *President, University of Notre Dame*

Fig. 6 Percentage of Seniors Planning Full-time Postgraduate Volunteer Service, 1985 to 2007



SOURCE: Data from Institutional Research Report Future Plans, gathered in May before graduation.

NOTE: The confirmed number of graduates entering full-time volunteer service following graduation is consistent with percentages indicated (see Center Research Report 7)

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This report documents trends in service and community-based learning participation at Notre Dame over the last twenty-five years. Data indicate that students are engaged at high levels and in multiple contexts.

Of particular interest is a potential shift from extra-curricular forms of service engagement to those integrated within courses and the curriculum. Across the nation, general forms of service engagement seem to have dipped recently (see Figure 2) from a peak in the years immediately following the events of September 11th, 2001. Students may be choosing to serve more often within classes, to take advantage of the opportunity to enhance their learning through creative engagements in community life or social challenges. Almost half (49.4%) of Notre Dame seniors reported taking a course involving community service during undergraduate years (up from 41% in 2001). Such a trend is consistent with calls to link higher learning and civic responsibility (Colby et al., 2003). Toward this end, the Center for Social Concerns at Notre Dame serves as catalyst and partner with departments, faculty, staff, alumni and community colleagues.

The data reported here outline rates of student engagement. Of equal import is what students take from their experiences, what they learn about self and society. Current and future research at the Center for Social Concerns addresses such research questions.

Social Concerns Index

Service / Learning / Civic Engagement

- 80%** Percentage of Notre Dame undergraduates who volunteer at least a few times per year
- 40** Number of student-led service and social action groups currently active on campus
- 95+** Number of service-learning and community-based learning courses offered annually at the University (including CSC Seminars)
- 49%** Percentage of Notre Dame seniors in 2007 who reported taking at least one course that involved community service during their undergraduate years (up from 41% in 2001)
- 10%** Percentage of Notre Dame students that enter full-time postgraduate service initiatives for one or two years following graduation
- 118** Number of undergraduates in Fall 2007 who participated in community-based research via twelve ND courses and related projects.

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Twenty-Five Years of Learning

*Total Participants in Center for Social Concerns Courses
Since the Opening of the Center in 1983*

3,621	Summer Service Learning Program (Three credits; one credit in early years)
324	International Summer Service Learning Program (Since inception in 1998; four credits)
5,445	Social Concerns Seminar: Appalachia (One credit)
6,488	Social Concerns Seminar: The Church and Social Action (The Urban Plunge, one credit)
14,500+	All Social Concerns Seminars (One credit, miscellaneous disciplines)
1,700+	Other three-credit courses taught by Center faculty and involving community-based learning and a focus on social concerns (in Theology, American Studies, Psychology, Economics and the like)

Postgraduate Service

3500+ Number of Notre Dame graduates that have entered
full-time postgraduate volunteer service since the
opening of the Center in 1983

Sources: Center Data Archives & the Office of the Registrar.
Numbers may be undercounted in some contexts.

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CENTER RESEARCH FACULTY AND STAFF

Jay W. Brandenberger, Ph.D.

Series Editor

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Associate Director for Academic Affairs & Research

Rev. William M. Lies, C.S.C., Ph.D.

Executive Director



UNIVERSITY OF
NOTRE DAME

Center for Social Concerns

CONTACT US

Phone: (574) 631-5293

Fax: (574) 631-4171

Online: socialconcerns.nd.edu

BY MAIL

Center for Social Concerns

PO Box 766

Notre Dame, IN 46556-0766