

Dear President Carothers,

My name is Jeremy Hawkins and I was a member of the team that traveled to Louisiana to work with Habitat for Humanity over the spring recess. While working on the site in Lacombe, Louisiana, I realized that in addition to thanks being extended to you, our generous benefactor, that I should share what I feel is the importance of such service outreach programs.

The most striking sight while working with Habitat was the commitment level from all University of Rhode Island members, and their varying degrees of association with the university – from students giving up their week off to offer assistance, to faculty members working alongside alumni, and even the Dean of Pharmacy, Dean Letendre. Our team was rounded out by members of countless other university students volunteering time as well. This effortless unity was facilitated by the innate goodness present within each worker. Each volunteer, in addition to learning the tools of the trade, walked away with an invigorated outlook on what needs to be done to help better the lives of those less fortunate, and with a fresh sense of their own self. Upon returning, Dean Letendre shared with us that to watch us grow was the highlight of his week – that more important than the construction of the homes was our own personal construction of ourselves, involved in something profound and meaningful.

However, our journey was not limited to the week we spent in Louisiana. An essential part of our trip was our weekly meeting – the academic portion that is so fundamental to service learning. Of course the service would speak for itself in its relevance, but it was the addition of the classroom component that enhanced our ability to comprehend our actions. Discussing issues pertinent to our service – affordable housing, response to the disaster in the South, the working poor – enabled a view through a grander lens, allowing our trip to be more than just manual labor. And it is our continued reflection following our return that allows us to answer the question: Why is service important? And more importantly: Why is a lifetime of service important?

The sense of fulfillment and happiness felt by all as we hammered and nailed down in Louisiana should be experienced by all students, especially those who view the college experience as strictly academic. Academic service learning ought to be an integral, if not necessary, part of the education received by students at the university level because it fosters within them the potential for a lifetime of civic engagement. I know it has planted the seeds for such a life within me.

Best Wishes,
Jeremy Hawkins
Class of 2008