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**Volunteering: A Comparison of the Motivations of Collegiate Students  
Attending Different Types of Institutions**

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**Abstract**

*College-aged young adults spend significant amounts of time in voluntary activities and may represent an important pool of future volunteers. Consequently, understanding the motivations for volunteering, of students attending different types of colleges and universities, appears to be worthwhile. Do individuals attending different types of universities possess differing motivations to volunteer? The results suggest that students attending different types of universities differ in their motivations to volunteer. The primary differences involved students attending a public commuter university and an African-American liberal arts university. The results are discussed.*

**Key Words:**

volunteers, motivations, college, students, university

Volunteerism represents a major source of labor in the United States (Dutta-Bergman, 2004). It involves a considerable number of activities and endeavors with the goal of improving communities and the lives of individuals (van Emmerik, Jawahar & Stone, 2004). Findings from the Current Population Survey, composed of 60,000 households, estimate, for instance, that between September 2001 and September 2002, more than one of every four individuals over the age of 16 in the United States engage in volunteer activities (Boraas, 2003). An activity pursued to such an extent appears to warrant research attention.

Volunteering affects more than merely the individuals who engage in it. Many valuable social programs rely on volunteers to succeed (Wilcox, Cameron, Ault & Agee, 2003). Many human-service agencies and nonprofit organizations providing these programs, however, are experiencing significant shortages of volunteers, often severely hampering their abilities to fulfill their missions (Edwards & Watts, 1983; Fisher & Ackerman, 1998). Consequently, recruiting new volunteers is often a major, ongoing concern for many such organizations (Brudney & Brown, 1990), consuming a significant amount of an organization's time and resources.

When volunteers are examined, one can quickly observe that, as a demographic group, young adults spend significant time in volunteer activities. Furthermore, school enrollment seems to have a significant effect on the extent of volunteering activities among young adults. Young adults enrolled in school have been observed to volunteer at a rate twice that of those not enrolled in school (Boraas, 2003). Moreover, the increased involvement in volunteer activities by college students appears to continue after graduation (Oesterle, Johnson & Mortimer, 2004). In fact, recent college graduates have been observed to volunteer at a rate twice

that of high school graduates and four times that of high school dropouts (Boraas, 2003).

Universities and colleges in the United States tend to develop campus cultures that could influence how students feel about many topics and ideas, including the extent to which one should become involved in volunteering activities. Understanding the motivations of college students to engage in volunteering activities and identifying whether differences exist between students attending different types of colleges and universities would seem to be worthwhile. The purpose of this paper is to explore whether students at five different schools, each an exemplar of a different type of college or university, possess differing perceptions of volunteering. First, past research on volunteering is reviewed. Second, rationales for the existence of differing campus climates toward volunteering is developed. Third, hypotheses are presented. Finally, the hypotheses are tested.

### **Volunteerism**

Each year, millions of people spend substantial amounts of time and energy voluntarily helping others (Clary, Snyder, Ridge, Copeland, Stukas, Haugen, & Miene, 1998). Many organizations that depend on volunteers to deliver services, however, often find that they are unable to provide the services clients need or desire because of a lack of an adequate number of volunteers. The recruitment of volunteers, therefore, is an area of great importance to such agencies (Brudney & Brown, 1990). Indeed, Bussell and Forbes (2002) suggest that as competition for volunteers becomes increasingly intense, many organizations are increasingly turning to marketing techniques to recruit and retain volunteers.

To understand potential volunteers, an understanding of individuals' motivations to become involved in volunteering would

seem to be important. Indeed, Clary, Snyder, and Ridge (1992) suggest that understanding the motivations of potential volunteers may help agencies identify and recruit potential volunteers. Consistent with this line of thought, Allison, Okun, and Dutridge (2002) and Oktan (1994) observed that an individual's motivation to volunteer is a good predictor of frequency of volunteering activities. Raman and Pashupati (2002) suggest that individuals' motivation to volunteer is a better predictor of future volunteering behavior than is present volunteering behavior since the extent of one's volunteering activity at any particular time is often cited by transient issues affecting the amount of time an individual has available for volunteering. Furthermore, volunteering is unquestionably a widely varied activity (Gaskin, 1999). Likewise, volunteers differ as much in the volunteer activity they perform (Cnaan, Handy & Wadsworth, 1996; Wymer, 1998) as in the motivations for becoming involved in volunteering.

Although many of the various definitions applied to volunteerism suggest that the volunteer must possess some form of altruistic motivation, Bussell and Forbes (2002) suggest that this is not necessarily true. They suggest several volunteering activities for which altruism is not a necessary motivation. Indeed, Clary and his associates (1998) identified six motives for volunteering: (a) developing and enhancing one's career, (b) enhancing and enriching personal development, (c) conforming to the norms of, or establish norms for, significant others, (d) escaping from negative feelings, (e) learning new skills and practicing underutilized abilities, and (f) expressing values related to altruistic beliefs.

The literature suggests that the extent of one's volunteering activity is affected by age and by cohort. Members of Generation Y, for instance, are volunteering in their

communities more than any generation in American history (Wright, 2000). "Ninety-five percent indicate that spending time volunteering or helping people is very or somewhat important. Fifty percent actively participate in volunteer work in their communities" (Nucifora, 2001, p. 2). Consistent with these observations, volunteering among the young has increased by 12% over the last decade (Fegenbush, 2001). Similarly, Baldwin reported that members of Generation Y have "a strong sense of community, not just in smaller units, but a feeling of connectedness to a larger unit of society" (2002, p. 6).

As mentioned in the introduction, involvement of members of the younger generation (Generation Y) in volunteerism is profoundly affected by one's education. Young adults enrolled in school volunteer at a rate twice that of those not enrolled in school (Boraas, 2003), a trend that continues after graduation from college. Similarly, Davis-Smith (1999) observed a strong positive relationship between the level at which young people cease their education and the extent of their volunteering activities. Indeed, recent college graduates volunteer at twice the rate of high school graduates and four times that of high school dropouts (Boraas, 2003). Furthermore, religion and race have been suggested as factors affecting the motivation to volunteer.

### **Role of Religion**

The role of religion in the motivation to volunteer has been long recognized (Benson, Dehority, Garman, Hanson, Hochschwender, Lebold, Rohr, & Sullivan, 1980). Greely (1997) and Wilson and Janoski (1995), for instance, contend that participation in church activities provides individuals with the tools and social networks that encourage volunteering in other areas. Similarly, Ammerman states,

*Every club that plans a special event, every society that needs officers, and every congregation that asks its members to teach classes and chair committees provides opportunities for the development and exercise of civic skills. And because congregations are the single most available opportunity for voluntary participation, they are the single most egalitarian imparters of civic skills to society. By engaging in the practices of building up the fellowship, congregations also build up their communities. "Religious practices transcend religious institutional lines (1997, p. 212).*

Church members have long been regarded as being more likely to become involved in voluntary activities than non-members (e.g., Moberg, 1962). Empirical research supports this contention (Becker & Dhingra, 2001; Parboteeah, Cullen & Lim, 2004; Wilson & Musick, 1997). Similarly, involvement in volunteerism is thought to vary across individuals belonging to different religious groups (Smith, 1994). Research on the relationship between religious identification and involvement in volunteering, however, has not produced consistent findings. Several studies (e.g., Lam, 2002; Peterson & Lee, 1976) observed that Protestants are more likely to participate in voluntary associations than are Catholics and those without religious affiliation. Thomson and Knoke (1980), however, observed that Catholics have a rate of participation higher than Protestants as did Wright and Hyman (1958). Hoge, Zech, McNamara and Donahue (1998) observed that although conservative Protestants reported the greatest amount of church-related volunteering, they tied for last with

Catholics for the least amount of non-church related volunteering.

### **Role of Race**

Relatively few studies have examined the relationship between volunteerism and race. The few studies that have, however, examined the participation rates of African-Americans observed that, when socioeconomic status is controlled for, African-Americans participate in volunteering activities at a rate higher than their white counterparts (Lucas, 1985; Williams & Ortega, 1986). Similarly, Latting (1990) observed that African-Americans are more apt to indicate altruistic motives for volunteering.

### **Research Hypotheses**

- H: Students attending differing types of universities possess differing motivations for engaging in volunteering activities. Specifically, students attending different types of universities differ in the relative strength of the following motivations to volunteer-
- HI: Developing and enhancing one's career (career).
- H2: Enhancing and enriching personal development (esteem).
- H3: Conforming to the norms of, or establishing norms for, significant others (social).
- H4: Escaping from negative feelings (protective).
- H5: Learning new skills and practicing underutilized abilities (understanding).
- H6: Expressing values related to altruistic beliefs (value).

### **Methodology**

#### **Sample**

Faculty members at five differing institutions were recruited to administer questionnaires, which included the Volunteer Functions Inventory Scale, to their

students taking marketing courses. The universities were chosen to represent differing philosophical and religious approaches to education. Specifically, they were chosen as exemplars of a public commuter institution, a public residential institution, a Jesuit Catholic institution, a conservative Protestant institution, and an African-American liberal arts institution. Students taking marketing courses were chosen to comprise the sample for two primary reasons. First, since business students are generally not encouraged to engage in volunteering as a part of their education, less likelihood exists of a social desirability bias in their responses. Furthermore, through their previous coursework or through discussions in their marketing courses on the environment and on consumer behavior, students taking marketing courses tend to possess an understanding of societal needs.

It is likely that the students attending each of the universities represent a different philosophical and religious subculture. Criteria for admission to the conservative Protestant university, for instance, include "evidence of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and a consistent, Christian lifestyle." Once admitted to the institution, students are required to attend church services regularly, to attend daily chapel services, as well as abide by a far-reaching standards-of-conduct statement. The nature of these, requirements will serve to strongly dissuade individuals representing alternative subcultures from choosing this university for their collegiate education.

Similar admission requirements do not exist at the other universities; nevertheless, the students attending each university can be expected to vary. At the Jesuit Catholic university, for instance, students are required to take a significant number of theology courses as a part of the institution's general education requirements. As a result, the vast

majority of students at the institution are Catholic.

The resulting sample sizes comprised 124 from the public commuter institution, 95 from the public residential institution, 73 from the Jesuit Catholic institution, 104 from the conservative Protestant institution, and 86 from the African-American liberal arts institution (for a total sample of 482). Since the instruments were distributed in classroom settings, virtually no nonresponse was noted.

### **Measurement of Motivation to Volunteer**

Various measures have been developed to examine individuals' motivation to volunteer. When they examined the available measures, Okun, Barr, and Herzog (1998) observed that only the Volunteer Functions Inventory (VFI) (Clary, et al., 1998) fits the data on volunteering, suggesting that it is the preferred measure for understanding and measuring motivations to volunteer. The VFI measures six motives for volunteering: (a) developing and enhancing ones career (career); (b) enhancing and enriching personal development (esteem); (C) conforming to the norms of, or establishing norms for, significant others (social); (d) escaping from negative feelings (protective); (e) learning new skills and practicing underutilized abilities (understanding); and (f) expressing values related to altruistic beliefs (value) (Allison, Okun & Dutridge, 2002).

When examining the validity of the VFI scale, Clary, et al. (1998) and Allison, Okun, and Dutridge (2002) observed that the VFI scale appears to be a valid instrument. The scale appears to be reliable: coefficient alphas are typically above .80 (Clary, Snyder, & Ridge, 1992) with test-retest correlations of .64 to .78 (Clary, et al., 1998). The scale also appears to possess construct and criterion validity (Allison, Okun, & Dutridge, Clary, et al., 1998).

Allison, Dutrid (2002) observed that responses to the VFI scale are strongly correlated with volunteering activity. The score for each motivation represents the relative importance of that motivation to the individual. Similarly, the highest score reflects the motivation with the greatest importance to the respondent (Clary, Snyder, & Ridge, 1992).

**Analysis**

MANOVA was conducted to test the overall Hypothesis. One way ANOVAs were conducted to test each secondary hypothesis reflecting each of the factors of the VFI scale. Finally, paired results are

compared via t-tests for each ANOVA for which significant results were observed.

**Results**

The mean scores for students attending each university, and for each motivation to volunteer are displayed in Table 1. Results of the MANOVA to test the Hypothesis were observed to be significant at the .05 level (F 3.912, significance = .000). The overall hypothesis, that students attending different types of universities differ in their motivation to volunteer, is supported. The results of the one-way ANOVAs are displayed in Table 2.

**Table 1**  
*Mean Volunteering Scores*

Motivation to Volunteer	PC	PR	JC	CP	AA
Developing and enhancing one's career (career)	24.37	25.40	23.40	23.43	25.19
Enhancing and enriching personal development (esteem)	22.05	23.76	21.39	20.42	23.48
Confirming to the norms of, or establishing norms for, significant others (social)	16.03	19.18	19.22	20.06	22.26
Escaping from negative feelings (protective)	16.19	18.57	16.54	17.17	21.00
Learning new skills and practicing underutilized abilities (understanding)	24.05	26.08	26.21	26.32	26.90
Expressing values related to altruistic beliefs (value)	27.12	28.19	27.69	27.84	29.73

University Category Key

PC – public commuter university

PR – public residential university

JC – Jesuit Catholic university

CP – conservative Protestant university

AA – African-American liberal arts university

**Table 2**  
*ANOVA Results*

Motivation to Volunteer	F-Value	Significance
Developing and enhancing one's career (career)	1.799	.128
Enhancing and enriching personal development (esteem)	2.780	.026*
Conforming to the norms of, or establishing norms for, significant others (social)	10.196	.000*
Escaping from negative feelings (protective)	4.873	.001*
Learning new skills and practicing underutilized abilities (understanding)	3.678	.006*
Expressing values related to altruistic beliefs (value)	3.875	.004*

\* = p < .05

**Table 3**  
**Post Hoc Tests**

University	Compared With	Esteem	Social	Protective	Understanding	Value
PC	PR	-1.65	<b>-2.88</b>	<b>-2.38</b>	<b>-1.96</b>	-1.02
		.101	<b>.002*</b>	<b>.020*</b>	<b>.019*</b>	.123
	JC	.65	<b>-3.22</b>	-.52	<b>-2.16</b>	-.61
		.545	<b>.002*</b>	.637	<b>.016*</b>	.391
		1.43	<b>-4.16</b>	-1.15	<b>-2.60</b>	-.91
CP	.147	<b>.000*</b>	.249	<b>.001*</b>	.161	
	-1.26	<b>-5.93</b>	<b>-4.40</b>	<b>-2.67</b>	<b>-2.72</b>	
PR	JC	.237	<b>.000*</b>	<b>.000*</b>	<b>.002*</b>	<b>.000*</b>
		<b>2.31</b>	-.34	1.86	-.20	.41
	CP	<b>.046*</b>	.752	.112	.834	.588
		<b>3.08</b>	-1.28	1.23	-.64	.699
		<b>.004*</b>	.198	.254	.464	.871
AA	.39	<b>-3.05</b>	-2.02	-.71	<b>-1.70</b>	
	.729	<b>.004*</b>	.080	.451	<b>.024*</b>	
JC	CP	.77	-.94	-.63	-.44	-.30
		.496	.376	.582	.637	.690
	AA	-1.91	<b>-2.71</b>	<b>-3.88</b>	-.51	<b>-2.11</b>
CP	AA	.113	<b>.017*</b>	<b>.002*</b>	.609	<b>.008*</b>
		<b>-2.68</b>	-1.77	<b>-3.25</b>	-.07	<b>1.81</b>
CP	AA	<b>.016*</b>	.092	<b>.004*</b>	.942	<b>.014*</b>

University Category Key

PC – public commuter university

PR – public residential university

JC – Jesuit Catholic university

CP – conservative Protestant university

AA – African-American liberal arts university

Motivation Key

Esteem – Enhancing and enriching personal development

Social – Conforming to the norms of, or establishing norms for, significant others

Protective – Escaping from negative feelings

Understanding – Learning new skills and practicing underutilized abilities

Value – Expressing values related to altruistic beliefs

\* =  $p < .05$

Significant (at the .05 level) differences were observed for five of the six motivations to volunteer. The only motivation for which a significant difference was not observed was developing and enhancing one's career (career). Support, therefore, was observed for Hypotheses 2 through 6, but not for Hypothesis 1.

Post hoc tests were performed for the five motivations to volunteer for which signifi-

cant results were observed, to better understand the nature of the differences. The results are displayed in Table 3.

For enhancing and enriching personal development (esteem), students attending the public residential university expressed significantly stronger motivations than students attending the Jesuit Catholic and the conservative Protestant universities. In addition, students attending the conservative Protestant university expressed significantly

weaker motivations than students attending the African-American liberal arts university.

For conforming to the norms of, or establishing norms for, significant others (social), students attending the public commuter university expressed significantly weaker motivations than students attending any of the other universities. Furthermore, students attending the African-American liberal arts university expressed significantly stronger motivations than students attending the public residential university and the Jesuit Catholic university.

For escaping from negative feelings (protective), students attending the African-American liberal arts university expressed significantly stronger motivations than students attending the Jesuit Catholic, conservative Protestant, and public commuter universities. Moreover, students attending the public residential university expressed significantly stronger motivations than students attending the public commuter university.

For learning new skills and practicing underutilized abilities (understanding), students attending the public commuter university expressed significantly weaker motivations than students attending any of the other universities.

Finally, for expressing values related to altruistic beliefs (value), students attending the African-American liberal arts university expressed stronger attending any of the other

## Discussion

Since individuals who have attended or are attending college appear to be much more likely to engage in volunteering activities, college students seem to be a group which should not be overlooked when attempting to recruit volunteers. In support of the general hypothesis, however, students attending different types of universities appear to possess differing motivations to volunteer. Closer analysis indicates that the

differences originate in five of the six motivations to volunteer. The results appear to indicate that it may be beneficial for human service agencies and nonprofit organizations to adapt their recruiting techniques to the collegiate background of the potential volunteers. When students attending the different universities (exemplars of a public commuter institution, a public residential institution, a Jesuit Catholic institution, a conservative Protestant institution, and an African-American liberal arts institution) were examined, the primary differences observed involved students attending the public commuter university and those attending the African-American liberal arts university. In the post hoc tests, students from these two institutions accounted for 19 of the 21 instances for which significant differences were noted. Closer examination of these results appears warranted.

Students attending the public commuter university were found to be consistently less motivated to engage in volunteer activities than were students attending the other types of universities. The differences were most pronounced for the social (conforming to the norms of, or establishing norms for, significant others) and understanding (learning new skills and practicing underutilized abilities) motivations. For each of these types of motivations, students attending the public commuter university expressed significantly less motivation than students attending any of the other universities. It appears that public commuter universities may be less likely to develop environments that foster desire among their students to engage in voluntary activities and/or are less likely to attract students who are motivated to volunteer.

Surprisingly few differences were observed to exist between students attending the public residential, the Jesuit Catholic, and the conservative Protestant universities. The only differences observed were that



students attending the Jesuit Catholic and conservative Protestant universities expressed lower esteem (enhancing and enriching personal development) motivations than those attending the public residential university.

Finally, students attending the African-American liberal arts university consistently expressed stronger motivations to engage in voluntary activities than students attending the other universities. The differences were especially notable for social (conforming to the norms of, or establishing norms for, significant others), protective (escaping from negative feelings), and value (expressing values related to altruistic beliefs) motivations. This finding is consistent with past research suggesting that race is a factor in one's propensity to volunteer. Furthermore, the finding that students attending the African-American liberal arts university expressed higher value (altruistic) motivations than students attending any of the other universities is also consistent with past research that suggests that African-Americans are more likely to pursue voluntary activities for altruistic motivations than individuals of other races. These findings suggest that students attending or who have attended African-American liberal arts universities may be especially likely to engage in voluntary activities and may represent an especially fruitful source of volunteers.

### **Implications**

If corroborated by future research, the findings indicate that nonprofit organizations and human-service agencies recruiting volunteers from among college students may need to alter the recruitment appeals based on the type of university that the students are attending.

The strongest motivation to volunteer was the same across students attending all

five institutions - expressing values related to altruistic beliefs (value). The motivation, however, was observed to be significantly stronger for students attending the African-American liberal arts university. Appeals to the altruistic nature of volunteering appear to likely be a successful means to attract students from all universities to volunteer.

Learning new skills and practicing underutilized abilities (understanding) also appears to be an important motivation to volunteer for all students, but the motivation was observed to be significantly weaker for those attending the public commuter university. Therefore, appeals to the learning aspects of volunteering appear likely to be successful, but their success will likely be less for those students attending a public commuter university.

No significant difference was observed between schools on the motivation of developing and enhancing one's career (career). Since the motivation was observed to be moderately strong for students attending each of the institutions, it may be used equally as an appeal to students attending each of the schools.

The results observed for the motivations of conforming to the norms of, or establishing norms for, significant others (social) and escaping from negative feelings (protective) were somewhat similar. In each instance, students attending the public commuter university expressed the weakest motivation and students attending the African-American liberal arts university expressed the strongest motivation. Appeals to these two motivations, therefore, can be expected to be more successful when directed toward students attending an African-American liberal arts university, but not when directed toward students attending a public commuter university. Although generally significantly stronger than those held by students attending the public commuter university, the strengths of these two motivations to volun-

teer (social and protective) were observed to be relatively weak for students attending the other institutions.

Finally, the enhancing and enriching personal development (esteem) motivation is strongest for students attending the public residential and African-American liberal arts universities and weakest for students attending the Jesuit Catholic and conservative Protestant universities. This finding suggests that appeals to esteem would likely work best for students attending non-religious-based universities.

### Limitations

Although the findings of this effort are encouraging, a number of limitations exist. First, the exploratory nature of this study limits the drawing of any firm conclusions. Second, the limited nature of the sample restricts the generalizability of the results to other populations. The universities chosen represent exemplars of differing types of universities.

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