

*Faith and Education: The Notre Dame Experience*  
by  
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(1984)

"Those who enjoy the benefits of Catholic higher education have the obligation to provide our society with leadership in matters of justice and human rights."

So stated the United States Catholic Conference in its 1980 document entitled "*Catholic Education and the Pastoral Mission of the Church*." Will those who have such education be ready, able and willing to provide that leadership?

It is a question which has been and is being faced by Catholic institutions of higher education. Here at Notre Dame, the general issue of education in justice and human rights issues has been a long-standing concern. Our students have a variety of opportunities available to them, ranging from special courses to short-term projects to more in-depth experiences lasting several months in unique situations. The overall goals of these opportunities is to broaden students' understanding of justice as it relates in particular to issues affecting the lives of the poor. The more specific goal is to examine the implications of one's faith for involvement in the world. The question at hand is whether students are taking advantage of such opportunities and what effect such participation may have.

One attempt to learn more about this important area is an annual survey conducted by the Center for Social Concerns in collaboration with the Social Science Training and Research Laboratory and the Office of Analytical Studies. Each year since 1979 these offices have administered a short questionnaire to graduating seniors to learn more about the range of activities and programs in which students have participated, as well as the kinds of opinions and attitudes they hold regarding Notre Dame, the Church and American society. This paper is a brief report on the findings for the Class of 1983.

We asked the students for information about their participation in two broadly conceived areas: social awareness activities and volunteer services. The social awareness activities (e.g., Urban Plunge, World Hunger Coalition) are more likely to emphasize education to increase familiarity with societal problems and alternative approaches (e.g., work with the handicapped, tutoring) are more likely to stress direct service to needy individuals and/or groups. Approximately 90% of the seniors completed the questionnaire so that the data give a very accurate reflection of the graduating class. There are 1,552 seniors in the survey: 1,150 males, 402 females.

It may be unique to Notre Dame (comparative data are not easily available) that more than half of the students (52%) state that they have participated in volunteer service or have become engaged in social awareness activities during their years at Notre Dame (see Table 1). Some 15% of the students have participated in both social awareness and volunteer service activities. In keeping with traditional service patterns in the U.S., women are more likely to have been involved in social awareness activities

and volunteer service than are men: 64% of all women and 48% of men have participated in either or both types.

Table 2 indicates involvement according to the college in which the student had been enrolled. In looking at social awareness and volunteer service collectively, it can be seen that Arts and Letters students are proportionally more involved than are students from other colleges.

It is interesting to note, however, that Science students are as likely to be involved in volunteer service or both volunteer service and social awareness concerns as are Arts and Letters students. The main difference between the two colleges is that Science students are slightly less likely to be involved in social awareness concerns alone. Engineering students are least likely to be involved in these endeavors, followed closely by students in the College of Business. It is unclear at this point to what extent this involvement is related to curricular opportunities or teaching within the colleges and to what extent the different patterns of behavior may be due to a self selection process in which students who have been oriented toward volunteer service and social issues are also the students who are more likely to select the College of Arts and Letters.

The comparatively high rate of involvement by students in the College of Science suggests that superficial explanations need to be challenged. Typical of such explanations is that the curricular demands of some majors or colleges may curtail this kind of activity. Such assertions need to be examined more thoroughly. One plausible explanation for the Science student involvement is related to interest in the health professions. Approximately 80% of the students in Science intend to go on to medical, dental or one of the other health professional schools. As a result, they are encouraged to participate in some kind of health-related volunteer service activity to test out their future career plans as well as to demonstrate their concern for others to the professional schools.

What accounts for those students who participate in such activities without any administrative encouragement to do so? These issues are not addressed in the present study but are under consideration for future examination. As discussed below, however, the fact of participation is related to significant differences in one's relationship to the Church and to one's awareness of values in the classroom.

### *Relation of Background and Campus Experience to Involvement*

Background characteristics certainly affect students' tendency to participate in social awareness and volunteer service activities. Students with strong religious orientations who attend mass weekly are more likely to be involved in these activities than are students who do not attend mass weekly (Table 3). Transfer students are also more likely to be involved than non-transfer students. Student experiences at Notre Dame are also associated with participants in these activities. Those who have opted for foreign study, for example, are more likely to participate in social awareness or volunteer service activities more than are those without such experience. Students who have been active in student or hall government are also more likely to have been involved in such activities than are those who have not. Furthermore, there is a difference (although not as pronounced) between ROTC students and those with either no ROTC experience or less than a two-year exposure. Those with two years or more are somewhat more likely to have been involved in both social awareness and volunteer service activities.

## *Differing Orientations of the Involved and the Non-Involved*

With this description of the involved and the non-involved, we turn to the question of the differences between the two groups in regard to their attitudes about the Church, Notre Dame and the United States society in general. In most instances there are differences in the experiences and perceptions between those students who were involved to those who were not. For most items, the greatest difference is found between students involved in both activities (social awareness and volunteer service activities combined) and those students involved in neither. We asked the students to express either agreement or disagreement with a number of items. For the sake of clarity, we will examine the issues in two general categories: 1) religious concerns and Notre Dame, and 2) broader societal issues.

As Table 4 indicates, those students who have been involved in social awareness or volunteer service activities are more likely than those who have not to indicate that they feel close to the Church. They agree that social justice involvement is an intrinsic part of the Christian commitment. They are less likely to agree that assisting the poor is more a matter of charity than justice. They are more likely to agree that the Church ought to be more involved in the political life of the country. Regarding their educational experiences, they are more likely than the non-involved to concur that their teachers brought an awareness of values to the classroom and that they have been aided by the faculty and staff to relate their faith to contemporary moral issues. Involved students are more likely to feel that sexual intercourse outside of marriage is always seriously wrong.

In examining attitudes about American society, it can be seen in Table 5 that the involved students appear to have different perceptions about contemporary societal issues when compared to the non-involved. They are, for example, less likely to believe that success is simply the result of good work on the job, less likely to agree that individual freedom is synonymous with the profit system, less likely to agree that people on welfare are cheating the system, and are more likely to believe that a national health care plan is important. Involved students agree more strongly than non-involved students that we need more attempts to redistribute wealth internationally, that social programs ought not to be sacrificed for military preparedness, and that the United States could be doing more to keep the peace.

It should be noted that there is no substantive difference between the involved and the non-involved in attitudes about women's roles and in attitudes about the USSR's efforts to keep peace.

### *Implications of the Survey*

This survey does not provide the opportunity to pinpoint cause and effect. It is clear, however, that there are important differences between students who become involved in social awareness and volunteer service activities and those who do not. Involved students feel closer to the Church and are more involved in the Church. They have more orthodox beliefs than non-involved students in the area of sexual morality and seem more aware of the presentation of values and of ways in which their faith can relate to contemporary life. The involved students have a higher grade point average as well.

In contrast to those who are not involved in either social awareness or volunteer service activities, involved students have a different view of societal problems and issues. They appear more likely to understand structural factors that influence individual success and more committed than the others to upgrading the standard of living of the poor both at home and abroad. The involved student sees more of a role for the Church in the life of the nation in the attempts to resolve issues affecting justice and human rights.

We do not have longitudinal data which would enable us to determine the exact effect of participation in social awareness and volunteer service activities upon students' expression of their faith. Certainly the faith one brings to Notre Dame has an impact upon one's educational choices. On the other hand, research might indicate that one's experience while at Notre Dame shape the expressions of one's religiosity. In short, participation in volunteer service and social awareness opportunities is associated with a generally higher level of societal awareness and a more affirmative orientation in addressing societal needs. Future studies (currently seeking funding) will have to explicitly address the complex relationship between participation and the type and quality of expressions of one's faith. Clearly of interest is the impact of experiential learning programs on such expressions. The Center for Social Concerns has as one of its fundamental tasks the examination of such relationships in an effort to provide the University with updated information on the total educational experiences of our students. Such information should enable all of us who are concerned with the educational mission of the University to better understand what it is that we can and must do to provide that leadership in "matters of justice and human rights," which the vision of the U.S. Catholic Conference holds up for us.

*Table 1*

*1983 Graduating Seniors Involved in  
Social Awareness and Volunteer Service Activities  
by Sex  
(Percentages)*

	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Total</i>
Social Awareness Activities	7	11	8
Volunteer Service Activities	27	29	27
Involved in Both Activities	15	24	17
Percent Involved in One or Both	48	64	52
Percent Involved in Neither	52	36	48
Number of Students	1,150	402	1,552

Table 2

*1983 Graduating Seniors Involved in  
Social Awareness and Volunteer Service Activities  
by College  
(Percentages)*

	Arts & Letters	Business	Engineering	Science
Social Awareness Activities	11	5	8	5
Volunteer Service Activities	29	27	21	34
Involved in Both Activities	22	12	13	20
Percent Involved in One or Both	62	44	42	59
Percent Involved in Neither	38	56	58	41
Number of Students	537	378	379	259

*Table 3*

*Social Awareness and Volunteer Service Activities  
Involvement by Various Categories  
(Percentages)*

	Social Awareness Activities	Volunteer Service Activities	Involved in Both Activities	Involved in Neither
<u>Foreign Study</u>				
Participants	13	28	30	29
Non-participants	6	23	13	59
<u>Weekly Mass</u>				
Participants	10	32	25	33
Non-Participants	4	17	8	70
<u>Transfer to Notre Dame</u>				
Yes	8	33	20	38
No	6	22	14	57
<u>Student or Hall Government</u>				
Participants	10	34	20	36
Non-Participants	5	18	12	65
<u>ROTC</u>				
Two or more years	8	28	16	48
Less than 2 years	7	23	14	57

*Table 4*  
*Involvement in Social Awareness and Volunteer Service*  
*by Religious Attitudes and Experiences*  
*(Percentages/agreeing with Item)*

	Social Awareness Activities	Volunteer Service Activities	Involved in Both Activities	Involved in Neither
My relationship to the institutional Church is very close	60	56	62	42
Assisting the poor is more a matter of charity than justice	16	28	14	32
In the future, I think the Catholic Church should play a more important and crucial role in political life of the country.	47	37	59	32
Unless a person is significantly involved in working toward social justice he/she is not fully committed to the Christian faith.	42	32	52	24
Sexual intercourse outside of marriage is always seriously wrong.	30	22	25	17
I have been personally helped by faculty and staff while at Notre Dame to relate my faith to contemporary moral issues.	61	57	76	43
Teachers I have had in my college at Notre Dame generally brought to their classes an awareness of the value implications related to their courses.	86	57	86	43



*Table 5*  
*Involvement in Social Awareness Activities and Volunteer Service*  
*Activities in Relationship to Societal Issues*  
*(Percentages Agreeing with Item)*

	Social Awareness Activities	Volunteer Service Activities	Involved in Both Activities	Involved in Neither
In almost any business or profession, people who do their job well rise to the top.	45	58	42	49
Anyone against the profit system is taking a stand against individual freedom.	18	27	16	29
Many people receiving public assistance are cheating the welfare department.	47	65	45	59
While racial equality is an important goal, it is primarily the responsibility of blacks and other minorities to achieve.	14	13	7	13
A national health care plan is needed to cover everybody's medical costs.	51	43	56	44
There ought to be major redistribution of wealth from rich countries to poor countries in working toward global justice.	44	37	60	26
It is unfortunate that the United States is contributing so little (per capita) development assistance to poorer countries in proportion to other wealthy industrial countries.	62	54	73	46
It is important that the United States strengthen its military preparedness at this point in history, even though cost may hurt valuable social programs.	27	34	18	40
The U.S. is doing all it can to keep peace in the world.	21	30	12	27
The USSR is doing all it can to keep peace in the world.	2	4	5	4
The activities of married women are best confined to the home and family.	11	10	11	11