

059-1983
Susan Rudy
June 2, 1983

Psychology field experience proves
influential in career decisions

Volunteer work in community job placements helps psychology students at Wilfrid Laurier University make career decisions while providing community services, a recent student questionnaire shows.

Forty per cent of Laurier psychology students participating in volunteer field placements this year said the experience influenced their career paths, Paul Davock, field-placement supervisor, said.

Of that 40 per cent a full 70 per cent indicated they were interested in careers related to the area in which they had been acting as volunteers.

Between 175 and 200 students generally participate in field placements each academic year, Davock said. Students usually express a high level of satisfaction with the program.

Students generally work two to four hours a day, one day a week. Half the placements are for two terms (fall and winter); half are for one term only (fall or winter).

Response from the community has also been extremely favorable since the program began in 1971, Davock said. Students are now working in more than 50 social service agencies in the Kitchener-Waterloo area.

Along with Davock, five psychology graduate students act as field placement co-ordinators, mediating between students and their job placements.

In order to co-ordinate jobs with students, job descriptions (given by the particular agency) are outlined in class. Students then sign up for the particular job situation of interest to them. Final negotiations take place between the student and the staff at the field placement.

Davock says some psychology courses, including developmental and educational psychology, have a field placement requirement. Others, including clinical and industrial psychology, offer field experience as an option.

Students volunteer time each week to work with the regular staff of many community settings, including nursery schools, old-age homes, public schools and group homes.

Davock says positive student response has meant that some students choose to work in two job placements in a term. Many students are able to accumulate work experience in three or four different jobs by the time they have completed their degree.

Davock says participating in practical job situations means students can apply the theoretical knowledge they gain in class.

Moreover, students develop ongoing contact, and often an emotional involvement, with individuals, including children, the aged, and those with special needs.

While offering practical work experience to psychology students and providing volunteer agency staff the program also provides a further benefit to the community.

Davock says 21 per cent of last year's students indicated they would continue their volunteer work on their own, while 41 per cent said they were thinking seriously of continuing at their volunteer job placement.

And that, Davock said, is a real plus to the community.