

Service to Others: Does it Really Matter?

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There is a lot of dialogue around Tulane nowadays about public service. Thousands of students are pursuing opportunities to contribute meaningfully to the rebuilding of New Orleans. But what's the point? Is there a deeper meaning or are we doing it just to clear our conscience so that we can go about our lives relatively undisturbed from the devastation of Katrina and her aftermath only miles away?

There may be some kernels of truth to the clearing of our conscience. But with each kernel, there is a seed of something greater—the transformative power of community service. Whether you find yourself helping a family in the 9th Ward pull apart what remains of their home or tutoring a high school senior in his third school of the year, you will have the opportunity to experience making a difference. You may come to community service because you determine somebody “less fortunate than yourself needs your help.” But, don't hold on too tightly to your understanding of the world. You will gain far more than you give. You will be taught about courage, perseverance, culture and strength. You will be taught about power, politics and society. You will be taught about yourself—your limits, your faith, your outlook, your needs, and if you are fortunate enough, you will be taught about where your passions lie. You will think about who you are and why you live your life the way you do. If none of these revelations happen for you, then begin to ask yourself why are you doing service. Getting attached to the questions may help you to gain some insight into the answers.

You may find that service is the path from charity to justice and when this happens, the line between the provider and receiver of the service will disappear. At the end of the day, you may not find yourself wondering about what you did to help somebody else, but what you did to bring about a more just society.

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