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Perspectives

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Volunteers UNITE!

The United States economy is directly in the middle of a huge boom. We're makin' money, spendin' money, workin' hard and bein' productive. Great! That must mean that things are getting better for everyone.

Unfortunately, that's far from the truth. One of the reasons we're more productive is that we're spending more time working. That means less time for everything else. What worries me is that as the middle and upper classes improve themselves, they're sacrificing the time that could be spent helping other people. Support services for people in need simply cannot function without volunteers.

In general, a successful volunteer unit has a few motivated, skilled and experienced leaders — probably paid employees. But the good they can do is limited by physics, time and geography.

What these organizations really need is you.

There are many opportunities on campus to get involved with volunteering. Many student organizations are entirely or partially dedicated to such service. Check



Jonathan Gruber



Bryan Dixon Emerald

Bryan Dixon

out the list on page 25 of the 1999-2000 University Student Directory. There are, of course, many more opportunities in

the larger community.

What service organizations need is an army of grunt workers who can take direction willingly. The reason that these "soldiers" can take the direction so well is that they care, and they know they make a difference.

"What we're looking for is a willingness to work in the movement to end the violence; someone who's real committed to that," said Cris Lira, the volunteer program coordinator of Sexual Assault Support Services.

What is most important, then, is not that skilled individuals use their experience and know-how in a volunteer setting, but that enough people care enough to volunteer at all. For example, Tonia Valadez, the Womenspace youth outreach and education coordinator, said, "You don't have to come in with crisis-intervention experience." Womenspace has anywhere from 100 to 200 volunteers at any time.

In fact, if someone is looking to get something out of volunteering besides its intrinsic worth to society, training is one of the perks. According to Lira, "Oftentimes we

get people who are looking to improve their skills."

SASS volunteers come from every segment of society. And there are all kinds of places volunteers can perform, including the 24-hour crisis line, peer advocacy, support groups and administrative tasks.

The volunteers at SASS generally work anywhere from four hours on up. They've even had volunteers log 200 hours in a month, although I doubt they were college students. But, if you think a four-hour shift is a little too long or structured, there are other ways to volunteer.

In terms of finding something with a little less weekly obligation, the United Way operates a Volunteer Connection Hotline (741-6000). United Way has all kinds of different volunteers, from corporate employees to high school students, in all kinds of different positions. Wintry Whitt, who works in the United Way's Support Services, said that even an hour of availability a week can be helpful.

And lastly, let me put in a shameless plug for Alpha Phi Omega, the community service fraternity of which I am a brother. As I tell people (who are generally confused, for I don't really look like a frat boy), we don't have a house, and men and women are all invited to become "brothers." We are really good at grunt work, and the variety of projects is large, so it's hard to get bored.

I know that I finally decided to do more volunteering when I realized that if I kept putting it off, saying, "I'll volunteer in the next phase of my life, when I have more time," I'd never get anything accomplished. I cannot be in Doctors Without Borders (the organization that won the 1999 Nobel Peace Prize) until I get out of medical school, but everyone can volunteer in some way.

What is most important is not what you do but that you do something.

Jonathan Gruber is a columnist for the Oregon Daily Emerald. His views do not necessarily represent those of the Emerald. He can be reached via e-mail jgruber@gladstone.uoregon.edu.

WORLD WIDE WHAT

Do you think the University should have a student-funded beer garden?

on the web
www.dailyemerald.com



“Yes, most definitely. It's a good way to get people to socialize. I don't think it could be harmful.”
Sarah Weston
sophomore,
education



“Yes, beer sales would raise revenue and provide students with a close, familiar setting.”
Vince Butera
junior,
CIS



“I don't think it would be a good idea. Money could be spent in more important ways.”
Sami Alenazi
freshman,
business
administration



“Yes. It would provide a more student-orientated drinking atmosphere.”
James Ehrhart
junior,
math