

## **A Brief History of the Summer Service Program**

In 1957, the University established a Summer Service program in local churches whereby college students could gain experience in a service-oriented leadership role. The purpose of the program was for students to gain leadership skills, develop their spirituality, and to live out their commitment to serving the wider community. In the pilot year, eight students were sent in pairs to serve six weeks in church settings in four sites in California, Oregon, Washington, and Idaho. Room and board were covered for the duration of the service and students were provided a small tuition credit for participating in the program (originally \$150). In its second year, 31 students participated. Because of the level of leadership required at each site, students were required to take a course in the spring term to prepare them for their summer experience. Because of the increased participation, the tuition credit was decreased to \$100 in the second year because the available resources for the program could not keep up with the program's popularity. The Church of the Brethren denomination recognized the strength of the program for developing leadership and decided to financially assist La Verne's program in these early years, increasing the tuition credit to \$420. In 1962, through the generous donation of O.P. Williams, an endowment fund was started and later added to by many donors over the years, providing long-term support for the program. Today the Summer Service Endowment Fund provides approximately 15 students a \$3000 tuition scholarship. We regularly place 20-25 students each year, and rely on annual donations to supplement the endowment in order to meet student interest in the program and community needs. From its beginning, the University held a Summer Service Dinner to thank donors for their support and to hear reflections from those students who had returned from their summer experience. This program has been possible because of the generous and consistent support from donors.

The goals of the program have been consistent over the last 60 years:

1. To encourage social awareness and responsibility
2. To train students for future leadership positions
3. To facilitate the development of spiritual values
4. To assist in clarification of career choices
5. To provide needed service in the community

While the goals have remained constant the focus of service has expanded. In the early 1970's the focus widened from "church leadership" to "Christian leadership," recognizing that service extended beyond the church to any kind of work that helped meet human needs. Volunteer sites expanded to include social service agencies and non-profits, community organizations, summer camps, as well as churches. Today, the program is fully engaged with the multi-religious and multi-cultural context of our communities. As La Verne's community became more religiously and philosophically diverse, the program welcomed students of various religious and non-religious traditions, and expanded the range of volunteer sites to include various religious communities and secular organizations.

The Summer Service program has always had a close tie with the curriculum at La Verne. As previously mentioned, the earliest students were required to take a leadership course to prepare them for their work in churches. In the 1970's the course was replaced with a two-day retreat. However, in the mid-1990's, when La Verne added a community service requirement, the Summer Service program became one of the ways in which students could fulfill this requirement. Today, students take the course, "Learning Through Community Service" and complete the course while they are serving. They select two inspiring books of their choosing. One must help them examine and engage with their inner self, such as their values, spirituality, meaning or purpose. The other book must engage them with issues of social change, social justice, community engagement,

or diversity. Students are also required to journal throughout the summer and submit a final reflection paper that focuses on their growth and learning over the summer. Each student sets a personal, service and spiritual/reflective goal for the summer.

Today, the Summer Service Program provides students with an opportunity to make a positive difference, serving and engaging with the wider community for a 10-week summer volunteer experience. The program places an emphasis on leadership development, personal and spiritual growth, and reflection on what it means to be a socially responsible citizen. At the center of the program is the opportunity to develop one's skills in interfaith leadership, intentionally engaging with others across lines of difference to help make a more peaceful and just world. Volunteer sites include religious, secular, and social service organizations in California, Virginia, Washington, and Oregon. The program welcomes students of all religious, philosophical, and secular perspectives.