



## Center for Social Development

GEORGE WARREN BROWN SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

### **Toward a Global Research Agenda on Civic Service: An International Conference**

**Buenos Aires, Argentina  
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Michael Sherraden, Director, Center for Social Development  
Amanda Moore McBride, Research Coordinator, Global Service Institute

The Center for Social Development at Washington University in St. Louis and Innovations in Civic Participation in Washington, DC, created the Global Service Institute (GSI) in March 2001. The primary objectives of GSI are to build a global knowledge base and understanding of civic service and to assist with the design and implementation of policies and programs worldwide. GSI supports the development of a global research agenda, a Web-based information network, and innovations in policy and program development. The Ford Foundation provided the initial grant to begin GSI.

The development of a global research agenda on civic service was informed through an international research conference hosted by GSI on September 3, 2002 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. The theme of the Research Conference was "Toward a Global Research Agenda on Civic Service." The purpose of GSI's first international research conference was to document the cultural, social, political, and economic issues that affect the development, implementation, and assessment of civic service around the world.

The daylong conference included structured presentations and discussion. Scholars from each of eight major regions of the world presented regional assessments on service. These scholars are regional experts on service, volunteering, and civil society. Each paper explored the status of service programs in a given region, and detailed the issues faced in developing, implementing, and studying those programs. A focus was placed on the context in which service programs operate, with attention to the role of government and civil society.

Civic service can be defined as an organized period of *substantial engagement and contribution to the local, national, or world community, recognized and valued by society, with minimal monetary compensation to the participant*. Service is recognized as a program strategy that may have a dual purpose of benefiting the servers as well as the served. Service programs may be

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Washington University in St. Louis

transnational, international, national, or local in scope, and servers can be young, older, or of faith, e.g., national youth service programs.

In the definition used by GSI, service is distinguished from informal volunteering. Servers are expected to fill a particular role and service activities are clearly defined. Participants provide service on an intensive basis and over an extended period. Program examples include the Peace Corps or AmeriCorps in the United States, national service programs in Ghana or Nigeria, and the new transnational service program, European Voluntary Service, which spans many European nations.

Both the causes and effects of service are only weakly understood and open to investigation. The GSI conference in Argentina will help establish an informational foundation that supports cross-national and cross-cultural scholarship on civic service.

A special issue of the journal *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* will be published from the conference papers in late 2003. This issue will provide a global perspective on the status of civic service.

As part of Washington University's sesquicentennial, GSI will host the second international conference on civic service in September 2004. This interdisciplinary conference will examine the effects of service, and focus on theories and methods for future research.