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University Students as Volunteers

University students as volunteers

The more education a person has, the more likely he or she is to volunteer. Today's university students are likely to be an important source of volunteers for decades to come. What do we know about these young people?

University students who volunteer have the same personal and economic characteristics as those who do not volunteer, but they show a greater openness to experience, according to research undertaken for the International Year of Volunteers.¹ These students are characterized by intellectual curiosity, active imaginations, independent judgment, and a preference for variety in their lives.

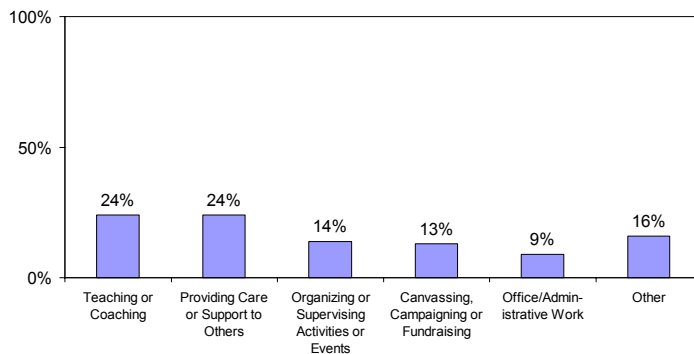
Where they volunteer and what they do

The most common volunteer activities done by university students who participated in this study were teaching and coaching (24%) and providing care or support to others (24%).

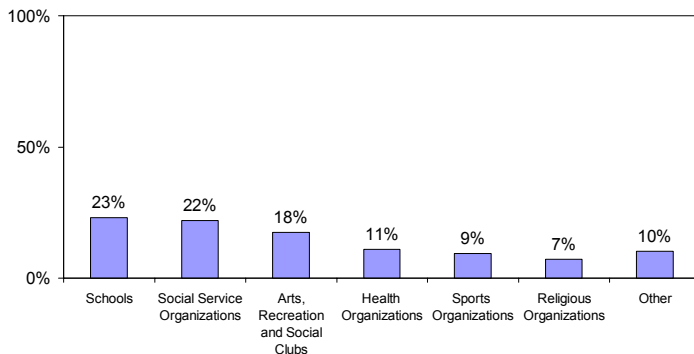
Students volunteered most frequently for schools (23%), social service organizations (22%), arts, recreation and social clubs (18%), and health organizations (11%). Unlike older adults, very few (7%) volunteered through religious organizations.

University student volunteers in the study contributed 23 hours per month on average. More than one-half (56%) were involved in two or more volunteer activities.

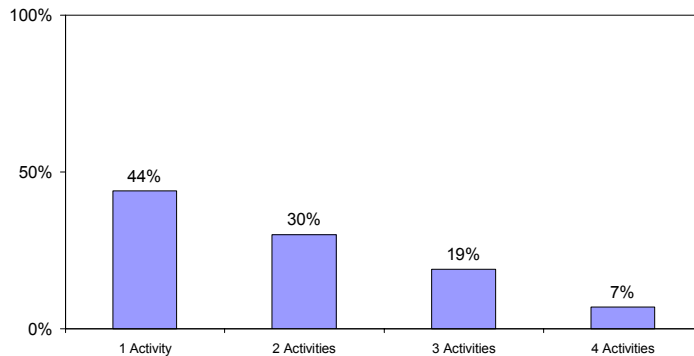
Most Common Volunteer Activities for University Students, by Percentage



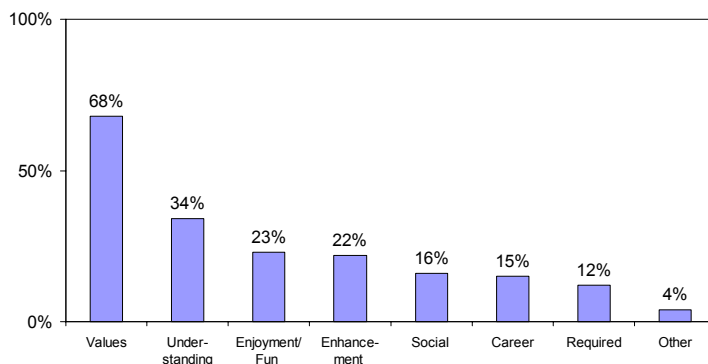
Most Common Organizations Chosen by University Students for Volunteering



Number of Volunteer Activities Taken on by University Students



University Students' Reasons for Volunteering



Quick Fact

Students who are satisfied with their volunteer activities report greater satisfaction with their academic work, their physical health, and life in general. They have a greater sense of meaning and purpose in life.

Why university students volunteer

As the above figure shows, the most common reason university students gave for volunteering was that it fit with their personal values (68%).² One-third (34%) volunteered to acquire and exercise new skills and explore personal strengths (Understanding). Almost one in four (22%) got involved to feel needed and to feel better about themselves (Enhancement).

What makes volunteering satisfying for university students?

University students find volunteering most satisfying when they:

- Learn new skills that can be used in the work force.
- Make new friends.
- Feel “passionately engaged.”

Susan Phillips
Carleton University

Brian R. Little
Carleton University

Laura Goodine
Carleton University

What this means for voluntary organizations

If university student volunteers perform narrowly focused, routine activities with little opportunity to find their own niche, learn new things or test out values, they will likely be dissatisfied with their volunteer experience.

To retain university students as volunteers, voluntary organizations should find ways to allow their student volunteers to grow. They can do this by:

- Offering student volunteers the chance to expand their volunteer responsibilities.
- Providing opportunities for student volunteers to experiment with new ways of doing things.
- Helping student volunteers learn new things.

¹ The study surveyed 146 volunteers and non-volunteers from first-year psychology courses at an Ontario university.

² For each volunteer project that they were engaged in, students were asked to give the reasons (as many as they wanted) they were involved in it.

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For more information on the International Year of Volunteers, visit www.nonprofitscan.ca.

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