



News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**University of St. Thomas Service Learning Course
Allows Students to Learn First-Hand**

HOUSTON (May 3, 2006)—University of St. Thomas Master in Business Administration students involved in an ethics service learning class learn first-hand what it means to be a social entrepreneur: bringing business skill and innovation to help address community problems.

The mission of service learning at UST is to assist the University in serving others, specifically offering resources to meet the needs of the Greater Houston Metropolitan area. Acting to fulfill the University's vision of responding creatively to challenges posed by poverty, globalization, limited economic resources and changing demographics, the service learning component allows students to connect classroom theory with practical experience in the community.

“Service learning enables students to use service to make a difference in their community and in their lives as well,” Dr. Jean-Phillipe Faletta, director of the Service Learning Program, said. “As one study noted, service participation shows significant positive effects on academic performance, self-efficacy, values, leadership and service participation after college.

In an effort to connect business with community, Dr. Michele Simms, associate professor of management, offers her MBA Management and Social Environment course as a service-learning class. “Sustainability and corporate citizenship are concepts tied to service that are finding their way into business curriculums nationally,” Simms said. “Social entrepreneurs are at the heart of these efforts, transforming the way we do business through ethical leadership.”

MBA student Afowiri “Kitz” Fondzenyuy offers one example. He currently seeks ways to partner Junior Achievement with Amom Charity, an organization committed to alleviating illiteracy in his village of Ngondzen, Cameroon.

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“Amom Charity’s current objective is to alleviate the rural primary school enrollment in Cameroon beginning with my village, Ngondzen,” Fondzenyuy said. “In my village, 62 percent of the kids 4-12 years-old cannot attend primary school mostly because they lack the tuition, estimated at \$12 a year.”

Another student team, Eddie Vousenasna, Eric Webster and Vineet Kumar, work with Shelley Nadel of the Hermann Park Conservancy on a project that involves evaluating outsourcing from different perspectives and justifying outsourcing as a viable service to individuals, groups, organizations and corporations both domestically and internationally. “This project requires us to develop a strategic marketing plan that the Conservancy can apply to their fund raising opportunities,” Kumar said.

“UST as a Catholic university presents a unique opportunity to apply the social traditions of outreach and community support. Through service, leaders of faith and character emerge,” Simms said. Several students participated in the UST Day of Service which led to their semester projects with The Children’s Museum and the Houston Zoo. Additionally, students are working with the Urban Business Initiative, Women Helping Women, Buffalo Bayou Project and RESULTS.

Another of Simms’ students, Rene Pavlas Vielmas, works with Faye Turner of the Women Helping Women organization, which trains and places skilled workers in nontraditional workplaces. The women participants build a one-room house, a task that teaches skills such as carpentry, basic electrical work and plumbing as part of their training. It is the only community-based organization in the Houston Metro Area providing training and placement of women in nontraditional occupations.

“The current project I am helping coordinate for this organization has provided me valuable experience,” Vielmas said. Vielmas has been coordinating the design of the house. She hired and is working with the interior designer to get the house ready for its opening on May 6.

“I have been exposed to many aspects of the nonprofit world, including how to plan a project, how to find support and resources, and improving my networking skills, all to make a project come to fruition,” she said. “I have learned a great deal about myself, as well as the nonprofit world by this volunteer service.”

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