

## Opportunities for Students Outside the Classroom

Contributed by Bonnie Lee Camp

A new school year is upon us, and this can be a very exciting time for students. After having a considerable break from our studies, we are looking forward to returning to class and getting back into the swing of things. A new semester provides a clean slate and a fresh start for each student who is returning to class. A new semester affords every student the opportunity to start over and have a successful semester. {mosgoogle right}

One of the most enriching aspects of a successful semester is becoming involved outside of the classroom. Students should really consider how valuable these educational opportunities can be. Examples of out-of-class opportunities can include service learning projects, volunteering, and field work.

These hands-on activities allow students to experience areas they may be interested in, but with a limited time frame. This provides the ability to get a feel for the occupation of choice before actually doing it full-time. When pursuing a course of study, areas of interest are very broad and becoming actively involved in a specific area can give the student a feel for that particular area of work. For students who are not quite sure where they want to be in their field, these opportunities allow them to "try on" many different areas. These learning opportunities also enhance a résumé when the time comes to show a prospective employer their experience in the field. Sometimes being hired or not being hired can depend on student activities outside of class. Volunteering or spending time in the field can help to swing the decision in a student's favor if there is more than one application for a position and one has experience or has spent time in the field and the other has not. Most employers seek to hire employees who take initiative and show community involvement in addition to their education.

Some areas that I have been involved in as a gerontology social work student include assisted living facilities, volunteer training with hospice, and working at the Office on Aging in my community. Taking the opportunity to spend time and learn the different aspects of each of these community services has allowed me to further narrow down where I would like to be when I complete my studies and am ready to enter the social work field. Each and every time that I have had the privilege of volunteering or taking part in an activity outside of the classroom, the lessons that I have learned and the friendships that I have made with both the facility personnel and clients have enriched my life and have reinforced my calling to be a social worker.

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