1. From Millennials Rising

Neil Howe and William Strauss

The definition of "community service" has morphed from one generation to the next, dating back to World War II. For the Silent [generation that came of age in the 1940s], community deed-doing was channeled by the Selective Service law, which pushed young males toward socially acceptable deferments such as teaching, science, or even marriage. For leading-edge Boomers, the term "community service" often meant cleaning hospital bedsheets to avoid Vietnam—or for the more radically minded, spurring oppressed neighborhoods to vent their grievances against the "establishment." When the draft ended, in 1973, first-wave Boomers had eliminated mandatory civic duty for their later cohorts and the generation to follow. Growing up in the era of the Volunteer Army, Gen Xers developed their own ethic of volunteerism, de-emphasizing great crusades in favor of simple acts of charity to help needy people. For teenagers, "community service" came to mean punishment for drunk drivers and Breakfast Club miscreants.

By the Millennium era [people born between 1982 and 2002], the notion of volunteering gave way to a more compulsory "service learning," which is now often required for graduation from middle or high school. Bolstered by Acts of Congress in 1990 and 1993, which created the Learn and Serve America program, the integration of community service with academic study has spread to schools everywhere. From 1984 to 1999, the share of high schools offering any kind of community service program grew from 17 to 83 percent, and the share with "service learning" grew from 9 to 46 percent. Two-thirds of all public schools at all grade levels now have students engaged in community work, often...as part of the curriculum.

A new Millennial service ethic is emerging, built around notions of collegial (rather than individual) action, support for (rather than resistance against) civic institutions, and the tangible doing of good deeds. Surveys show that five of every six Millennials believe their generation has the greatest duty to improve the environment—and that, far more than older people, Millennials would impose extra civic duties on themselves, including taxes to achieve results.

2. Community Service Mission Statement

The Dalton School. (A small private high school)

Community Service is something that needs to be done. Community Service situates our moral center; it teaches us through experience—about the relationship between empathy and responsibility, about what it takes to be part of a community, in essence, about being human. Inherent in the notion of community
service are the feelings of optimism and empowerment: we are optimistic that the world can change for the better and when empowered to effect that change, we as individuals can make a difference. There are no more important lessons that we can learn and teach.

For Survival
We are members of many communities: family, school, neighborhood, city, country, religion, and ethnic group. It is from these communities that we gain our sustenance. We must each play a role in contributing to our communities so that these communities can continue to survive and prosper. Benevolent action is essential to the survival and prosperity of any community. We must engage in community service because it needs to be done and because we need our communities to survive.

For a Moral Center
Community Service is vital to the healthy community. A community that takes without giving back, that is indifferent to the needs of its fellow members, that is only concerned with individual measures of success, is a weak, unsound community. The strength of a community can be found in its moral center; the ability to articulate and act upon a defined moral center will fortify a community. The moral center of a community, that place where we can find the values of empathy, compassion, and caring, is the basis for civic responsibility and the success of that community.

For Personal Enrichment
Doing Community Service is empowering. When an individual goes out in the world and interacts with other people in the spirit of bettering, that individual makes a contribution and will feel a sense of accomplishment. We are reminded all too often of the cynicism, indifference, and isolation that exists in our society. Community Service, the taking of physical action, reminds us of our connection and ability to connect. It is important to study the great actions of others, but participating in community service enables the individual to learn for himself and to teach herself.

For the Institutional Community
Our school is a place of learning; we need to integrate the ideals of Community Service into our academic curriculum. Because Community Service embodies experiential learning, locating a moral center, community health, because it is about empowerment and making the world a better place, because these issues are at the core of being, we need to do it. The desire to act comes from a pride, caring, and respect for a community. Community Service must be harnessed to foster a sense of community in a school, a neighborhood, and beyond.

3. Volunteer Work Opens Teen’s Eyes to Nursing

_The Detroit News, April 16, 2005_

If you asked 13-year-olds to make a list of their favorite after-school activities, visiting with the elderly probably wouldn’t be a top choice. But it would be for John Prueter, son of Keith and Barbara Prueter of Easvville, who says he’d spend time with older generations every day if he could.

“All the older people are nice people,” he said. “They like to see young people come visit in these homes.” Prueter, a seventh-grader at Cramer Junior High School, spends much of his after-school time at the Alterra Sterling House, an assisted-living home in Hamptons Township.

Prueter got into volunteering with the elderly almost two years ago when his great-grandmother, Mable Post, suffered a stroke. Always close to her, Prueter visited her regularly when she was in the hospital. After 100 days, she was transferred to Alterra, where she still lives. Now, instead of coming just to visit a relative, he comes to volunteer and visit with everyone. He is the youngest of Alterra’s regular volunteers and one of the most frequent visitors.

Prueter spends his time there helping with activities such as cooking and gardening, playing games with residents and just chatting with them. He speaks to the residents on a level that makes them feel good, said Pam O’Laughlin, executive director for Alterra’s Bay City campus. “He has a unique ability to communicate with these folks,” she said. “He’s not timid. They look forward to him coming.” Prueter sometimes takes the residents small gifts, such as cake on a birthday, and often calls them when he cannot come in.

He’s willing to help Alterra’s staff with any activities, O’Laughlin said. For example, he helped residents make cheesecakes for Easter. He helps with gardening and crafts, and calls the bingo games each Sunday. He also helps with mail delivery, assists nurses and helps residents get ready for special trips or concerts.

Virginia Ball, an 85-year-old resident, says Prueter visits with her regularly when he stops in. He runs and answers her phone when he hears it ringing down the hall and helps out with other tasks. “He’ll offer to fold laundry,” she said. But if there is nothing to do to help, Prueter will just sit in her room and chat. “He seems to enjoy talking to older people,” Ball said.

His service at Alterra earned him an outstanding youth volunteer award from Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 6950. Prueter wants to be in the marching band when he moves up to Garber High School. But he says he doesn’t plan on letting practice get in the way of his visits to Alterra. Even after high school, Prueter hopes to continue working with the elderly by studying nursing. He says he became interested in the field because of his volunteer work.

His dream job, he says, is working where he volunteers now.
4. In the Good Name of Community Service
(summary)

TARA BAHRAMPOUR, WASHINGTON POST, MARCH 7, 2005

Willie Grothman and Tim Phang of Washington-Lee High School in Arlington, Virginia have formed a student service organization called the Willie Grothman Club, which involves community service without minimum hours or mandatory attendance or even formal enrollment. Anyone can join, even if only to participate in a single activity. They have held ten events, many of which have involved walking — for AIDS, for the homeless and for breast cancer in an event in which they took turns walking relays all night around a track in the rain. The group plans to go bowling soon to benefit cystic fibrosis research. For such events they collect pledges of money from friends and family members for each mile walked or each bowling pin knocked over.

Club members remind potential recruits that besides offering a chance to be helpful and make friends, participation in the Willie Grothman Club looks good on college applications. "All the college people I've been talking to have been fairly impressed," Grothman said. To add luster to that aura, they are generous in bestowing titles and offices. "I won't lie — I mean, we created a lot of positions," Grothman said. "But when you're putting it on a college application, you want to at least have an officer position." He admits that the club began "as a ridiculous joke" but is proud that "we made something of it, which is more than a lot of school clubs do."

5. Mandatory Volunteerism

ARTHUR STEKAS, MARK SYNDER, AND E. GIL CLARY

PSYCHOLOGICAL SCIENCE, JANUARY 1999

Two studies suggest that community service requirements can have negative effects on students' intentions to volunteer freely in the future but only when students feel that they aren’t ready to volunteer or that the requirement is too controlling. Students who are ready to volunteer should be less influenced by requirements to serve.

Students who were not "ready" to volunteer were less affected by the free choice condition — that is, researchers were able to persuade them to volunteer while making sure that they still felt that it was their free choice and they were more likely to want to volunteer in the future than "not ready" students who had been required. Students were just as likely to want to continue volunteering after being required as after having a free choice to volunteer. To avoid the negative effects of mandatory volunteer programs on students' motivation, institutions should design these programs to contain an element of free choice and to offer

programs that allow students to choose the type of volunteer activity they will engage in or allow them to combine personal interests and skills with their service requirements. Researchers found that students who initially did not want to volunteer found that they actually enjoyed helping others if requirements were applied gently and with their input and involvement in the process.

6. Volunteer (cartoon)

THE BREEZE, JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY NEWSPAPER
7. From Youth Attitudes toward Civic Education and Community Service Requirements (graphs)

MARK HUGO LOPEZ, THE CENTER FOR INFORMATION AND RESEARCH ON CIVIC LEARNING AND ENGAGEMENT, 2002

Graph 1: Attitudes toward Requiring Community Service for a High School Diploma, by Age

Graph 2: Attitudes toward Requiring Community Service for a High School Diploma, by Level of Educational Success

• Source 1, the excerpt from *Millennials Rising*, points out that legislation supports "the integration of community service with academic study." This raises the question of whether required community service should be part of a student's course work.

• Source 2, the mission statement from a small private school, offers an argument based on morality, a sense of responsibility, and belonging to a community. However, the statement is from a small private school. Might this influence its wider application?

• Source 3, "Volunteer Work Opens Teen's Eyes to Nursing," is quite positive and possibly persuasive if you are writing in support of community service. However, it focuses on the experience of a seventh-grader, which might not be relevant to high schools.

• Source 4, "In the Good Name of Community Service," is a good counter-example to Source 3. It reports on the cynical attitude of students who develop community service efforts specifically to bolster their college applications. Granted, this particular case does not involve a required community program, but it could be argued that such exploitation might be encouraged by a requirement that some will satisfy only for their own gain.

• Source 5, "Mandatory Volunteerism" from *Psychological Science*, reports research showing that requiring activities that should be voluntary discourages future involvement in those activities, making it less likely that community service will be a lifelong habit.

• Source 6, "Volunteer" the flyer, emphasizes an upbeat, try-it-you'll-like-it advertising claim. It could be interpreted as questioning the motivation for performing community service or even whether "mandatory volunteering" is an oxymoron.

• Source 7, the graphs from a study by Mark Hugo Lopez, a researcher from the University of Maryland, raises further questions about required community service. Graph 1 shows that support for requiring such service is weakest among those currently in school and is evenly split among those over the age of twenty-one. Does this finding suggest that community service is "good medicine" for high school students, who will eventually appreciate the experience? Graph 2 shows that young people with greater levels of education (completion of a BA or some college work, as opposed to only a high school education) are more likely to support a community service requirement in high schools.

**Formulating Your Position**

Before you formulate your position, it may be helpful to take stock of the issues. In analyzing the texts on community service, the following issues emerge:

• Does requiring community service devalue it?

• Does requiring it discourage future participation?

• Does the positive experience that most volunteers have offset their initial reluctance to participate?

• How does the structure of the community service program — is it part of academic study? Are there choices? — affect its perceived value?

• Can such a requirement be safeguarded from exploitation for an individual's personal gain? If so, how?

• What values about community and education underlie a service requirement?

• What influence does socioeconomic situation play in such a requirement? For example, if students need to earn money, can required community service programs be designed to accommodate them?

• How does a school system determine how many hours of service to require?

These questions — and others you might have — illustrate the complexity of the issue and ensure that you do not develop an argument that is one-sided or even polarized between yes and no. Instead, you are now prepared to write a documented essay that reflects the complexities surrounding the topic.

With these questions and issues in mind, you can begin to formulate a thesis, or claim, that captures your position on the topic. Consider the following working thesis statements:

• Community service can be extremely valuable in the development of both character and academics, but the negative effects of forcing students to participate by making such programs a graduation requirement offset the benefits.

• Though students may not recognize the value of community service until later in life, high school should require community service to instill a sense of civic responsibility and encourage a lifelong habit of helping others.

• High schools should encourage students to participate in community service and reward those who do so without making participation mandatory for graduation.

• Required community service programs are beneficial to both the individuals who participate and the communities being served, as long as students have some choice in the type of service they engage in.

Although you might want to tailor these working thesis statements to use in your essay, each one suggests a clear focus while acknowledging the complexities of the issue.