

WORKING FOR THE RIGHT CAUSE

By Skip Sturman, Director of Career Services
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It may strike some as rather presumptuous that Career Services would launch a “Careers for the Common Good (CFCG) program, as we did last fall. Is the assumption, then, that any careers excluded are inherently evil? And why Dartmouth? Why now?”

Ahhh, we may be presumptuous but we’re not foolhardy. The stated intent of Careers for the Common Good is “to empower and support students in the pursuit of values-driven work opportunities in the not-for-profit, public *and* private sectors.” The onus is on you, not us, to determine which deeply held beliefs dictate your choice of work and satisfy your needs for fulfillment. Most work is not inherently good nor evil; it is the values which you hold dear that ultimately elevate or diminish the work you perform.

In Career Services, our task – through CFCG- is to shine the spotlight ever more brightly on a widening array of career options that allow you to make a meaningful contribution to society. As for being presumptuous, if we are, Dartmouth certainly finds herself in good company. Ever since a woman named Kath Connolly first fashioned a CFCG program at Brown University’s Swearer Center for Public Service, a growing number of liberal arts institutions have followed her lead and created their own variations on this programmatic theme. Dartmouth’s version pulls together and expands upon an array of activities, some of which have existed for quite some time (e.g. career panels and the annual Not-for-Profit Career Fair) and some of which are being introduced for the first time this winter (e.g. an Idealist Career Day and CFCG Job Club).

The reasoning behind CFCG is that there is a perception at Dartmouth, as one astute observer put it, that the whole of resources devoted to “instilling a sense of civic responsibility” is less than the individual parts. In other words, Dartmouth could be doing more, should be doing more, to support students who are seeking ‘values driven work opportunities’. CFCG is a direct response to the expressed desire, articulated by many attendees at a ‘Public Impact Retreat’ in the Summer of 2002, for more “guidance for those pursuing jobs in the ‘common good’ and more encouragement to translate undergraduate experiences into a life of working to improve civic and social institutions.”

So what makes this a particularly opportune time for a Careers for the Common Good program at Dartmouth? Well, for one, you are voting with your feet. Almost 1000 of you attended the Not-for-Profit Fair over a two day period back in October. Subsequently, 600 of you registered an interest in being added to the CFCG targeted blitz list that we instituted in Career Services. According to a national Brookings Institution poll of 1000 members of the Class of 2003, almost two thirds had seriously considered a job in public service. Of those, “the nonprofit sector was seen as the best place to go for someone who wanted a chance to help people, make a difference, and gain the respect of family and friends.”

In truth, there is no shortage of sectors where ‘do-gooders’ can do well. Many socially responsible businesses, like Tom’s of Maine, believe in “doing well, good”. Post-graduate options need not come down to taking a vow of poverty or choosing mammon. The lines are increasingly blurring between sectors, permitting Dartmouth graduates to take skill sets developed in the public or private sectors into the nonprofit sector or vice versa. The ranks of a new alumni group, “Alumni for Social Change”, are filling with graduates who have pursued hybrid opportunities such as working in corporate contributions or community foundations, microfinance or nonprofit management consulting.

Whichever sector initially captures your fancy after Dartmouth, Careers for the Common Good should help convince you that you are in good company as you seek values-driven work.