

Reflecting on Service Learning

Over 40 Honors RCC Students spent time serving at Ripple Effect and Food Not Bombs serving food to the homeless over the past weeks. First-Year student Chelsea Dygan shares her reflection on the experience:

You know, it's a strange experience, this "service learning". They are certainly two very different concepts. "Service" implies something inherently selfless. You're in it to give, and nothing more. "Learning", at its core, implies getting more for yourself. You want to walk away with a little something you didn't come with, be it insight or understanding or just a theme to use for your reflection paper. Both are noble tasks, I'm sure, but the combination of the two was hard for me this week when I went with a group of Freshman Honors RCC students to help "Food Not Bombs" serve a group of homeless people near Lake Eola.

The people we were serving would ask us what we were doing there: "Is this a school project?" "Are you getting credit for this?" "What made you come tonight?" I was embarrassed to admit that the answers to their questions were, "Yes," "I sure am, but only if I write a good essay," and "My teacher told me to." I envied the "Food Not Bombs" volunteers, mostly young people who'd been participating in the grassroots organization for months, maybe years. They were comfortable. They were eating the leftovers of the food they were serving. They could honestly say they were there to help, not to "learn" or "observe" or "study" anybody's hard time.

I think Rollins is amazing for organizing these trips for us, because I think without them we would probably just stay in our Winter Park bubble. But I realize now that they are only a training ground. We cannot "service learn" for the rest of our lives. These one-hour glimpses into the world of selflessness are just a jumping-off point for the meaningful, independent service we are meant to find for ourselves. Once you graduate, nobody's going to rent you a bus and ask for a paper every time you find it in your heart to help people. Some day, very soon, we will have to, as Kurt Vonnegut says, treasure people simply because they are people. Some day, very soon, we'll have to find the will and dedication to serve, and serve alone. That's what I'll be working on.