International Service-Learning at Calvin: Why Not?

Two rapidly expanding programs at Calvin College are the Off-Campus Study-Abroad Programs and the Service-Learning Center. At first glance, it might seem like the different geographic foci of each of these programs (international and domestic respectively) makes a certain institutional distance understandable. Yet given the foundational similarities between these two relatively new and growing pedagogical opportunities it comes as a surprise that they have shared so little mutual benefit.

Currently, in many of Calvin College’s eight semester-long international study programs, students, faculty, and their families regularly participate in acts of service and social justice. They occur, without any formal connection to Calvin’s Service-Learning Center. So what might it look like to unite the pedagogy of service-learning with Calvin’s well-structured and popular international study programs?

Valuing the link between study abroad and service-learning is impossible without a fuller understanding of the underlying goals of both programs. They intersect in their efforts to introduce students to locations, communities, cultures, and languages different from their own in order to foster the following: the cognitive dissonance necessary for deep learning; opportunities for hospitality; an understanding of reciprocity in learning; and experiences outside of one’s comfort zone in order to overcome inclinations toward provincialism.

A variety of inherent challenges inhibit the successful linking of these disparate programs, but in certain cases, these barriers will be overcome by benefits that outweigh them. These challenges center on individual, institutional, and cultural resources. In order to implement a successful study abroad program, significant resources must be dedicated simply to living and learning. Effective academically-based service-learning programs also require significant expenditures of time in initiating and sustaining human relationships. This may be impossible for a faculty member already stretched in a temporary context. Yet because of the potential value for the realization of core missions, the effort to weave justice and mercy together in the context of service-learning and rigorous international academic curricula seems worth investigating. In international contexts where colleges and universities have established strong local partnerships through a long-term presence, the pedagogy of service-learning can be a meaningful method for teaching students in a context of service and partnership.

Well-developed partnerships in this vein offer an opportunity for Christian colleges and universities to become involved in a mainstream dialogue with new insights relative to parallel activity on the part of faith communities in missions, development, and relief activities. The idea that north and south, east and west must come to partnership as equal image-bearers of God is one that can enable Christian institutions of higher education to speak into an ongoing dialogue regarding this emerging pedagogical opportunity. In international study semesters where faculty and arrangements are more temporary, setting up service-learning partnerships will require much more work. Preliminary feedback indicates that it is likely too expensive in most cases. Additional research, as well as practical experience will be required to more fully answer additional questions about pedagogy and program in the area of international service-learning.

A longer version of this article was presented by Jeff Bouman at the Congreso Internacional, a gathering of the International Association for the Promotion of Christian Higher Education, in Granada, Nicaragua in November, 2006.

"Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf; for in its welfare you will have welfare."

--Jeremiah 29:7 (NASB)
After a hectic summer of letter-writing, agency-contacting, and detail-organizing, the three short days of StreetFest flew by faster than I ever could have imagined. A good summer culminated into a great StreetFest, and I can unequivocally say that StreetFest 2006 was worth all the work.

This year’s StreetFest theme, “Seeking the Well-being of the City” was based on a passage in Jeremiah 29:7, in which Jeremiah tells the exiled Israelites, “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” We chose this theme because of its allusion to the signature distinction of reciprocity in service-learning; in the midst of our service, we gain a unique and valuable education we never expected.

Students engaged in this already-ongoing seeking of the city’s well-being in a variety of ways. Some served at agencies such as ICCF, Fuller Avenue CRC, or Luther Village—organizations which have been staples of the StreetFest program for years. Others embarked on service-learning experiences with new StreetFest partnerships, such as the new daycare facility Gateway to Life or Neighborhood Ventures, an agency working towards neighborhood revitalization the Southtown area. We also strove to incorporate new service-learning experiences to the StreetFest program. In addition to reviving the urban bike tour of Grand Rapids instated last year, we implemented two other new StreetFest sites: Trillium Haven Farm and a walking tour of Eastown. At Trillium Haven, students not only planted broccoli for the farm, but they also learned about agricultural issues that affect urban living. The walking tour of Eastown offered a more in-depth introduction to a neighborhood with which Calvin has a long and continuing history.

No matter which site students visited for StreetFest, most of them returned to Calvin with fatigued smiles and excited stories about their day. It was wonderfully heartening and reassuring to hear of the hospitality the students encountered within the community of Grand Rapids, and their experiences reinforced the devotion of many to this great city. We are thankful for and indebted to each agency which so graciously hosted our students for our StreetFest program. We hope to see you all again for StreetFest 2007!
A Day at the Farm Teaches Students about the City

I did not consider planting broccoli and harvesting tomatoes as service-learning opportunities until this year’s StreetFest. Then I led two groups of first-year students at Trillium Haven, an organic farm just outside of Grand Rapids, in serving, learning, and even eating. Although working out at the farm was not the typical StreetFest experience, our time at Trillium Haven gave students a great introduction to service-learning and the importance of community.

In addition to learning how to plant and harvest certain produce, students heard from Anja VanderBrug Mast about her experience at Calvin as well as what led her and her husband, Michael VanderBrug, to start this farm. Pointing to our Christian calling as earthkeepers, she also explained how Trillium Haven specifically works to take care of the land and community around it. Students asked a variety of questions on sustainable farming practices, community, and Supported Agriculture. Overall, they were impressed too see the VanderBrug’s faith as the force driving their work. Because the farm was short on staff at the time, the workers who helped us in the fields deeply appreciated our work, even when we planted in the wrong rows and harvested bad tomatoes.

Being at Trillium Haven allowed us to experience a unique farm community that serves all of Grand Rapids. It also gave students time to connect with each other, with the workers, and with our mentors. Getting grimy is a great way to bring people together—and we definitely got our hands dirty digging in the soil! Trillium Haven was more than just a day of work on the farm. We experienced the crucial reciprocity of service-learning, and a few students even demonstrated interest in returning to help again!

Even if we hadn’t been able to eat our fill of homemade goodie and tomatoes right off the vine, our time at Trillium Haven would have been well worth it because many of us were introduced to an innovative way of serving God and Grand Rapids.

Gardens for Gateway to Life

Written by Cheryl and Dan Hoogewind

On September 1, we had the opportunity to be mentors and recipients of a StreetFest team at Gateway to Life Christian Child Care Center. Our son Samuel was the first baby under its care starting in 2001. Now our second son Peter has joined Samuel there. Tonya Kirkland, the owner of the center, asked us to design and put in the landscaping around Gateway’s new building. Feeling overwhelmed by the size of the project, we remembered that StreetFest was coming up. Cheryl, a previous mentor of two years, contacted Devin Byker, the StreetFest Coordinator, hoping a StreetFest group could come to Gateway to do landscaping and interact with the children.

A day later, we found out that Gateway was scheduled as one of the sites. We scrambled to get all of the necessary supplies and tools to make the job possible in one week’s time, including a trip to Fruit Basket Flowerland with Tonya for her first time. With extensive lists of plants to buy, it took three vans loads to get everything back to our house.

On Friday, the StreetFest team came to Gateway. Tonya gave us a tour, and then the work began. In one day, fifteen of us shoveled, scraped, raked, hauled, and planted three large planting beds. Each bed was planted with Michigan native perennials that will attract native wildlife.

While we were planting this garden, kids poked their heads out the windows that overlooked the bird garden in which we worked. We enjoyed seeing their excitement for our work. We planted a native perennial garden outside the main windows of the building and it can be seen from 28th Street as the cars whiz by. The third garden is a rock garden next to the main driveway off-Jefferson.

The results are outstanding! The staff of Gateway can be found looking out the windows at the garden or strolling outside. The Calvin students were a true blessing, pitching in where they could, and we accomplished so much more than we thought possible. We are constantly thanked for our help, and we pass that thanks on to Calvin for its community involvement.

Stepping Into Something Great: StreetFest’s New Walking Tour

I consider myself a StreetFest veteran of sorts. Heading into my third year of StreetFest, I expected to pull some weeds, pick up some trash, lead a discussion, and go home happy. Little did I know that I was in for some loads to get everything back to our driveway off Jefferson. The cars whiz by. The garden next to the main entrance of serving God and Grand Rapids.

This unique feature was added to the StreetFest lineup this year in order to give first-year students an introduction to a neighborhood near and dear to many Calvin students’ hearts.

After a quick lunch at Yesterdog, Professor David Fuentes, our unofficial tour guide, led us through his own neighborhood, explaining the history of Eastown (Did you know that the Catholic church helped preserve Wilcox Park and the surrounding neighborhood during the 1970s?) and the importance of its architecture to the “Eastown atmosphere” (houses with big porches built close to the street, encouraging sociability).

But don’t worry—our tourist endeavors quickly became interactive; exploring the shops on Lake and Wealthy, helping look for a stolen pit bull puppy, and picking up trash at the Southeast Academic Center playground on Sigsbee are just a few ways in which we got even more intimate with this place.

Near the end of our tour, we stopped by Professor Fuentes’ house where his wife and children were waiting for us on the front porch with freshly baked dessert. In some ways, I’d call that the essence of service-learning; while we were seeking the well-being of our city, it was looking out for us, too.

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Spotlight on Federal Work Study

I do not have what most people think of as a typical college job. I do not work in a cafeteria, retail shop, or library. I am the children’s program assistant in a shelter for victims of domestic abuse. I am a federal work study employee. Work study has given me amazing experiences and the chance to make a difference in the lives of traumatized children and families.

I work at Ramoth House, a shelter for Safe Haven Ministries. Safe Haven offers many services to women and children who are victims of domestic abuse. Services include group therapy, legal advice, childcare, independent counseling, and an emergency thirty day shelter for those fleeing an abusive relationship. The women who I encounter while working in the shelter are traumatized and frightened. We offer them solace, support, and help starting over.

Working with children who are the victims of abuse is not an easy task. The stories that come from the mouths of these children are heartbreaking, yet the children also bring liveliness to the house; they are filled with amazing love, joy, and strength.

Many of the women and children I have worked with have taught me more than I could ever learn through formal education. There is so much more to life than we see within the Calvin bubble. At Ramoth House we receive multiple crisis calls each week from women in abusive relationships; many people simply do not realize the extent of domestic violence in our communities today. I have learned to look beyond myself in order to see the suffering of others. By not simply letting it pass by I am able to address complex issues in an attempt to end them.

Working at Safe Haven is also very encouraging. Seeing women stand up on two feet again and leave our house changed and free is an amazing experience. These women have taught me to be strong and stand up for who I am. The Federal Work Study program has given me the opportunity to work within the community, help impact others lives, and in turn have my life impacted as well.

Online Service-Learning Opportunities

The Service-Learning Center always looks for new ways to foster and facilitate connections between Calvin and our community partners. The introduction of our web-interfaced searchable database makes that process simpler and smoother than ever.

In previous years, the S-LC used a large blue binder to organize and “post” service-learning opportunities. The binder was cumbersome, difficult to keep up, and accessible to only one student at a time.

Hoping to make lingering dreams a reality, the administrative staff focused this summer on increasing opportunity accessibility by posting them online. This summer, Dieter Bouma, recent Calvin graduate and longtime S-LC employee, set to the task of realizing this vision. Sarah Greenfield, CIT Systems Analyst who developed the S-LC database, adapted his ideas to create a web-interfaced searchable database.

The online opportunity search allows students and faculty to search for service-learning opportunities by agency name, neighborhood, opportunity type, and available times. Students and faculty are able to make more informed decisions and can access the information at any time.

As of this fall, the blue binder has been lovingly put to rest. In the words of Director of the Service-Learning Center Jeff Bouman, “I feel like we just entered the 21st Century – and it’s about time.”

Book Review: Fadiman Catches Spirit of Cross-Cultural Dilemmas

In Western society, diseases are thought to be best treated by medical professionals, whose instructions are implicitly trusted. Most of us don’t even think twice before accepting these premises. But how would we respond to doctors’ orders if we came from a culture that framed the concept of disease very differently?

This is the struggle that anthropologist Anne Fadiman articulates in her 1997 book The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down. The book follows Lia Lee, a young girl born to an immigrant Hmong family in California. The Hmong are an indigenous Asian ethnic group who were displaced en masse during the Quiet War in Laos in the mid-1960s, many ending up in the United States. Lia was diagnosed with epilepsy at an early age, and during the few years of Fadiman’s observations she is brought to Merced County Community Hospital dozens of times by her concerned parents, Noa Kao and Foua Yang. Doctors can help Lia with tests and medications, but they are not equipped to bridge the enormous cultural gap between themselves and Lia’s parents. Noa Kao and Foua Yang name Lia’s disease quag dab peg, which translates to the book’s title. They understand Lia’s condition to be a mystical affliction caused by soul loss from a dab, or evil spirit. It needs to be respected and treated holistically.

As might be expected, these contrary worldviews cause a culture clash of grand proportions and great costs for the Lees and the Merced doctors. A nearly impermeable language barrier complicates things further. Imagine being asked to give your daughter instructions that you cannot read. Lia even ends up in foster care for a time when her desperate doctors are forced to admit that her own family is endangering her health. As the story builds, does the creeping dread that Lia is headed for a grand mal seizure her caretakers will be unable to prevent.

Fadiman chronicles the intricacies of this situation with meticulous attention and sympathy for the people on both sides. The chapters that cover the Lees’ history as Laotian refugees are heartbreaking and eye-opening. In the world of book reviews, this book’s age makes it old, but the lessons it teaches about cultural interaction are invaluable for anyone aiming to understand the charred underbelly of the U.S. melting pot.
Convergence of Classroom and Community through ESL Tutoring

What happens when the pedagogy of service-learning emerges as real places and faces? The academically-based service-learning partnership between Calvin’s Spanish Department and Roosevelt Park Christian Reformed Church is one such concrete example. Read about the perspective of agency leader, student, and professor to understand the reciprocity of service-learning.

A Community with a Vision: Lisa DeYoung of Roosevelt Park CRC

When we hired Pastor Pablo Canche to be the Hispanic Ministries Director at our church, he identified the greatest need in the community as the desire to learn English. Now, with the assistance of Calvin students, we care for this need by offering ESL classes every Tuesday and Thursday evening free of charge.

With Calvin students’ involvement, we can tutor three times more community members than without their support. Calvin students also benefit; forced to look beyond themselves, students sharpen their language skills and relate to people from situations different than their own. This broadens their perspective on Grand Rapids and even the world.

Led by Pastor Pablo and myself, the program has a number of congregational members and Calvin students working as tutors. We serve community members from a variety of cultural backgrounds, but for all of them Spanish is either their first, second, or third language. Most of our students live in the Roosevelt Park neighborhood.

In the past, the number of students and tutors fluctuated a great deal, and students rarely worked with the same tutor. Now, with the implementation of new policies, we have a much better turnout on both ends. Throughout the semesters of 2004 and 2006, on the topic of Hispanic immigration to the United States.

As a result, relationships grow and attendance is taken more seriously. The people involved comment that they look forward to seeing their new friend each week and can’t wait to come back. Tutors send cards in the mail, pray for their students, and genuinely want to get to know them. Some have continued to meet outside of class to do even more together. It has been an enriching experience for all.

A Student with Aspiration: Lindsey Bouma

It began as a way to fulfill a requirement for my Spanish class, but developed into a meaningful experience. Last year as a way to obtain “culture points” (exposure to a culture other than my own) for my Spanish class at Calvin, I enlisted as an ESL (English as a Second Language) teacher for Spanish speakers at Roosevelt Park Christian Reformed Church.

Three semesters later, I’m still tutoring and wouldn’t trade the experience for the world. The class meets twice a week on Tuesday and Thursday for an hour and a half, and each week has a different topic (family, money, transportation, etc.). Lesson plans include vocabulary, grammar, and problematic words. First, the tutors and students meet as a group to read a Bible verse and sing. Then, the tutors and students pair off, working one-on-one work through the lesson together.

My first two semesters as a tutor for the ESL program at Roosevelt Park CRC had their ups and downs. I could only visit when I had free time, and I was not always paired with the same student. This semester, though, I tutor both Tuesdays and Thursdays regularly and work with the same very patient student each time. And even while we strive for her to learn English, occasionally I have an opportunity to practice my Spanish with her in order to explain difficult English words. We learn from each other by sharing our different backgrounds and stories. Now, we consider each other friends, and I deeply treasure my experience at Roosevelt Park CRC. As I look forward to studying abroad in Spain next semester, I will miss tutoring at Roosevelt Park CRC, yet the skills I have attained there have invaluable importance for me in the future.

A Professor with a Plan: Marilyn Bierling of the Spanish Department

As a Spanish professor at Calvin, I am constantly searching for sites in the Grand Rapids community that encourage my students to have personal contact with native Spanish speakers. A site that has worked extremely well is the ESL program at Roosevelt Park Christian Reformed Church. The program provides outreach to the surrounding community of Spanish speakers, while teaching valuable skills while also providing personal contact that motivates them and increases in students’ understanding of the nuances of various Hispanic groups. The greatest motivator for language students is to be able to communicate with another person who would be a stranger except for the ability to speak the other’s language.

Students who assist with these ESL sessions come from two Spanish classes. The first is a special section of Spanish 202 offered each spring for “Cross Cultural Engagement” credit—a graduation requirement. To receive CCE credit a student must spend a significant amount of time with adults from a culture different from U.S. mainstream culture, and the students must reflect on their experiences through discussion and writing.

The other volunteers come from an advanced Spanish class, taught in the fall semesters of 2004 and 2006, on the topic of Hispanic immigration to the United States. Tutoring at Roosevelt Park CRC is one of the ways for these Calvin students to come to know a Hispanic immigrant personally and to learn that person’s story.

A major strength of the program at Roosevelt Park CRC is the one-on-one tutoring between the same persons each week, allowing personal relationships to form. Also, this specific program is extremely well organized, giving busy Calvin students good ideas and materials that do not require a great amount of preparation time and allow all involved to experience real progress. The program even permits my Calvin students to speak some Spanish before, after, and during the lessons, while other ESL programs may prohibit this. Finally, there is a spiritual dimension to the lessons, which Calvin students and ESL learners can discuss if they so choose.

In their journals my students comment on how a personal relationship with an ESL student has affected their understanding of immigrant issues, as well as their understanding of the miracle of communication between people of different languages and cultures.
Continuity in Partnership: Students in the Residence Halls

Sometimes waking up today already feels like tomorrow. The college years move fast; one moment you are a young freshman trying to figure out the mass of abbreviations for classes and buildings, and the next, you find yourself walking across the graduation stage. In the rapid flow and change of these college years, discovering continuity remains among the most meaningful tasks.

The residence hall community partnerships at Calvin College, led by groups of students called Community Partnership Coordinators (CPCs) in each dorm are an intentional effort to create and sustain meaningful continuity through the college years as students are immersed in campus and community life. The work of students in residence hall community partnerships marks a collective legacy of students and neighbors, which in turn informs the individual identities of all those involved.

Each year, on campus, nearly 2,000 students will enter or leave each of 7 residence halls. Yet with so much change in the student body in the dorms, community partnerships remain a fixture from year to year.

For example, students in Rooks-VanDellen Residence Hall weekly visit Baxter Community Center where they tutor and play with young children from the neighborhoods; varying groups of students have been involved with Baxter Community Center since 1987.

Students in Beets-Veenstra Residence Hall regularly meet with a community of mentally handicapped people called Horizons, working to build meaningful relationships through fun activities such as hayrides, dinners, dances, crafts, trick-or-treating, worship services, and devotionals; this partnership with Horizons has existed for more than 15 years.

Crucial to these partnerships, the CPC student leaders create a bridge between the community and the residence hall students. Within each residence hall, groups ranging from 2 to 5 students have taken on volunteer leadership positions as CPCs. Typically sophomores with previous dorm community partnership experience, these CPCs’ leadership commitment demonstrates the initiative of many students to take the next step in their community in order to help create and sustain a commitment to service-learning.

From one year to the next, the specific individuals participating in residence hall partnerships change. However a legacy of service-learning continues as the students of Calvin College work within these longstanding partnerships to discover their own meaningful continuity by connecting with other convicted students and devoted community members amidst the rapid change of college years.

$100,000 Lumina Grant Gives High Hopes to ACT Tutoring Program

With help from the Grants Office at Calvin College, the Service-Learning Center in conjunction with Pre-College Programs received a generous two-year $100,000 grant from the McCabe fund of the Lumina Foundation. The grant, which supports programs benefiting African-American males, recognized the Service-Learning Center’s ACT tutoring program (with its predominantly African-American attendance) at Ottawa Hills High School as an important component of the proposal submitted by Pre-College Programs.

The Service-Learning Center started the fledgling ACT tutoring program at Ottawa Hills last Spring. Twenty-seven high school students enrolled in the program, receiving one-on-one tutoring and mentoring from Calvin students.

The recently awarded grant will fund a new program called P2P Excel run by the Pre-College Programs Office. P2P Excel will have three components. The first component will consist of tutoring and mentoring middle school students. The S-LC’s Academically Based Service-Learning Education Coordinator, Katy Chadwick, will assist Pre-College Programs in this. The second component of P2P Excel will be the ACT program run by the Service-Learning Center. The final component will be a communications network for parents of the students involved in the ACT program.

With over sixty high school students already signed up for the ACT tutoring program component of P2P Excel, the McCabe grant offers exciting opportunities for this new long-term support effort between Pre-College Programs and the Service-Learning Center.

Nathan Tonlaar, a Senior, is a Pre-Med and Biology major from Ghana. He is the ABSL Natural Sciences and Mathematics Coordinator.

Bryan Kibbe is a Video Production and Philosophy major from Virginia. A Junior, he serves as the Community Partnership Coordinator.
Service-Learning Looks into the Future

_Educating Citizens, Building Communities_ was the theme for the twentieth anniversary gathering in Chicago of the national organization Campus Compact. On October 18th, among hundreds of scholars, administrators, community partners, and funders, the celebration prompted a national discussion regarding the vision for the future. More than forty “visioning papers” were solicited and discussed at the gathering, including one written by S-LC Director Jeff Bouman. Bouman wrote on A Seamless Coat of Learning: Weaving Together Telos and Praxis through Committed Community Engagement. In his paper he articulated four areas in which colleges and universities must improve to more deeply embed engagement in higher education. All suggest that bridges between institutions must be built and strengthened between curricular and co-curricular manifestations of civic engagement. The four areas are as follows: the mutual intellectual work of student life and academic affairs; housing options for students and why they matter; connecting student activism and service-learning; and the intersection of the liberal arts and a commitment to place, both domestically and internationally.

The workshop roundtable where the paper was discussed overflowed with attendees and included faculty and student life professionals from colleges and universities ranging from Franklin Marshall to Hofstra to Tulane to Bowling Green State University. Calvin’s participation at this level of an important national conversation demonstrates both the depth at which the college has built important cross-divisional bridges around service-learning and the need for our internal dialogue to become even more deep and broad.

Urban Bike Tour Wins Award

The Urban Bike Tour, an annual part of StreetFest, has won the Society for Park and Recreation Educators Innovation in Teaching Award. This organization recognizes teaching innovations created and implemented by participating institutions. StreetFest’s Bike Tour was added in 2005 and has taken over one hundred Calvin first-year students on the twenty mile ride through Grand Rapids.

HPERDS professor Don De Graaf created the tour with help from many of his colleagues for a Recreation 201 class. De Graaf created the tour as an “experiential, interdisciplinary, and engaging way to teach about the city.” He noted the positive experience of working with the Service-Learning Center to adapt the tour for the StreetFest portion of first-year students’ orientation to Calvin. “I think one of the main reasons the tour won the award,” said De Graaf, “is because it was adapted and used for StreetFest in such a creative way.” De Graaf was very pleased to receive the award. “It is always wonderful to be recognized by your peers,” he said, “especially related to teaching. In addition, I have appreciated the opportunity to connect with others across campus in a fun and worthwhile project that enhances our ability to teach and interact with students.”

The tour continues as a part of StreetFest; the Service-Learning Center has plans to expand the program to include more students in the coming years. “We love the bike tour,” said Lori Gesink, Associate Director of the Service-Learning Center. “It adds a dimension to StreetFest that allows new students to experience Grand Rapids and learn from incredible faculty in a recreational way.”

A Grammatical Moment in Service-Learning

In the academic world, there stands an eternal battle of semantics, choosing one word over another to properly capture the definition of a term. Never mind the field—philosophy, English, science, etc.—because word choice always has critical implications. Occasionally, these debates leave participants irritated; eyes rolling, they wonder if it all really matters.

At the Service-Learning Center, we’ve encountered our fair share of these philosophical linguistic debates, but perhaps one stage at which people do not often cast a critical glance is that upon which our little, pivotal hyphen stands.

The Service-Learning Center takes seriously its mission to be a place of both serving and learning. However, we do not believe the experience of service-learning participants to be particularly isolated to merely service or learning. Indeed, we aspire to achieve both. It is for this reason we precisely and thoughtfully place the hyphen in our title, embracing it as a beloved center point driving our work.

We are a people of partnership, and we hope that the considerable placement of the hyphen in our title reminds us to embrace education and lending a hand as two intricately woven principals of community participation.

Our work is to serve. We hope to see students serving community members, but just as importantly, we desire the service of the community to impact students’ lives, especially because students stand in a unique position as temporary but by no means passive elements in Grand Rapids.

Additionally, our work is to learn. This, too, happens in a reciprocal manner. While we long to see students learn in a non-traditional “classroom,” (be it through the class, race, and gender structures that may influence the needs of a community or through the warm strength of an elderly woman who a student may visit weekly at her home), we strive for the education of the community as well. Our hope is that all parties involved experience the joy and critical thought involved in both service and learning. We hope that service leads to learning as much as we expect learning to lead to service.

The hyphen is our friend, and we embrace our friend as a critical guide that points to the complex nature of the work done through the Service-Learning Center. We are a people of partnership, and we hope that the considerable placement of the hyphen in our title reminds us to embrace education and lending a hand as two intricately woven principals of community participation.
Staff Covenant

We are not in control;
This world is not our own.

With repentant hearts we commit ourselves to this covenant:

We, the Service-Learning Center Staff, offer our voices and experiences for the uplifting of this body. We will appreciate each other's gifts and voices.

Embracing the traditions of Calvin College and the Service-Learning Center, we seek to be a resource that inspires action, creates and sustains connections, and aspires to further the Kingdom of God.

Humble and grateful for the community partnerships upon which we base our service, we celebrate and lament with our community, learning and meeting with it in a spirit of love and servanthood.

Striving for excellence in all we do, we recognize that we cannot bear fruit on our own. We plead with God to reconcile our relationships with each other, with Calvin College, and with the greater community.

We are not in control;
Our world belongs to God.

This Year’s Service-Learning Center Staff

Back Row (from left to right):
Lori Gesink (Associate Director), Kate Leese (Spring Break Trips Coordinator), Devin Byker (One-Time Opportunities, Mentoring, Blood Drives), Laura Smit (Administrative Support), Nathan Tonlaar (ABSL Natural Sciences and Mathematics Coordinator), Katy Chadwick (ABSL Education Coordinator), Grace Miguel (ABSL Spanish Coordinator), Jocelyn Jones (Federal Work Study Coordinator), Jeff Bouman (Director)

Front Row (from left to right):
Kaitlyn Bohlin (Communications Coordinator), Carolina Martinez (ABSL Contextual Disciplines LLA Coordinator), Amy Jonason (Site Development Coordinator), Nick Thompson (Site Development Coordinator), Bryan Kibbe (Community Partnership Coordinator), Colin McWhertor (ABSL Social Sciences Coordinator)