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## Mount facilitates education and service to the community

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Facilitating Education and Service to the Community

By: Zachary Hacker

One of the key assets of the College of Mount St. Joseph's curriculum is its thriving Cooperative Education Program. A grant from the SC Ministry Foundation supported 26 students who worked for 19 non-profit organizations this past semester. Incorporating diverse students majoring in many fields, such as English, communications, nursing, psychology, History, and accounting, this grant funded a perfect fusion of service to the community, and hands-on education for the students. As a co-op student myself, working for the Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati Communications Office, it was an honor to experience the seemingly endless avenues the SC Ministry Foundation grant helped the community, and the students of the College of Mount St. Joseph.

Meeting with many of the students working in this program, the most consistent message expressed was gratitude to be helping others. "Nothing feels more satisfying than knowing I am helping make a difference in others lives," said Tom Ciulla, a recent graduate of the college, who worked for the Anthony Muñoz Foundation. That same feeling echoed from every other co-op student, such as Jessica Weingartner, who worked for the Susan G. Komen Foundation. She was thankful to "deliver a lifesaving message."

Working with various aspects of the community, Mount co-op students affected multiple facets of community life, including helping at-risk elementary school children, helping to preserve neighborhood history, honoring high school academic achievement, assisting low-income homeowners, and helping the fight against breast cancer. These students were fortunate to realize the duality of their situations: helping the future of the community, and helping their own futures at the same time.

Amanda Varnum worked as a co-op student at the Delhi Historical Society along with supervisor Peg Schmidt. She was afforded the unique opportunity to "preserve the history of the community," said Varnum, a history major at the Mount. "The Delhi Historical Society was founded in 1976 to promote, interpret and preserve the heritage of Delhi Township, Ohio, in suburban Cincinnati" ([www.delhihistoricalsociety.org](http://www.delhihistoricalsociety.org)). Varnum helped at the Museum farmhouse by assisting in the annual Christmas Gala Fundraiser, and by cataloguing the many documents and artifacts that make their way to the Delhi Historical Society. "I plan on working with archives, so it helps my future, as well as allows me to understand a small museum," said Varnum of the experience's educational benefits. Peg Schmidt, thrilled to have Amanda working there, said it was great for her to "witness and have firsthand experience with exhibit setup."

Representing another aspect of service to the community, the Susan G. Komen for the Cure Organization employed co-op student Jessica Weingartner, who served as grant and educational outreach intern. Her grant work, reviewing grants and interfacing with recipients, enabled her to "invest properly in the community to make a difference," said Peggy Isenogle, the programs Executive Director. "Susan G. Komen for the Cure is the world's largest source of nonprofit funds dedicated to curing breast cancer at every stage - from the causes, to the cures, to the pain and anxiety of every moment in between" ([www.komencincinnati.org](http://www.komencincinnati.org)).

Isenogle also assured that "it was a wonderful opportunity to utilize Jessica with the program." Weingartner enjoyed her position, "gaining experience working hands-on with a nonprofit." As a communications major, the Cooperative Education Program allowed Jessica to develop her communication skills in real world interaction, as well as "deliver a life saving message," and promote the Susan G. Komen for the Cure mission: "to save lives and end breast cancer forever."

Another non-profit benefiting from the Mount Cooperative Education Program was People Working Cooperatively Ohio, who hired Kathryn Doepker. "People Working Cooperatively provides thousands of low-income, elderly, and disabled homeowners with a higher quality of living" ([www.pwchomerepairs.org](http://www.pwchomerepairs.org)). Doepker, a recent graduate of the College, performed accounting functions, which she said enabled her company to "help individuals who have a low income with certain services, such as installing a wheelchair ramp...purchasing a refrigerator...or even fixing their heat." Citing her multitasking skills, as well as an ability to work diligently and independently, Doepker saw a direct correlation between her schoolwork and the altruistic work she was able to do for People Working Cooperatively.

Thomas Ciulla, a recent graduate of the College, organized the Straight "A" Luncheon for the Anthony Muñoz Foundation. This luncheon "honors high school students who exhibit academic excellence, athletic achievement, and an active role in the community while possessing a strong ambition, a winning attitude and the ability to overcome adversity" and is celebrated at Jeff Ruby's Steakhouse in April annually with college grants awarded to those in attendance.

"The Anthony Muñoz Foundation engages the Tri State region to impact area youth mentally, physically, and spiritually" ([www.munozfoundation.org](http://www.munozfoundation.org)). The Muñoz Foundation hosts a variety of events seeking to acknowledge the youth of Greater Cincinnati, including the Impact for Eternity Camp, a Youth Leadership Seminar, a Hall of Fame Football Academy, and a Holiday Toy Collection. In his role organizing the Straight "A" Luncheon, Ciulla developed his communication skills learned at the College of Mount St. Joseph in a "real world" environment, as he was "constantly corresponding with different high schools, restaurants and businesses as I marketed the Straight "A" Campaign. Students may not be nominated if people inside their community are not told about this campaign. Excellent communication skills are necessary in performing such tasks." Utilizing these gifts, Ciulla helped honor the community, and loved it: "It is a wonderful feeling to be part of something that not only enables high school students to pursue a higher education but celebrates the all-around achievements of these young people."

In the social work field, Resurrection School and CMSJ students Corey Straus and Sherri

Kleinholz mutually benefited from the Cooperative Education Program and the SC Ministry Foundation Grant. Resurrection School is a Catholic elementary school in Price Hill. Dr. Becky Lilley supervised the co-ops, and described their job as "interacting in very creative ways, and telling the truth with love and encouraging problem solving." Kleinholz, a senior psychology major at the Mount, attested that "a lot of kids don't realize the opportunities they have, so we try to open their eyes. There are 170 students here, and no one gets lost. They know that the faculty cares about them." The students of Resurrection received the benefits of having these co-ops there, who worked with them through books, videos, games, role-playing, puppets, crafts and music. "We try to use examples the kids can relate to," said Dr. Lilley. While helping Resurrection students see the value of making positive choices instead of easier destructive ones, Straus and Kleinholz improved the quality of their own educations: Kleinholz said, "I'm blessed. It all comes down to the teachers I have, both Dr. Lilley and the students. I've been able to apply here what I learned in college."

This is a sample of the Greater Cincinnati community that the Cooperative Education Program covers. The co-op program appreciates the partnership with the SC Ministry Foundation, it is astounding how profound an impact the co-op students from the College of Mount St. Joseph made in these non-profit organizations. It is a valuable, rare opportunity to assist the community, as well as foster one's own education so substantially. The student's diverse body of work stands as a testament to the value of cooperative education. Sherri Kleinholz, former co-op at Resurrection School, summed up the program succinctly, stating, "What you learn in school is expanded through experience."