Elsa Cline

Service Reflection

In my time at Warren Wilson, the service component of the triad often felt like the overlooked “third wheel” of work and academics, especially when it came to fulfilling pegs— an easy system to check off some boxes— adaptable to work done on breaks, through required classes, and payed internships. However, the service done outside of my school time and the peg system, through my work done with Bounty and Soul, has been one of the most valuable aspects to my last few years at school.

I came into Warren Wilson with a passionate love for unpaid labor benefiting community partners: my last few years had been spent interning with a raptor center at home. However, despite my high opinion of community service, I still put it on the backburner, caught up in other aspects of school. The spark I had with working for the center was similar to how I felt about work and life on campus: I was a contributing member of my community. There was no serious interest in getting outside of my WWC community until I first went to Bounty and Soul, an occasion that broadened my definition of “my community” and made me start to think beyond campus.

The greatest gain from Bounty and Soul was a different perspective on my studies. Humans are responsible for the current state of our planet and as an environmental studies student living on our beautiful, isolated campus, it was especially easy to simplify our world’s problems. By getting outside of the Wilson “bubble, I began to see these issues are more so the result of failures in human systems. Our consumer driven society, built around global corporate capitalism, puts growth above all, environmental health especially, but also human welfare. It allowed me to connect a major environmental problem— food waste and the inefficiencies of our food system— to the serious social issue of food insecurity. It helped to make me a less cynical person. I got to see the revolting amount of food wasted on the grocery store level, but I also got to see the people working tirelessly to take advantage of that inefficiency and apply it towards easing the harsh reality of food insecurity.

It was a gratifying feeling being able to work with an organization that is having a positive impact on our community. While my place was small, I took my roll seriously: trying to be fully present at markets, bringing a positive version of myself, and connecting with market goers. I would like to think that because of that, I was able to work as an extension of Bounty and Soul, that through whole-heartedly representing them and devoting my time weekly for years, I was able to serve my community.

However, maybe the most important aspect of my service at Wilson was that I was able to work for an organization that I believed in. For me, right out of school, unsure or what I want to do, I believe service will play an essential roll. I plan to continue with my work with Bounty and Soul. Eventually, I would like to look into AmeriCorps. Ideally, what I take from my time will allow me to plan next steps. One thing I have learned about myself— it is essential, for my own sanity, to work for an organization that advocates for the environment and people instead of pitting the two as separate, oppositional spheres.