Service-Learning at SDS

Whether by refining a skill or learning a new one, volunteering can enhance our abilities while giving us insight into ourselves, an idea clearly demonstrated through the concept of service learning. Service learning focuses on meaningful experiences through community service that allow for self-reflection.

Western recognizes the importance of service learning and is making efforts to introduce it to first-year students through Residence Education and Programs. Yara Hosein, a Residence Don at Perth Hall organized a Service Learning Reception for her floor where she invited several groups on campus to talk to students about their volunteer experiences. Omer Moharram and I were among presenters at this event that included individuals from the Rotaract Club, Cancer Awareness Club, and the Alternative Spring Break Program.

In the VIP program we had the opportunity to talk to Mark Weir, English Conversation Circle Leader, and Caitlin Russell, Career Services Newsletter Editor, and ask them to reflect on their VIP Service Learning experience.

“Service Learning focuses on meaningful experiences through community service that allow for self-reflection”
Saeeda: What is one thing you’ve learned from your volunteering experience with the VIP Program?

Mark: Through my experience as an English Conversation Leader, I have learned to appreciate and encourage sharing of different cultures. After seeing 30 different countries, and that I was only able to scratch the surface, I am amazed at the diversity on campus, and within my group of students where there is a wealth of interesting and insightful cultural stories.

Caitlin: I have learned how to write with a purpose. Writing in newsletter and email formats, as opposed to writing academically, have forced me to get my point across efficiently. This position has also taught me to work within constraints of various deadlines.

Saeeda: How did/does your volunteer experience relate to your academic studies at Western?

Mark: Part of my studies and research here in the Master’s degree of Health and Rehabilitation Sciences is to take a greater focus in subjective and contextual factors that every one of us lives our lives in. By seeing issues with a broader lens of inquiry, I can see the bigger picture and importance of helping each other in ways greater than simply providing answers to questions. Showing you care is contagious, and by doing so, you get beyond the face-to-face interaction to build sincerity and rapport with students.

Saeeda: How does your VIP experience relate to your career development?

Mark: As I move into the field of bioethics, I will be looking at issues of how people’s values can conflict with the application of genetic medicine. A major component of understanding how people construct and defend their values is to look into how they construct their world-view by listening to what they value. By gaining insight into how people view the world, one can obtain a greater appreciation of how to address complex issues in medicine. The VIP program provides me with the opportunity to look across a diverse group of people, to take a greater look into their worlds and gain appreciation for the way it’s seen by them.

Caitlin: I want to get into publishing, so this was a fantastic start. I was given freedom and independence with projects. I was also involved in Faculty meetings, allowing me to gain experience in a professional setting. Writing for Career Services publications was great for my career path. Learning about topics I write on is a skill that, without this position, I would not have had the ‘know-how’ to find.

Saeeda: Working with the VIP Program has made you think more about...

Mark: what it must be like to move to Canada without knowing anyone, or having any social support network. I admire students who come all the way from their home country to experience a new way of life.

Caitlin: real life experience. Now, when I look at Graduate Programs, I am drawn to those that include internships.
The 2006-07 year started out with a bang at the annual VIP Orientation night. With over 60 people in attendance it was a great way to meet many of your fellow VIPs. Taking place at USC Council Chambers, volunteers were warmly welcomed by Dr. Gail Hutchindon, Director of the Student Development Services, Sandra Pehilj, VIP Program Coordinator and Zena Al-Saady, VIP Program Assistant. The evening began with an introduction to the various programs and services available at the Student Development Services. Various representatives spoke about their programs within SDS.

Dr. Jack Russel introduced the VIPs to the psychological services available, while Ms. Tracey Ropp outlined the various learning skills services offered. Several other speakers outlined the First Nations Services, Services for Students with Disabilities, Effective Writing Program, Career Services, and International Student Services.

Once the formal orientation was complete, the VIPs headed over to the Wave for the first social of the year. Madeeha Qasmi, Beverly Bunker and Shannon Miranda were some of the lucky winners of the door prizes. Once everyone was full of pizza, everyone got to know each other through the VIP version of “speed dating”: talk to the person in front of you for a minute, and then switch! Overall the night was a great way to meet some fellow VIPs, and a good start to the year.
Can you dig it? It’s VIP Volleyball!

By Omer Moharram
VIP Student Coordinator

Bump, set, spike!! If you happened to stop by the Thames Hall Gym in October or November of this year, those are some of the things you might have seen. The reason being that it was intramural sports season, and the VIP volleyballers were busy not only volunteering, but also setting, serving, spiking – you name it! Each weekend our team would go out and do whatever we could to get the ball over the net and represent the Volunteers In Progress with pride. It was this tenacious attitude that earned us a winning record (3-2), and now we’re hyped and awaiting our first playoff game. Win or lose – there’s no doubt we all had lots of fun and some great moments that made for a memorable season. Back in action this weekend, we’ll do our best to keep the good times rolling and show the other squads what we’re made of. Everyone in this league knows that in order to win it, they’re going to have to get through the VIPs!

If you are interested in joining the volleyball team next semester please contact your VIP Captain Omer Moharram at vip@sdc.uwo.ca

VIPs help the Youth Action Centre

By Natalie Hetmanczuk
VIP Student Coordinator

On November 9th 2006, a group of VIPs volunteered for an evening at the Youth Action Centre in London (YAC). YAC is located in downtown London and provides services to street youth. London youth can come to the centre for a meal, health services, counseling, or simply some help when they need it. The centre also encourages youth to participate in public speaking engagements within the community to inform the public about issues facing the homeless youth in London.

Our group of VIPs prepared a delicious dinner for the youth who needed assistance that evening. While as VIPs we may not be expert chefs, it was a great way to give back to the community. We hope that no one minded the bread that was accidentally burnt by our novice chefs, Omer and Zena. Our lack of talent in the kitchen was hopefully compensated for by the mocha cappuccino cakes provided by Student Development Services. Stay tuned for our next community involvement day next semester!

If you have any ideas or want to be involved in future Community Involvement Days please contact Natalie Hetmanczuk at vip@sdc.uwo.ca
Bowling at Fleetway!

By Madhu Gupta
VIP Student Coordinator

Sometimes it’s best to take a break from homework, work, and even volunteering to relax with friends. So, the VIPs decided to have our first social in October at Fleetway. However, once we arrived, we didn’t make it to the lanes right away. Before we had the chance to bowl everyone unanimously decided to stop at the attached Dairy Queen first. We all related a few stories from our experiences at Western and started to learn a bit about each other. Finally, with blizzards in hand, we started to bowl. I was intimidated at the beginning of the game because I’ve never been an expert bowler, but I learnt that I didn’t need to be an expert. We all had gutter balls and a few strikes. In the end it didn’t matter who had the highest score because we were too busy laughing at everyone who “Pulled a Natalie”. All in all, it was a great night. Something to remember while I’m studying for my fast approaching finals and wishing to be relaxing with friends again.

A great way to meet and learn about the other volunteers in the VIP program is to come out to the socials. Next semester look out for a day of Snowtubing and a Dessert Potluck!!!

Dinner at The Wave!

Dinner is best when you are surrounded by friends, so why not have dinner together? That’s why on Thursday, November 23rd, the VIPs had dinner at the Wave. This relaxing evening gave everyone a chance to unwind and talk about their experiences in and out of the VIP program.
VIP Spotlight: Learning Skills Assistant

For Ghazaleh Namavar-ian, getting involved is an important part of being at Western. The 4th year electrical engineering student shows this by having not one, but two positions in the Volunteers In Progress Program! Ghazaleh is currently volunteering as an International Student Presentation Assistant, a new position in the Learning Skills Services (LSS), where she helps prepare presentations offered by the LSS. Ghazaleh’s experience as an international student allows her to give valuable feedback and input for the presentations. “I learned English 6 years ago,” she explains, “so I’ve had to deal with many of the challenges that international students must overcome in order to be successful”.

This position is a perfect fit for Ghazaleh, whose native language is Farsi, and who is very interested in learning about different languages and cultures. Ghazaleh also volunteers as a Learning Skills Assistant where she teaches students the skills necessary to be a successful in university, giving advice on topics such as time management, problem solving and writing multiple choice exams. “The key focus is on identifying the students’ needs so they’re able to solve their own problems”, Ghazaleh comments. “Every student has a different approach to problem solving, and it’s our job to help them feel comfortable with it”. Ghazaleh admits that it can be tricky at times to meet the specific needs of so many students. “We do our best – it’s always a challenge to be able to give the right advice”. The benefits of being involved in the Learning Skills Services, however, are apparent to Ghazaleh every day. “Being exposed to students’ problems gives you a better understanding of how to face challenges of you own. Also, the ability to help someone is a rewarding experience – you learn a lot about communication,” Ghazaleh says.

Ghazaleh’s broad knowledge of problem solving techniques is advantageous for her career as an electrical engineering student. “My two positions at the SDS give me variety in my life that helps me to be more flexible when it comes to the challenges encountered as a student,” Ghazaleh says. “It’s good to be exposed to problems that aren’t just technical”. Ghazaleh, who plans to continue volunteering in the future, knows the importance of getting involved and meeting students from all walks of life. She explains, “Personally, I think that having variety in your life expands your horizons.” Whether Ghazaleh is contributing valuable insight to international student presentations, or sharing her knowledge of problem solving techniques with students, she is always busy being a VIP and we wish her continued success as a volunteer and as a student here at Western.

Ghazaleh’s VIP Supervisor, Sarah Carter had some feedback regarding the new Learning Skills position: “Ghazaleh has been involved in preparing and delivering two presentations particularly for international students and those learning in a second language: Reading Strategies for International Students and Classroom Learning Strategies for International Undergraduates. Learning Skills hopes to offer these presentations again in the winter term, as well as put together a binder of information on learning strategies for second language learners. Ghazaleh also works as a Learning Skills VIP in the Help Centre (Room 270) twice a week, giving individual assistance to students. All this is in addition to her internship at Robarts Research Institute. I am thinking of asking her to advise me on my time management skills!”

By Omer Moharram
VIP Student Coordinator