

Introduction

Martin Luther King Jr. once said “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is: What are you doing for others? Living is a form of not being sure, not knowing what next or how. The moment you know, you begin to die a little.” I entered the University of Louisville unsure about my future, like many students do every year. When asked what I wanted to major in I always answered Accounting, but never could express any details about what I will do with that degree after I graduate, because I did not know what it was that I wanted. For me, a huge part of my college experience is out those future plans of mine while developing my identity as a maturing adult. As a Martin Luther King Jr. Scholar, now in my 2nd to last semester of my undergraduate experience, and pursuing my degree in Peace, Conflict, and Justice Transformation, the quote above speaks a lot to me about my experience with this program, and how connected it has been within my identity development over the past 4 years.

This semester, doing such extensive service learning has forced me to critically think about what the value of service is and exactly what service means to me. However, even more so, I have started to think more about how I can continue to do service even when I graduate and for the rest of my life – whether that is as simple as volunteering an hour of my time at an event or doing more long-term, in-depth service projects. Through my experience, I have left the premature mindset of doing service just to do service, but I have developed the mindset of constantly asking myself what community I want to serve and how I can do that. In essence I continually ask myself “what am I doing for others?” Like Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Living is a form of no being sure, not knowing what next or how...” In my understanding, service has a parallel with that statement. I do

service because of the altruism in helping others and non-profits, whether directly or indirectly. Whether I know what service I am doing or not, or even if I do not entirely understand how my service is benefitting a community, I have to constantly remind myself that the value of my service is still there.

The last line of the quote, "...The moment you know, you begin to die a little," applies to my views on the end-goal of service. I interpret that line as saying that service should not have an end goal, as there is always a community to serve and to aid with. Furthermore, if I set an end goal for my service then there instantly becomes a time limit on the service that I do. We see that happen a lot with young adults, even here at the University of Louisville. For example, a person may need 25 hours of service for their organization but may stop doing service after the hours are accumulated; or raising a minimum amount of money to give to a cause for a short period opposed to raising funds for the same cause continuously throughout the year. I believe that a key element of service is that unknown that many people experience while dedicating their time to service. It is okay to struggle with the value of service, the impact of service, or even the practicality of service – in my opinion, having those feelings associated with service is truly what makes service a lifelong pursuit.

Service Site – Introduction

I am now finishing up 64 hours of my service learning capstone at Family Scholar House. Family Scholar House's is a non-profit organization with four sites in Louisville. Their mission is to end the cycle of poverty and transform our community by empowering families and youth to succeed in education and achieve life-long self-sufficiency. The main function of Family Scholar House is that they offer free housing to

single parents that are pursuing an associates or bachelor's degree in any field of study. In addition, Family Scholar House provides educational programs to the general community and supplemental support to residents of their property (such as tutoring, baby-sitting services, and financial help). Being from a low-income background and experiencing homelessness myself while growing up, I felt very connected to Family Scholar House's mission, the staff that supports, and the residents that I interact with when I do service there. That is the main reason I decided to originally pursue service there years ago, and select Family Scholar House as my service site. A single-mother raised me. I am a first generation college student, and currently in my last year of undergraduate at the University of Louisville. Having the privilege to serve at Family Scholar House in my current position is the juxtaposition considering the community that they serve.

Service Site – Responsibilities & Reflection

My responsibilities at Family Scholar varied depending upon the needs of the day/week. The organization heavily relies on volunteers for day-to-day, tedious tasks that full-time employees do not have time for. This semester was not my first time heavily serving at Family Scholar House so I am used to doing tasks any tasks necessary. Some consistent tasks I did in my time at Family Scholar House this semester included babysitting, tutoring, processing of donations, assisting with program decorations, assisting with programs, organizing donations and other messy work areas. I even did some intake and clerical tasks on days that they were short-handed - but I recognize that as a unique privilege that not many volunteers have because typically only interns have that level of responsibility. I was able because I had those duties when I volunteered with them about 3 years ago.

Initially, my service started off very ‘slow,’ meaning that I really did not have too many tasks to do in my first couple weeks at Family Scholar House. In addition, my service learning experience at Family Scholar House did not offer any opportunities to carry out and implement new programs, or lead a service project while there. So most of my tasks were day-to-day that could be done by any person, which left me feeling often times replaceable. However, I came to understand the concept of direct vs. indirect impact. Sometimes, performing service does not mean having a real, substantial impact on an organization or community. Often times, just doing small, tedious tasks allows others in the organization more time to make more substantial decisions or perform more high-level tasks; such as sitting in on board meeting or developing a budget. In this sense the service is indirect and my seem miniscule, but is still a very important part of the stream of service. This idea made me feel a lot more comfortable about the tasks that I performed and helped me come to terms with feeling replaceable.

As I moved through more weeks of service at my site, I started to get into a better groove of consistent activities and the culture of the organization. I believe this contributed to my communication with my service coordinator. It was taught in PEAC 350 that active listening is one of the most important skills for mediation. Furthermore, I believe that to be a vital skill for any kind of communication in an organizational structure. I put that skill in use when I requested additional duties with the service coordinator of Family Scholar House, which yielded positive results for me in the weeks following.

The most substantial week for my service was during the week of November 26th, where I came to truly understand the value of my service. I was tasked, while

volunteering this week, with dividing up Christmas donations that Family Scholar House received into groups of four distributed to all the Family Scholar House locations across the city. While separating the donations (about 400 individual items), I started thinking about how it must have taken many individual acts of kindness to take accumulate so many items (ranging from diapers to toiletries to school supplies and washing detergent) that will benefit single parents and their children enrolled in the Family Scholar House program.

The idea of many, many individuals coming together to help a cause and have a significant influence reminded me a lot of Sociology-210 (Soc-210), Intro to Social Problems. A concept introduced in Soc-210 was that in order to induce social change, there typically needs to be a significant number of common people pushing for that change (for example the large amount of people who pushed/backed the Civil Rights Movement) or a significant number of influential people to affect things on a policy level (such as The Supreme Court striking down Jim Crow Laws as unconstitutional).

Remembering that concept during my volunteering this week got me thinking about how that applies to service. A lot of the experience with this class has been reflecting on the value of service and what it means to me, and being less focused on the amount of hours I accumulate – unlike the time when I volunteered a few years and had to accumulate 300 service hours. The realization I came to this week is that service learning is a parallel for the concept that I learned in my Soc-210 class. Service is truly so beneficial to society because there is a significant number of individuals that dedicate their time to service projects, charities, organizations, and helping others. Even more so, we even see that influential people (such as celebrities) tackle social issues through non-

profits that typically benefit a target population. While service may seem trivial on some days, this week I have come to understand that I am a much-needed part of the whole. Without the significant number of people who dedicated their time to service on a daily basis, then non-profit organizations will not function to their most productive, efficient way. Life without the many people who dedicate their time to service, even if it is just one hour every other day, is a life where I do see non-profits truly succeeding.

Family Scholar House is an organization that is truly dependent upon a significant number of volunteers. Serving there first hand, I have seen just how little time the interns and full-time staff have to focus on the tasks that I and the many other volunteers perform on a daily basis. It made me realize and understand the value of service is, predominantly, in the vast amount of individuals that perform those acts.

My current position is very unique. Due to extenuating circumstances I still have two more weeks' life to complete the hourly service requirement for my site. That means that while I am genuinely reflecting upon my experience at the site, this reflection truly is not final. I feel as if I will be able to gain more perspective in my final two weeks at the site as we move deeper toward the December holiday season. In addition, having this time to deeply reflect upon my cumulative experience may allow me to carry my own, new perspective into my service sites for the remainder of my weeks at the site.

Service Site – Successes and Failures

Personally, I thoroughly enjoyed my experience of service learning at Family Scholar House this semester. It was a much different, more enjoyable experience this time than when I performed my 300+ service hours my sophomore to junior year at the site. I believe that what made this experience so much more valuable was the

introspective mindset that I had coming into this semester. In my first meeting with Russell it was communicated that this semester of service learning is about the value, not the hours. This challenged me to think more proactively about my service – the value, the commitment, the successes, and the failures.

My biggest success this semester was coming to understand what service means to me. As a Martin Luther King Jr. Scholar, service has been a pivotal part of my college experience. I felt like I was charged with continuing the legacy of a great leader, and that I needed to live up to that expectation. I feel like service is the best way to live up to those expectations. Through my involvement in my mentored scholarship program I developed a very basic understanding of what service means to me, and this experience has really strengthen and solidified my understanding of the value of service.

This semester, I have realized that service is about the altruism – doing things from the goodness of your heart because you want to support others. It is about generosity, which I believe is one of the most basic, positive forms of human nature and connectedness. When service is genuinely altruistic it connects people of all backgrounds, religions, creeds, races, and orientations. In addition, I have come to understand that service is a lifelong pursuit, as it is a form of continuing development not only for oneself, but for society too.

A failure that I have had this semester with my site has been the consistency of my service. The consequence of doing this in my 2nd to last semester has been that with all of my duties as a senior and wrapping up my campus student leader roles that sometimes my service fell to the back burner. I managed to eventually find that consistency with my site, and it helped me to eventually find value in the service that I

was doing. Furthermore, It truly helped me to develop into a better person through my mistakes and learning from them. From my failures I learned accountability and how to truly own up to your mistakes to supervisors, teachers, and mentors.

Another of my personal failures this semester with my service site was that I did not feel like I dedicated all of my time to m service, even when I was present. This semester presented my challenges for me – personally and academically. Personally, I struggled financially for the month of October and November and transitioned into working 25+ hours a week on a third shift schedule. In addition to that, early November I experienced the lost of my Uncle and Grandfather. Academically, I held two leadership roles: One as a Peer Advisor and another as VP of Administration and Finance for Interfraternity Council. All while being the President and Choreographer for Cardinal Hip-Hop Club, a performance-based dance team. Needless to say, my time was extremely stretched and with so much on my mind it became challenging to focus on my service, even if I was in the middle of doing it. As challenging as this way, it definitely taught me a valuable lesson about adapting to a changing, face-paced environment and not taking on too many tasks at once. I also learned that I needed to dedicate time to myself that is not related to academics or my personal problems and just relax.

Course Preparation – PEAC 325

PEAC 325 “Peace, Conflict, and Justice Transformation Fundamentals” was my introduction to peace studies in my 2nd semester of my freshman year. In this time, peace studies were a foreign concept to me. I did not truly realize the depth of the field and the transferable skills that could be learned until I took that course. From that course I learned the history behind civil disobedience and of peaceful protests that have brought

about very successful revolutions across the world.

This class also explored proactive practice of peace building at the individual, community, national, and international levels. The personal aspect of peace building was something that proved very beneficial while exploring my understanding of the value of service while I spent my time doing service learning at Family Scholar House. This aspect of peace building was so important because most people that seek out Family Scholar House typically are homeless themselves, in transition, or just struggling through really stressful situations.

Because of these circumstances, the many single parents that try to enroll into the program (or already enrolled) typically have a lot of internal struggles. In PEAC 325 we learned that it is difficult to move forward from situations and have proactive, productive use of time if an individual is not at peace within himself or herself. While at Family Scholar House, I tried my best to casually talk to some individuals about this concept. Most of them seemed highly receptive to the idea, because it gave them something that they felt like they could control (their emotions) even if they cannot control the things that is the cause of their instability.

It was truly rewarding to find somehow to use a concept I learned in my very first peace class in everyday life, especially at my service site to help others. Even though I am almost finished with my hourly requirement for the semester, I plan to continue to service at Family Scholar House at least one day a week next semester. I am hoping to follow-up with the individuals that I had discussion with and gather if our conversations on internalized peace proved beneficial for them in the long-term.

Course Preparation – PEAC 350

I took PEAC 350 “Mediation and Conflict Transformation” during fall of my sophomore year. This is easily my favorite class in the series of classes needed for the certification. This is a class that taught active listening, concise speech, behavioral analysis, how to ask clarifying question, and to work through complicated conflict. Throughout my years in college since taking this class, the skills I learned from this class are what I use the most in not only my personal life, but also while holding student leader positions on campus.

From taking PEAC 350, I learned how to have a very mature temperance and a calm, level head while interacting with others. This proved useful in my time at Family Scholar House when communicating with my community service coordinator, residents of the site, and other workers at my service site as well. In my reflections journals I detailed a time that politely asked my service coordinator for more consistent responsibilities. Russell commented that it is often how we ask for things to get the desired outcome we want, not simply demanding and asking. No doubt that is a skill that I learned from my time in PEAC 350.

In addition to the basic mediation skills I learned during my time in the class, I realized that the ability to discern and disarm conflict without escalating a situation is something that should always be honed and utilized more. During difficult times like these in our nation, where policy brutality and violent crime in some areas have been on a steady rise, I have realized truly how important that skill is. It is something that could save my life someday, and did summer of 2016 when I was robbed at gunpoint.

I was walking back to campus around 2 A.M. after lighthearted night out with some friends. Out of nowhere, one male and one female appeared out of nowhere and

pulled a gun out on us. The male demanded our wallets and phones while the female stood silently behind us, also aiming a gun at us. In the situation, I felt oddly, almost eerily, calm, both externally and internally. The perpetrator demanded the watch of one of the people I was with and my friend started to talk to the perpetrator asking why he was robbing us, what he gained from it, and saying, "things do not have to be this way." The male edged closer to us and said that he must want to die if he does not want to give up the watch. My friend that the perpetrator was referring to was visibly angry. His fist was so tight that they were white, and he was shaking. At that point I placed my hand on his right shoulder and calmly, quietly, and directly said, "That watch is not worth your life." I knew my voice reached him because I saw the anger in his eyes shift to recognition and his shaking stopped. He then took off he watch and gave it to the perpetrator, and we walked away from that situation unharmed.

I believe that a part of the reason I was able to stay so calm in such a high stress situation because of the skills that I learned from this class. I analyzed the situation, the needs and wants of the parties involved, weighed what was valued, and made a decision based on that. The fact that I am still alive today, I believe, is a testament.

Course Preparation – COMM 324

COMM 324 "Communication and Gender" is the supporting course I decided to take to support the Peace, Conflict, and Justice Transformation Certification. Being a business major (Accounting) I could not find a course that directly supports my degree, so I decided to choose one that supports my minor (Communication) and that also sounded interesting to me at the time.

COMM 324 is a course that examines how gender identities, roles and norms

have been structured within different modes of communication (e.g., interpersonal, mass media, and institutional). This class was challenging for me because I had to face my privilege as a male in society and learn from the voices of others as well as understand their thoughts, perspective, and experiences. This is a class I felt connects to peace studies really well because it teaches how to be aware of your biases when communicating with people of the various gender. In context of peace studies, I believe it is extremely important to understand various perspectives from identities that differ from your own. Thus, this class helped teach me to better understand the female perspective. To my surprise, this class helped complement my experience at Family Scholar House. Of all the volunteers that I have interacted with at my service site within the past 3 months, I have not seen another male volunteer. In addition, for the interns and full-time staff, there are only two males and about 13 females within the organization. Past that, over 95% of the participants enrolled in the program are females, and I have not seen any males attempt to enroll into the program since I have been volunteering there this semester.

Taking COMM 324 proved to be a useful tool in preparing me for such a female-dominated environment. I am able to have casual conversation and communicate with the individuals connected to Family Scholar House in a genuine, respectful way. The fact that I took COMM 324 by chance is a blessing as it perfectly complements my service site.

Conclusion – Reflection on My Journey of Peace Studies

I feel like many people kind of stumble into peace studies at the University of Louisville, whether that is through mutual friends, a Peace Day event, or tabling at a RSO

Fair. The Martin Luther King Jr. scholarship program introduced me to peace studies, and because of that my experience has been unique. In fact, when I originally applied to the program while in High School, PEAC 325 was a class that garnered my interest because it was something that I have never learned before but I felt like would align with my values. For me, peace studies were an amazing opportunity to explore my identity and grow as a person during my time in college, and perfectly complemented my experience as a Martin Luther King Scholar.

Through this program, I was given the opportunity to attend the Notre Dame Peace Conference in my Sophomore Year. That experience exposed through a world that I had only scathed the surface of from my earlier peace studies class. At the Peace Conference, I learned from the experiences of writers, philosophers, engineers, doctors, etc. about what peace means to them, in addition to how it has provided value into their life. I saw many visionary leaders at this conference and discovered the potential benefit that peace studies has for society, far past what it has done for me personally. After taking that trip, I became inspired to continue my own personal academic pursuits of peace studies and apply it to my life in some way.

Returning from the peace conference, I met with Russell and we discussed the experience that was had. During the conversation, Russell asked me about the moment that I danced at the peace conference and how that connected to peace. I stated that dance is truly the essence of peace. I said that because dance is something that connects all people from every single background by a common feeling – that feeling being the individual's passion for dance. The language of dance is universal and is understood at all ages. Something so pure, genuine, and altruistic as dancing is where I truly feel the most

connected to humans.

That conversation and understanding was a result of my experiences from the peace conference, but I also think it was where Russell understood truly what this program means to me. Afterwards, I pushed off taking PEAC 550 for almost two years because of other academic pursuits, leadership roles, and internship opportunities.

My career plans are still up in the air. I have the option of pursuing a career in Accounting or pursuing a Master's Degree in Accounting and eventually earn my CPA (Certified Public Accounting). My other area of interest is attending a Master's Program for Higher Education or College Student Personnel; and hopefully earns a Graduate Assistantship in Academic Advising. Unfortunately, none of those career paths directly align with peace studies, but I recognize that peace studies can still provide value to any of the career field that I choose. I learned from my studies in PEAC 350 that mediation has many business applications, and is crucial for being able to navigate workplace conflict. For Higher Education/College Student Personnel, the temperament and things I learned from my time in COMM 324 will assist in helping me interact with a diverse population of students. Regardless of my post-college career pursuits, I believe that peace studies are tools that I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

Now, as I near the end of my journey into peace studies, I am able to better see the growth and change I have experienced since the start of this program to the finish. Personally, I feel that the concepts and ideas that I learned in this program have strongly resonated within me. While the idea of peace studies were new to me entering college, through my time and participation in the program, I learned just how instrumental peace studies was to incite change and how valuable a tool it was to many leaders across the

world at various times throughout history. I entered college a bright-eyed young man looking for the opportunity to mature and become a person that I will be happy looking at in the mirror when I wake up in the morning. I decided to leave behind the brash, angry, spiteful versions of myself in High School and the past. Through this program, I learned to develop a temperament of calmness, forgiveness, level headedness, and tenacity that I want to be attributed to my character. I learned how to use my passion and love for dance to spread a message about peace and connect with others who feel the same way. Through this program, I have been able to do just what I came to college to do - find an opportunity to mature and grow into a person I am proud to be. I want to earn this certification because even though I have been through so much with the peace studies program, I am still growing, and I welcome that growth and any opportunities that earning the Peace, Justice, and Conflict Transformation certificate will offer.

Martin Luther King Jr. once said “Life’s most persistent and urgent question is: What are you doing for others? Living is a form of not being sure, not knowing what next or how. The moment you know, you begin to die a little.” It is my deepest belief that service is a lifelong pursuit. One does not have to do substantial service or change the world. Sometimes, simply the act of pursuing service to others is enough to incite change and hope. In this reflection, I exposed some of my most vulnerable moments, successes, and failures throughout my journey of discovering my own definition of peace. I have come to realize that I live life in a state of uncertainty, never entirely sure of what path I will pursue next. Of course, that is also a very exciting part of my life as well, as it prevents me from getting complacent. So constantly and urgently I ask myself, as I ask of others, what are you doing to serve others?