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Idealist, crazy, selfless, naïve, self-righteous, and...

By Matthew Carroll

Many Catholic high schools and colleges believe so strongly in the value of service that they require all students to participate in some form as a graduation requirement. After calling each of the Jesuit universities in the US, I was surprised to find that although most of their students’ commitment in serving others, few required service of their students. Jesuit education values “care of the whole person.” Core curriculums are filled with a breadth of subjects in order to expose students to ideas they may not have explored on their own. That is why core courses are required.

I ask, why not extend the same standard to service-learning?

Nearly all of the admissions officers at the universities I spoke with highlighted select programs that required service. However, when asked if it is possible for students to complete their four years without service, each responded that it is. While Jesuit schools are often right to believe their students will naturally be inclined to serve others, by not requiring at least some first-hand exposure to service-learning they run the risk of adding some students of potentially life-changing experiences.

If every student is affected or changed in some way by his or her service requirement, is that not worth the inconvenience it may cause those who are not?

Such experiences can light a fire within students, a flame that can spread throughout the world. And after all, isn’t that what the founder of the Society envisioned?

Matthew Carroll, a graduate of Boston College, is currently serving on a Jesuit Volunteer in Los Angeles with Homeboy Initiatives.