

Nicole Hallett, 2001 Richard J. Wood Community Commitment Award Acceptance Speech

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2001 Wood Award Acceptance Speech April 12, 2001 Indianapolis, IN

Nicole Hallett, Recipient of the 2001 Richard J. Wood Community Commitment Award, is a DePauw University junior. Her service and civic engagement activities have included promoting literacy through AmeriCorps and the Indiana Reading Corps, working with Habitat for Humanity in Florida, serving in an orphanage in Bangladesh, registering people to vote, establishing a Greens Party group on campus, promoting environmentally and socially responsible investment, and attending the 6th Conference of the Parties UN Summit in the Hague.

I have been asked to speak about the reasons that I am standing before you today, but I think that the fact that I am here means that there is no reason to. Instead I want to talk about the people who aren't standing up here today and whether you, as educators, can do anything about it. The focus is often on the fact that students aren't involved. Perhaps they spend too much time watching South Park, playing Mario Kart, or surfing the internet for MP3s. Often we target the students who couldn't



NICOLE HALLETT DELIVERING SPEECH.

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The focus is often on the fact that students aren't involved. Perhaps they spend too much time watching South Park, playing Mario Kart, or surfing the internet for MP2s. Often we target the students who couldn't tell you what service learning was if you asked them. But from my experience, these students are few and far between.

By and large, students are involved in too much, stretching their capacities and schedules to accommodate the numerous different activities they want to do. We thrive on being busy. The real crisis with today's youth is not that we aren't involved, but that the things we do fill our schedules not our minds. While spending an hour working at a soup kitchen or helping a child learn to read is a worthwhile activity in itself, we must urge students to look beyond that hour to examine the reasons that we are needed in the first place. If not, then my children will be tackling the same problems I am today and we will be running to stay in the same place.

Community service has been a very important part of my life, but I have coupled that with a growing awareness of the political and social undercurrents that shape our lives and the society we live in. A wise person once told me "You can pull drowning

babies out of the river or you can go upstream and find out who is throwing them in." Social change must accompany service to produce a solution that attacks the problem from both ends.

I want to return to my original question of who isn't standing at this podium right now. They are the families who can't volunteer at the soup kitchen because they must eat there. And it is the man who can't tutor a child because he himself can't read. As educators, you must constantly be aware of who isn't in your classroom because of obstacles and hardships they have had to face. But furthermore, we must expect more from today's youth than an hour or two a week of volunteer work.

Community service coupled with apathy does nothing – in fact, it makes it worse. If we let ourselves fall into this trap, we will be caught in the infinite cycle of service that doesn't end. If we can open the doors of perception for them, however, and urge a greater awareness of the world around us, then the service we do will have a purpose. Only then will we no longer be participating in service learning. We will be living it.