

► I recruit three to five successful students from an earlier semester to serve as peer mentors for independent study credit. Peer mentors help integrate the service experience into the course and gain valuable experience in the process. They serve as role models, help students choose and begin a service learning project, lead small group reflection sessions, and assist with other projects. It has been a great learning experience for them and also helps solve the problem of resistance while facilitating the integration of the service experiences into the classroom.

#### Outcomes

Overall, the course reviews have been very positive. Student outcomes indicate that the service learning component helps achieve course objectives. For example, according to student evaluation surveys, a large majority of students:

- agreed that the service learning component enhanced their learning in the course
- reported that the service learning experience in the course made them more aware of community needs.

Many students wrote in journals and on student evaluation forms that they were inspired to continue their service work. Their comments include: "I plan on being more active in my community" and "I plan on keeping this up and getting others interested in it."

Although I sometimes encounter initial resistance to service learning, by the end of the semester students come to see the value of this approach to learning. In fact, many comment that it was their favorite part of the course and thank me for providing the opportunity to get involved.

One student made this comment on her final exam: "This class has changed my way of thinking on so many issues. You have really changed the way I look at things...I come home from class each day and pass on what I have learned to family...I hope to take what I have learned and maybe change things one little step at a time." I couldn't be more pleased.

I opened this essay with Peter Berger's warning about the effects of studying sociology. I agree that learning about the nature of the world can be upsetting and, for some, even lead to feelings of hopelessness. However, it is my belief that studying sociology, especially with a service learning component, can counteract hopelessness with feelings of efficacy. That is why I teach sociology and why I use service learning. As Virginia Gildersleeve (an early 20th century educator) put it:

The ability to think straight, some knowledge of the past, some vision of the future, some skill to do useful service, some urge to fit that service into the well-being of the community ... these are the most vital things education must try to produce.

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## OCCASIONAL PAPERS

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The New York Campus Compact Occasional Papers are designed to advance an understanding of and appreciation for collegiate civic engagement. This, the first Occasional Paper, describes one professor's success in developing a service learning component for a sociology course.

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### SERVICE LEARNING IN SOCIOLOGY: Replacing Hopelessness with Efficacy

by Heather Sullivan-Catlin (SUNY Potsdam)

People who like to avoid shocking discoveries, who prefer to believe that society is just what they were taught in Sunday School, who like the safety of the rules and maxims of... the world taken for granted should stay away from sociology.  
-Peter Berger (Invitation to Sociology, 1963, 24)

► I became a sociologist for the same reason that many of my colleagues have pursued this discipline: to change the world.

More specifically, we pursue sociology to understand social problems in order to help solve them. As a result, teaching our discipline can often be an exercise in consciousness-raising and students often learn the lesson alluded to by Peter Berger: sociology can shake you up.

Indeed, learning sociology is about developing a new way of looking at the world. C. Wright Mills (1959) called it "the sociological imagination" - a lens that enables us to see the relationship between individual experiences and larger social and historical forces. Developing one's ability to see the systemic roots of problems that society often attributes to personal failures (such as poverty) can be unsettling and can often lead to a sense of hopelessness. But rather than leave them depressed I

hope to inspire students to take action. Service learning can help students develop a sense of efficacy while providing them with the tools to become engaged citizens (Eyler and Giles 1999; Hironimus-Wendt and Lovell-Troy 1999; Myers-Lipton 1998; Sullivan-Catlin 2002). I will describe here my use of service learning in the introductory sociology course beginning with a brief introduction to service learning pedagogy and its applicability to the teaching of sociology at my institution.

#### Service Learning

The field of sociology is extremely broad, but a central theme is that there is a structure to social groups - groups as small as families and as large as entire societies - and that structure influences the experiences of every individual in the group. However, as Hovory has argued "social structure cannot be seen, and thus students learning about it must experience directly or indirectly its dimensions. Service learning provides that opportunity to see how social location shapes so much of what occurs in our individual and collective experiences" (1999, 152).