Strength in service: 'I feel now I can fill the position of what a leader needs to be'

by News Bureau - Monday, June 30, 2014


Three members of the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Circle K Club put the organization’s motto—“Live to Serve, Love to Serve”—into action earlier this month at the 59th annual international convention in Nashville.

Circle K, the collegiate arm of Kiwanis International, is the world’s largest student-led collegiate service organization with more than 12,600 members in 17 nations. The UW Oshkosh Circle K Club meets on Tuesday evenings in Reeve Memorial Union throughout the academic year.

The convention included a Large-Scale Service Project that provided Circle K members from across the country the opportunity to give back to the host city of Nashville. Service projects took place at the Boys and Girls Club, Nashville Rescue Mission, Ronald McDonald House and more.

At the convention, the students also took part in leadership and professional development workshops as well as caucusing and voting for the 2014-2015 international board.

“Live to Serve, Love to Serve” is the motto of UW Oshkosh’s Circle K Club, said the club’s new president, Josie Mackai. “I feel now I can fill the position of what a leader needs to be. It’s an experience I wish I could share with all Oshkosh Circle K members.”

UW Oshkosh boasts more than 100 student organizations that, like Circle K, are centered on community service and civic engagement.

The organizations range from the American Red Cross Club, which “strives to learn, practice, and exemplify humanitarian values through youth service projects and partnerships with other community groups alongside the American Red Cross Northeast Chapter,” to the Habitat for Humanity Campus Chapter, which helps the local Oshkosh affiliate build houses to fight poverty and providing housing for families in need.

The volume of service work and learning involved at UW Oshkosh is staggering.

The student organization “Titan Volunteers” completed 47 volunteer service events for a total of 765 hours of service (the equivalent to 95 full work days) in 2013-14. That’s up from 26 events and 430 hours completed in 2012-2013. UW Oshkosh fraternity and sorority members completed 4,751 hours of service (the equivalent of 594 work days) and donated more than $11,700 to target philanthropies in fall 2013.

The campus-wide growth has been partly fueled by development of “The VolunteerNow! Portal” app. It was completed and rolled out for agency and student use in spring 2014, helping students connect with current Oshkosh-area community agencies’ needs in real time.
Missy Burgess, assistant director for student involvement at Reeve Memorial Union, said the growth of student service organizations at UW Oshkosh also has a lot to do with something hard to quantify: students’ “personal passions” stoked through past experiences with local, regional or national organizations. Those without past experience or connection to a particularly, existing cause are stepping up and rolling up their shirt sleeves through more general service-oriented student organizations such as Titan Volunteers.

“I think our broader, service-based groups are based on those students who are interested in simply doing service, not necessarily based on a specific passion,” Burgess said. “… And a lot of our students are coming to UW Oshkosh having done some service in their high schools.”

Beyond the obvious benefits of doing good on and off campus, service has also helped fortify student learning and stoked a lifelong hunger for civic engagement opportunities, data shows.

Michael Lueder, outgoing program adviser for volunteerism at Reeve and “Quest III” coordinator for civic engagement projects with UW Oshkosh’s year-old transformation of general education, the University Studies Program (USP), said the institution tracks seven different learning outcomes connected to service.

“We always see a higher result in a learning outcome from those who participate in a service program,” Lueder said. “The more time spent doing service-related work, the higher the learning outcome.”

The NASPA (Student Affairs Administrators Association) Consortium Civic Engagement Survey was completed in February 2014 with 200 UW Oshkosh respondents. The results were compared to the same survey completed in 2011. A few of the key findings include:

- 56.6 percent of respondents indicated that they had participated in a service-oriented group at least once in the fall 2013 semester.
- 47.7 percent of respondents indicated that they had participated in a one-time service opportunity at least once in the fall 2013 semester.
- Students indicated they want to work with agencies and causes in a wide range of volunteerism categories. The most common were Youth (56.4 percent), Animals (55.7 percent), Women and Families (36.2 percent), Health Care (34.9 percent), Environmental (33.6 percent), and Counseling (32.9 percent).
- 50.35 percent of students either strongly agree or somewhat agree that they would like to see more civic engagement in their major courses, and 64.4 percent of students either strongly agree or somewhat agree that they would be more likely to engage in service learning if they received credit for it.

That last data point bodes well for the USP. Lueder and colleagues are preparing to launch the “Quest III” civic engagement and community experience component of the two-year program for the first time this fall. Between 800 to 900 students entering Quest III will, through their USP courses, connect with local and regional nonprofits, other organizations and initiatives, as faculty members tie the course content to “civic action, community partners and real-world challenges.”
In Quest III courses built upon USP’s signature questions rooted in sustainability, bridging cultural divides and instilling lifelong civic engagement, faculty members will introduce students to nonprofits specializing in locally grown and organic food, equine therapy and domestic violence victim services, just to name just a few.

“We are looking forward to an incredible 2014-15 academic year as our students and faculty continue to their groundbreaking teaching and learning on and off campus through the USP,” Lueder said.

Learn more:

- UW Oshkosh Circle K on Facebook
- UW Oshkosh Student Organizations
- University Studies Program: Quest III, Community Experience