

SERVICE-LEARNING:

# THE IMPACT

Volume 3, Issue 1

## PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT: Writing as Service

Writing may not be the first thing that comes to mind when you think about ways to serve, but in a text-driven society like ours, writing can be a very powerful tool for advocacy, reflection, and creating confident members of society.

The English Department at Messiah College empowers students to use literature and present theory to contribute conscientiously to the world. In an English class discussion about the significance of typographical errors in students' and scholarly writing, Michelle Day '14 responded using an example from her service-learning site: “My SciTech student had a lot of run on sentences which detracted from the power of her essay. I helped her tighten the prose to make her essay more compelling and likely to stand out to a college admissions office.” For Michelle and others, the writing skills become a way to impact the world.



At SciTech in Harrisburg, Messiah students help high school seniors write compelling essays for their college applications.

### MESSAGE TO THE READER

In this issue, you will find insights into the service-learning program at Messiah College. Our students, faculty and community partners have all contributed to the publication of this newsletter by graciously sharing their stories. Our featured alumni focus story serves to provide a glimpse into the valuable experiences that our service-learning programs provide. By reading the impact that one person can have on the community, we hope that you will be inspired to get involved. Read further to learn how—and why—service-learning makes a difference in the places we live. Thank you for your support of our work!

*Chad Frey, Director of the Agapé Center for Service and Learning*

### COMMUNITY PARTNER SPOTLIGHT:

#### Danzante Urban Arts

*Serving as a multicultural community resource to provide artistic education for Latinos, Hispanics and others as a means of developing career opportunities, healthy minds and bodies, and respect for self and the environment*

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## ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT: Heather (Smith) Korpi '09

From drafting a promotional film script to blogging about backpacking through Nepal, Heather (Smith) Korpi '09 knows how to connect service with her writing skills. Her passion for Christian higher education has developed out of service-related educational and professional experiences.

While at Messiah, writing classes with Dr. Jean Corey, working at the Agape Center, and interning with CURE International helped Korpi to see the purpose behind her writing. “Why do I have this skill? Why use it? To bring glory to God and share stories” of the work organizations like CURE and the Agape Center are doing as a way to impact the world for Christ. “I see it as learning that my gifts and passions were about more than just myself.”

For Korpi, post-graduation life has been “a journey



Heather Korpi interacts with Nepali children while backpacking in Nepal this summer.

of figuring out how the things I enjoy doing (like writing) intersect with the world's needs, and finding what opportunities I have to merge them together.” She and her husband who got married this summer are becoming involved in outreach through a local church, but Korpi also sees her current position as an admissions counselor for international and missionary kid students at Gordon College as a way to fuse her writing background with ministry. “The work I'm doing now is to help equip students to enroll in college through Christian higher education. I believe in the transformation that happens at Christian colleges.”

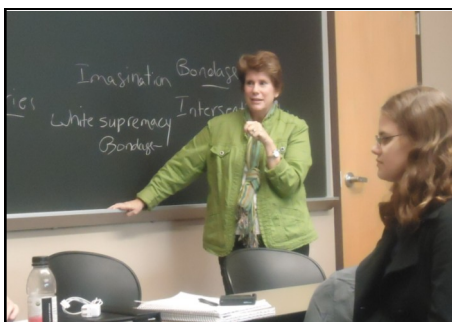
Although her professional employment does not require reflective writing, Korpi continues to do so on her own. “I've been amazed by having this need to write after graduating. [It's abrupt] to go from intensive writing senior year—don't think I went a single day without writing—to graduating without accountability from anyone to keep writing.” For her, blogging has become “a way to keep up that creative outlet outside of my normal job hours, [and to] continue with photography.”

Korpi's service-oriented foundation from Messiah set her up for life-long learning. As Korpi explained, “The Christ-centered mindset [of Christian higher education]—through courses and profs—changes whole perspective. In service-learning courses, the idea is that your learning and your skills are about so much more than just you, and the gifts and skills you have been given truly are from the Lord. In English classes, it is about developing your writing—refining it, and honing in—[in the context of a bigger picture]. So having that Christ-centered foundation allows students to pursue their passions in ways that are so much more glorifying to God.”

## EDUCATOR SPOTLIGHT: Jean Corey

Since before she started teaching at Messiah, Jean Corey knew she wanted to incorporate service-learning into her classes. She lost no time: during her first semester at Messiah six years ago, Corey assigned students from her Composition Theory and Pedagogy class to volunteer as writing mentors for various service sites both on campus as peer tutors and with partners in Harrisburg. "Every year has looked a little different," said Corey, "but to me, that is energizing, and you get to be with students in a different context than the classroom."

One of the most consistently successful service sites is at SciTech, a Harrisburg charter school for academically high-achieving students. As fellow students and writers who were applying for college themselves within the last few years, volunteers from Corey's class offer SciTech high



During her Composition Theory and Pedagogy class, Jean Corey facilitates discussion about the social influences which inform a person's ability to learn how to write.

school students less-intimidating feedback than their teachers might.

Part of Corey's goal for her class is to address real needs, not just theoretically constructed ones. The world of academia can valuably contribute to its community, and partners have much to offer students as well. "Harrisburg is so fluid, that the process of organizing projects is always [a bit hectic]." That can be frustrating, but it is part of service learning. "We are so encumbered with structure that we are slow moving," said Corey. "The real world isn't structured like that. I want my students to pay attention to [the difference]. The conflict and tensions you are working with make the effort all the more vital."

For Corey, who continues to prioritize volunteer work for herself and her family, writing instruction is a valuable intersection between academics and hands-on service. "I love the world of texts, and wanted to bridge the world of texts to the real world," she said. In this way, the humanities have the power to liberate and "humanize the world"—by facilitating connections between and within individuals and their communities. "Writing has the power to change the world and change ourselves," said Corey.

"Written reflection is the number one tool" for students participating in service learning, said Corey. While verbal processing can also be effective, "writing allows you to step back and reflect critically" on your experience. Written reflection provides an ideal space in which students can connect the ideas they are learning in the classroom to real-life experiences that positively impact the community, and students do some of their best writing in their reflections because

## Finding your field

By Alison Roncin '09

When you write as a form of service, there's more at stake than when you're merely writing to complete a classroom assignment. You're connecting with a larger audience, you're helping people share their stories and you're compelling people to take action. What you say and how you say it matters. The quality of your writing has to rise to meet a real need, so your passion to fulfill that need drives your intellectual growth, and that's where the real learning takes place.

I intentionally sought a job with an organization where I could write about topics I cared about and that I felt could make a difference in the lives of other people. The job search required keeping an open mind, but I am now employed as a copywriter for an Internet marketing agency where my writing helps families care for loved ones with Alzheimer's disease, inspires entrepreneurs to serve seniors in their communities by owning a home care business, and fosters monastic vocation opportunities to help Trappist monks sustain their way of life. While I get paid to do my job, it's important to me that serving others remains at the core of what I do with my time and talents.

they are using their own authentic voices in the midst of the real-world context of their service-learning. Corey said, "I include service because I want theory to inform practice and practice to inform theory. I don't know of a better way to do that than through civic engagement."

Looking for your own ways to incorporate service-learning in the classroom? Check out the [faculty resources](#) on our website.

## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: Helping children acquire literacy

By Andrew Riccardo '12

I never thought co-teaching a creative writing class to elementary students would count as service, much less service-learning. I always thought of service as standing awkwardly around food pantries or women's shelters, waiting to be corralled into box-carrying or setting up tables.

So while sitting in Composition Theory at the beginning of the semester, hearing Professor Corey announce that the class had a new service-learning component, I had my misgivings. Were we really going to help anyone? Anytime I had actually done service in the past, it was for purely selfish reasons. I'd volunteer to hang out with friends, or hang out with kids, or even just for something on my résumé. And besides, what could we possibly do to help the needy in a writing class?

Helping teach this class has made me reconsider my thoughts on service. Introducing kids to

haikus, stories, encouraging them to talk about growing up in an urban environment, creating songs... it doesn't really feel like a chore. The colorful walls, painted chairs, and paper-mache sculptures scattered about the art room hardly make for an oppressive atmosphere. And when I heard one of the kids say "We learn more at Danzante than we do at school," it makes me stop and wonder whether we aren't serving others after all.

The process of acquiring literacy is just a college classroom abstraction until you see it take place in the real world. We really call these projects "service" because they are mutually beneficial. I don't know about you, but I need to try new things more often. I'd probably learn more.

Looking for your own volunteer ideas? Check out the [student resources](#) on our website.



Andrew Riccardo '12 brainstorms poem ideas with students at Danzante, an after-school arts program in Allison Hill, Harrisburg.

**SERVICE-LEARNING** is a type of pedagogy that intentionally integrates academic learning with community service in a credit-bearing academic course. Students participate in an authentic service activity that meets needs identified by the community (designed within the framework of a mutually beneficial relationship), and then they critically reflect on that activity. Thus, students gain a deep understanding of course content, a commitment to socially responsible citizenship, developing skills and understanding needed to contribute to civic well-being.

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