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GEORGE WARREN BROWN SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
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RESEARCH BRIEF

A SUMMARY OF CSD'S CURRENT RESEARCH AND FELLOWS PROGRAM

Understanding Civic Service: International Research & Application

In February 2007, the Center for Social Development (CSD) welcomed 31 Research Fellows from 17 countries to Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, for a five-day seminar showcasing the Fellows' latest research on civic service and volunteerism worldwide. The Fellows, selected in 2002 and 2005 from an international pool of applicants, completed original research on multiple aspects of civic service across more than 30 countries, contributing to the growing international knowledge base on civic service. The seminar, "Understanding Civic Service: International Research and Application," represented the culmination of the CSD Fellows program. Fellows offered unique perspectives on civic service based on their areas of expertise, and identified key questions and strategies to guide future research and policy. They also offered their expertise to the Washington University community, participating on panels on international practicum placements, publication opportunities for civic service research, and careers in civic service.

Emerging Themes in Civic Service

Functions of Service

An important theme of the seminar was the complex relationship between the function of civic service and its economic, social, political and cultural contexts. In "Conceptualizing Civic Service across National and Regional Contexts," a round table discussion led by CSD Fellows Leila

Patel and Helene Perold, the researchers acknowledged the differences in voluntary action across nations and cultures, especially in Africa and Latin America, where civic service is less institutionalized. Unlike the United States and Western Europe, informal volunteering is the most prevalent form of service in these regions. CSD Fellow Danielle Vogenbeck extended this idea, noting that different meanings of volunteering and service also exist in different parts of the United States. The discussion suggests that forms of service vary, not only because of regional differences, but also because of the characteristics of the communities where it takes place and the types of relationships that exist among stakeholders, servers, and beneficiaries.

The Center for Social Development's Civic Service Research Fellows' Seminar, February 27 – March 4, 2007

The "Narratives" of Service

If service is assigned a "function" according to the context where it takes place, it is not unfeasible to conceive service as a human activity embedded in societal values and sustained by culture, traditions, and language. Supporting this view, Menon, McBride & Sherraden (2002) write that "context matters for how people interact with others in society; it influences how people perceive the relationship between their actions and their responsibilities toward others".

In his keynote speech, "Collective Memory and Civil Society," Professor James V. Wertsch addressed the relationship between civic service and context from a different point of view. Wertsch, who serves as both a professor and the Director of International and Area Studies at Washington University in St. Louis, draws on the notion of "narratives" to describe community values and self-identity. Wertsch's research on collective memory and the development of civil society suggests that the meaning assigned to service as a human activity is accomplished through acts of interpretation and reconfiguration of collective experiences. The relevance of Wertsch's research to the work of the CSD Fellows was evident in presentations by Chandra Bhatta and Peter Devereux.

CSD Fellow Chandra Bhatta's study examined how the narrative surrounding civic service in Nepal has changed over a period of 40 years. In his presentation, "Nepal's National Service: Perceptions and Policy," Bhatta argued that the institutionalization of volunteerism in the 1950s and the professionalization of service accompanying the NGO revolution of the early 1990s led to a fundamental shift in the understanding of service. As a result of this shift, the traditional participatory welfare approach to service once typical of Nepal was replaced by a more western concept of "offering oneself for any service." This politicization of service, Bhatta argued, threatens notions of "citizenship and nationalism" in the Nepali context.

CSD Fellow Peter Devereux's presentation, "International Volunteers in Community Science for Sustainable Development," offered a different view on Wertsch's notion of social constructs and narratives. Drawing on data commissioned by the Voluntary Service Organization in 2002, Devereux found that UK citizens possessed a "shrinking global view" characterized by misconceptions of developing countries. UK citizens who were long-term volunteers, however, reported consciously reevaluating these pre-conceived ideas as a result of their volunteer experiences. This shift in viewpoint, which in turn affected the quality of relationships between volunteers and their beneficiaries, appears to be necessary to a civic service program's success. Performance measures, therefore, should focus on the quality of these relationships. In a similar vein, Devereux noted that consideration of local context and beneficiaries' knowledge of community needs and resources is crucial to the design of effective programs. More conventional top-down program design, on the other hand, contributes to a narrative of dependency instead of promoting a true exchange.

> ### RESOURCES ON COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND CIVIL SOCIETY
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> James V. Wertsch is the Marshall S. Snow Professor of Arts and Sciences and Director of International and Area Studies at Washington University in St. Louis. His most recent book is *Voices of the mind: A sociocultural approach to mediated action* (2006).

Social Inclusion and Broader Participation

During the seminar, the theme of "inclusion" was also dominant—from inclusion of all stakeholders in research, policy, and program development to inclusive approaches that enable all individuals to have equal access to service programs. For example, CSD Fellows Agnes Uhereczky and John Stringham presented on the current efforts of the Association of Voluntary Service Organizations (AVSO) to promote policies in the European Union that facilitate cross border participation. Both practitioners stressed the importance of policies that enable transnational mobility or the right of servers and volunteers to move freely within the European Union. Mobility for servers should also include non-discrimination policies, encouraging those who are economically disadvantaged, disabled, or members of ethnic minority groups to participate in voluntary and civic service.

During her presentation on United Nations Volunteers in Mongolia, CSD Fellow Erdenechimeg Tserendorjiin also emphasized civic service as an important strategy for youth policy in countries like Mongolia where the youth population is the largest demographic group. Based on her research, Tserendorjiin concluded that civic service offered an effective means of improving the skills of Mongolia's workforce. She also noted the important role service could play in promoting social inclusion by focusing on leveraging local resources.

The Role of Government and Faith-Based Organizations in Promoting Service

The role that government agencies and faith-based organizations and government agencies play in supporting civic service dominated the discussion during the research panel on "Volunteerism and Service in Latin America." According to the panelists, government and faith-based organizations have an important role in creating mechanisms that encourage individuals to engage in service in Latin America. For example, CSD Fellows Anabel Cruz and Lucia Perez Bruzzone discussed possible

national government strategies to promote elders' volunteerism, such as the creation of a national register of elder service initiatives by program type and geographic location. An official directory of elder service programs would promote awareness of existing programs and encourage increased participation. Cruz and Bruzzone's research found that many older adults do not have knowledge about existing programs, although such programs appear to offer critical resources to a population that is often isolated and ignored.

Faith-based organizations also play a crucial role in the design and implementation of service programs in Latin America. CSD Fellows Fiorella Rojas and Terrence Jantzi's research found that long-term volunteerism was enhanced when supported by a "faith in action" philosophy with close church connections. Likewise, CSD Fellow Teresa Matus added that a faith-based orientation is the key to the success of civic service programs in the region. Dr. Matus also argued that in Brazil and Chile, programs have a tendency to delegate high levels of responsibility to volunteers during service placements. It is imperative, suggested Dr. Matus, that these programs increase the level of professionalization and the training of their volunteers. The future of many organizations may depend on careful strategies to develop the skills of their volunteers not only to meet community needs but also, in the case of youth, to prepare them to enter the workforce.

Civic Service and Social Development

Dr. Matus also presented a special lecture on "Civic Service in an Unequal World: Analyzing Four Paradoxes." Her lecture, which marked the beginning of National Social Work Month in the U.S., examined civic service in Latin America and its role in social development. Dr. Matus suggested that sustainable growth in the third sector and civic service is hampered by a number of paradoxes. In an unequal world, for example, more economic development does not reduce poverty.

Similarly, when economic disparities exist, advances in technology do not necessarily lead to the creation of global citizens or social inclusion. These paradoxes are visible in Latin America, where civic service exists in a context dominated by social inequalities and a poorly designed wealth distribution system. Matus maintained, however, that civic service is critical to the development of citizens and democratic values in Latin America. With institutionalization, service programs could become effective agents of this kind of change.

Service-learning: The Motivation to Do Better

All CSD Fellows elaborated on the importance of service for students' motivations and development. Although the research questions varied across the studies, Fellows reported on the positive impacts associated with students' participation in service-learning programs.

CSD Fellow Fares Howari discussed environmental service-learning programs in the United Arab Emirates and impacts on environmental awareness and civic engagement. He concluded that environmental service-learning had an impact on motivating students to improve their academic skills. Howari's study also found that students believe that heavy class loads take attention away from service learning programs and environmental activities. CSD Fellow Tara Hopkins discussed various forms and impacts of university-level service-learning in Turkey. Her study found that, although Civic Involvement Project (CIP) students have less time for academic work, the majority of students believe that they have not experienced any negative effect on that work.

One remarkable similarity among CSD Fellows service-learning research is that students participating in service-learning programs seem to be motivated by their personal development rather than their political beliefs. For example, in Turkey, Hopkins found that there is little to no impact on students' political affiliations because of CIP. Likewise, Cheryl Keen's study found that no significant relationship exists between participation in the Bonners Scholar Program and political engagement outcomes such as voting and participating in other political activities.

Keen noted that students participating in the Bonners Scholar program in the US believe that dialogue with other volunteers is crucial to their understanding of service-learning experiences. Keen also analyzed the long term effects of service by comparing the civic development of alumni from Bonner Scholars and other campuses. A survey of Bonner Scholars who graduated in 1999 showed that all Bonner Scholars alumni were somewhat involved in community service activity many years after completing the program. In addition, Bonners Scholars were twice as likely to work in nonprofits organization as were students from other campuses.

All Research Fellows agree that a hands-on approach and student-led involvement are the main determinants of a successful service-learning program.

Emerging Themes & Future Work

CSD Research Fellows reflected on the emerging themes in civic service at the end of the seminar. Each fellow developed a range of recommendations, responding to the need for a common research agenda on civic service.

The main discussion centered on creating an information exchange mechanism among programs, policymakers, and researchers, and creating new models for collaboration among researchers who study civic service.

Fellows noted that the lack of financial resources remains a challenge to many civic service network organizations despite their capacity to form partnerships.

Fellows agreed that more research on community-level impacts and best practices are the best way to support the creation of new programs and to ensure continued funding for existing programs.

We want to thank all the CSD Fellows for their invaluable contribution to the seminar, and to the growing international knowledge base on civic service.

FINAL REPORTS ONLINE

The following final reports and executive summaries are now available at the CSD website:

Mishlavim Project - The inclusion of youth with special needs into National Youth Service in Israel: Program Evaluation Research (2003-2004)
Amit, K. & Fleischer, N. (2005).

The Voluntary Cultural Year in Germany: Perceptions of Volunteers, Institutions, Politicians, and Society
Birnkraut, G., Hein, I.E., & Looke, F. (2004)

Study on the Effects of the National United Nation's Volunteer Program in Mongolia
Erdenechimeg, T., Bulganzaya, T. & Gantumur, R. (2005).

Exploring and Assessing Intercultural Competence
Fantini, A. (2007).

Measuring Effectiveness of Civic Participation at the University Level in Turkey: A Case Study of the Civic Involvement Project at Sabanci University
Hopkins, T. (2007).

Environmental Service Learning Programs in the United Arab Emirates: Impacts on Environmental Awareness and Civic Engagement
Howari, F. (2006).

Statism, Youth and the Civic Imagination: A Critical Study of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Programme in Nigeria
Obadare, E. (2005).

Social Development in a Society in Transition
Patel, L. (2003).

In Between Occupational Work and Volunteer Work: Serving as a Teacher in France and in the United States
Simonet-Cusset, M. (2005).

K-12 Service-Learning in Argentina Schools
Tapia, M.N., Golzalez, A. & Elicegui, P. (2005.)

National Service Impacts on Nonprofit Community Networks
Vogenbeck, D. (2007).

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