

March
February 27, 2002

Dr. Nathan O. Hatch
Office of the Provost
300 Main Building
Notre Dame, IN 46556

Dear Provost Hatch:

We, the members of the Student Senate Committee on Academic Affairs, having met with leaders from the Center for Social Concerns, the Career Center and various Academic departments are writing this open letter to inform you of the position the Student Senate has taken on Experiential Learning at Notre Dame.

As you know, the University of Notre Dame provides a variety of experientially based learning opportunities from Accounting to Theology; however, many of these programs often go about without student awareness. The typical Notre Dame student is very much interested in experiential learning; however, they often do not know of the opportunities available. In a recent survey conducted by our committee, 75% of the students polled said they would favor more experientially based opportunities. At present, the Center for Social Concerns provides an excellent example of how experientially-based learning programs can be developed. Last academic year, the organization provided over 700 students the opportunity to engage in experiential education on issues ranging from American Border Patrol Policy to Urban America. Every year, one out of every nine students will apply for one of these programs. With a variety of opportunities available, we urge the Provost's office to assist the Career Center in gathering of information about experiential learning programs available to students as they are in the best position to disseminate such information to students.

These programs have become increasingly popular for a number of reasons. One of these reasons is that the opportunities offered by the Center for Social Concerns have academic credit attached to it. Through our research on experiential learning, we found that the types of programs worthy of academic credit vary widely throughout colleges and even within departments of various colleges. We strongly urge your office to take a leadership in establishing a University-wide policy on experiential learning programs and academic credit. As a model, we would like to recommend the Department of Government and International Studies. The Government Department has within its department an Intern Coordinator who assists students in not only finding experiential learning opportunities but provides both reading and written assignments which students can do for academic credit.

Many of our nation's colleges have already made curriculum changes based on the concept of experiential learning. For example, many business colleges are now requiring their students to take a semester or a summer off of school and spend their time interning in their field. Schools

such as Stanford and UCLA have developed centers which incorporates experiential learning into a variety of courses. Georgetown University now provides a Fourth Credit Option for all courses where students can gain an additional unit of credit by spending 40 or more hours in service based learning which complements material learned in the classroom.

Sincerely,

Student Union Senate