



November 6, 2009

First Lady Michelle Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Room 200, East Wing
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mrs. Obama,

We write to update you on the efforts of GW's students, faculty and staff to make service a part of our everyday life. Your challenge has inspired thousands of students to take on new service projects and look for ways to get involved in our city, our country and around the world. For those already involved in service, it has spurred a renewed sense of dedication to making a difference in our community.

Student community service efforts took off with a roar this year when President Knapp announced your service challenge to 1,400 members of the GW community who were waiting to take part in the first ever GW Freshman Day of Service on September 11th.



Over the course of that day, student preformed 3,365 hours of service—throughout all eight wards of Washington, DC, as well as Maryland and Virginia. Students worked with USO, TAPS, Vinson Hall and the Armed Forces Retirement Home to build thousands of care packages for the troops, write letters to the families of fallen soldiers and help elderly veterans clean up their living spaces. Across the city, students beautified parks, collected trash in the Anacostia Watershed and painted schools.

As impressive as this day was, our effort has just begun. In the subsequent weeks students, faculty, staff and trustees immediately took the initiative, and began setting up their own programs, counting their service hours and looking for ways to get involved. Students have formed new groups, planned events, pledged to serve, and gotten to work.

*Assembling care packages for our troops
During Freshman Day of Service.
Photo credit: Tessa Bialek*



One new group—Grassroots Colonials—has recruited 18 student athletes from GW to teach HIV/AIDS awareness in DC public schools across the city. Each student took part in a four week training program designed to prepare them for the questions they will face handling this difficult subject. They expect to perform 850 hours of service this semester alone.

Grassroots Colonials teach at MLK Jr. Elementary School in Congress Heights (left). Photo credit: Jake Miner

In the seven weeks since the announcement of your challenge, students have recorded over 19,000 hours of community service through our Office of Community Service.

Total Service Hours	19,025
Alternative Breaks	550
Community Building Community	1,959
DC Reads - DCPS	2,090
DC Reads - Community Partners	2,559
Freshman Day of Service	3,365
Jumpstart	2,175
Neighbors Project	1,065
AmeriCorps*VISTA	1,316
Medical School	3,946



GW students planting a tree. Photo credit: GW Medical Center.

Countless hours continue to filter in from Greek organizations, student groups, and other members of the GW community looking to do their part and most of these efforts are not yet part of the university's official count. For example, the 104 brothers of Pi Kappa Alpha have already amassed 862 service hours toward the effort that will be included in future tabulations.

To make sure that we are counting all the service hours, GW has partnered with VolunteerMatch, an application that will allow students, faculty and staff to easily track and report their hours. VolunteerMatch is a non-profit organization that boasts a network of over 70,000 non-profits located all over the world who list their volunteer opportunities and recruit volunteers via the specialized VolunteerMatch sites. The GW site will not only list these general volunteer opportunities but also allow members of the GW community to advertise and recruit volunteers for their own specific service projects. Every student, staff, and faculty member will have an account set up when the program launches on November 16th. We expect our numbers to jump as volunteers enter the many hours they have been manually counting since the start of the semester.

What lies ahead for our service efforts?

The challenge had inspired enthusiasm throughout the GW community. Among the exciting events and programs planned:

- Students and staff are scheduling service projects to coincide with the 37th annual National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week November 16-21, 2009. This year's events will include trips to DC Central Kitchen and the Capital Area Food Bank, as well as our traditional Hunger Banquet: an interactive simulation event where participants learn about the nature of hunger, poverty and pervasive inequities from local community, national and global perspectives. The week will culminate with GW's participation in the 22nd Annual Fannie Mae Help the Homeless Walkathon.
- Inspired by the challenge, each member of the GW Board of Trustees committed to completing 60 hours of service each before May 1, 2010. Many of the board members will be serving alongside President and Diane Robinson Knapp, who have made a list of service activities in which they will be participating this academic year. Additional commitments have been made by groups and individuals across all sectors of the University, such as GW MBA students and Sigma Chi Fraternity.
- Students and staff have already begun planning and signing up for our 2010 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day events. We want to make sure that students view January 18th as "a day on, not a day off."

Who is behind all this service?

Thousands of students, staff and faculty have joined in the efforts. Each has a great story of how they have been inspired. Below are a few profiles in service:

Davina Durgana, Senior

Davina is a senior studying international politics and conflict and security. While serving on a mission trip in El Salvador she became involved in efforts to fight human trafficking. As an intern in DC Attorney General Peter Nickles' office she worked on a recent anti-human trafficking campaign. Davina is a Big Sister to a young girl in Anacostia and spends a few hours per week helping to run a Girl Scout troop in Southeast DC. Instead of relaxing for her senior year, Davina is hard at work studying to become a certified EMT. She will start a volunteer position at the Hyattsville, MD fire department next week. She requested that particular station because it has the greatest call volume in the Washington metro area. She has also started a chapter of Angel Tree on the GW campus - an organization that reaches out to the children and families of prison inmates. Davina hopes she provides the girls she works with a strong, independent female role model.

Derek Rogers, Sophomore

Derek began his community service during Community Building Community (CBC), spending his first days at GW volunteering at the Latin American Youth Center in the Columbia Heights neighborhood and at a charter school for children with special needs. Derek is now a leader of the program, heading up efforts around DC with sites such as the Capital Area Food Bank, ThriveDC, and Higher Achievement's tutoring program for inner-city students. Derek is involved with Alternative Breaks, a program where students travel across the United States and to foreign countries to serve. After spending a month in Belize where he volunteered at two

elementary schools, Derek became a co-leader for an upcoming trip to Cusco, Peru. After college he plans to enter the corporate world of retail where he looks to tie together fashion and community service.

Supriya Shah, Junior

Supriya serves as the Public Relations and Communications Chair for the Alternative Breaks Executive Board and will lead the program's winter trip to Guatemala. She is a CBC guide for the incoming class of 2013 and is actively involved in the "DC Reads" tutoring program at Francis-Stevens Education Center. Supriya was a leader of the Freshmen Day of Service on September 11th. She has a true passion and desire to make a difference in the world and believes that it is through service and direct action that she can affect change in the lives of others. Next semester she will be studying abroad in Egypt where she plans to be involved in global service projects.

These members of the GW community and thousands more like them have heard your call to serve and have answered with a resounding "Yes, We Can!" In the coming months we will provide you with regular updates of our service hour tally and personal examples of the good work your challenge has inspired. This information will also be available on a real-time basis at our new Service Challenge website serve.gwu.edu. We look forward to working towards the ambitious goal you have set in the months ahead.

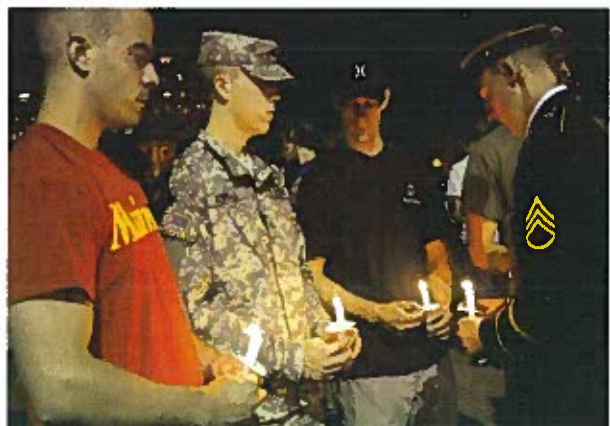
Sincerely,



Julie Bindelglass
President, GW Student Association



Jason Lifton
Executive Vice-President, GW Student Association



Students add some DC pride to their service project (left). Photo credit: GW Law. Veterans and GW students participate in a candle light vigil to mark September 11th (right). Photo credit: Jessica McConnell