Proposal for Humanities and Volunteering Seminar

Submitted by Beth Ann Williams

**Title:** Pro Humanitate Student Seminars: Drawing on the Humanities to enrich the Student Volunteer Experience

**Description:** The Pro Humanitate Student Seminars will take their participants below the surface of their volunteer experiences, using the Humanities to help students critically reflect on their service. The discussion and reflection promoted by the seminars will enrich the students’ personal development and increase their capacity to serve their organization.

**Precedent:** Wake Forest’s student body is already heavily involved in volunteering, both on campus and within Winston-Salem. The importance of service as a key university priority has already been embraced by the Wake Forest community. There has been less emphasis, however, on reflecting and reporting on these volunteer experiences. Consequently many students do not enjoy the full benefit of their service encounters, perhaps even viewing these experiences as little more than resume builders or hours to be filled. The Pro Humanitate Student Seminars will work to correct this, providing a forum for intentional reflection and improving the quality of Wake’s already vibrant volunteer culture.

**Format:** The seminars will meet 3-4 times a semester, over the course of one academic year. Location TBD (Benson, PDC classroom, etc...)

The group will explore literature (a book, articles, or creative media) related to the chosen topic before meeting. Gathering together, we will process our understanding of the literature, its legitimacy, strengths and weaknesses, and what it can tell us about the chosen topic. We will discuss any questions it raised and problematize our previous understanding of the issues covered.

The second half of the session will be spent reflecting on how, if at all, our discussion should affect our personal volunteering experiences. What actions will we take, if any, in reaction to what we have learned about our situation and ourselves?

**Faculty Advisor:** A faculty advisor should be attached to the program, although the seminars will primarily be convened not by faculty but by individuals already involved in facilitating campus volunteering. This advisor will provide advice regarding discussion materials and serve as a consistent, stabilizing presence as new seminars are convened.

**Budget:** A small budget will be requested to provide refreshments and materials.
Primary goals and anticipated outcomes for participants:

- Through reading and discussing the chosen literature, participants will expand their understanding of the seminar’s topic, especially as that topic reflects on the roles and responsibilities of volunteers within their organization.

- Participants will be driven to engage critically with their volunteer position, to consider their role within the organization and how they can make it better. They should no longer view their experience as a simple resume builder, but as an opportunity to live out the university’s pro humanitate motto.

- Participants will be empowered to participate in the ongoing campus-wide and national dialog regarding the Humanities and their contribution to the Common Good, detailing how the participants’ engagement with a humanistic perspective on their volunteer experience strengthened their capacity to serve.

Pilot Seminar:

The WF Baptist Health Experience: Where Do I fit?
(tentative title- to be revised when topic/materials are determined)

This is a new Seminar, submitted September 2011.

Convener: Beth Ann Williams

Participants: Students volunteering at Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center
- Anticipated: 6-10 core participants

Topic: Administration of a hospital and/or patient experience: using the Humanities to awaken participant awareness of the administration of a hospital and/or patient experience and applying new understanding to deepen the vibrancy of individual volunteer experiences within the WF Baptist Health structure.

Potential Future Seminar Partnerships:
- Campus Kitchen
- Children’s Center for the Physically Disabled
- Wake Saturdays
- VSC