

# Cadets at Center of CORE Service Program

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Last month, VMI introduced a new service program that extends its reach from volunteer opportunities to study of the causes of and solutions for poverty to research and internships addressing real-world problems. Called CORE – Community Outreach and Renewal Experience - the program also launched a new website, [www.vmi.edu/service](http://www.vmi.edu/service).

At the center of these efforts are the founding officers of VMI's new Rotoract Club, including its general chair, Cadet Michelle McCusker '14. McCusker has put in her hours helping launch the CORE program, but she also plans to take full advantage of opportunities it offers, starting with her Summer Undergraduate Research Institute (SURI) service project last summer.

"This was the first hands-on experience that I had," said McCusker, who worked with the Rockbridge Area Free Clinic, which had received a yearlong grant to do a community health assessment.

She used data the clinic had collected to write a community health improvement plan and produced other presentation materials herself, including a blog and video. She worked with her mentor, Col. Christina McDonald, head of the Institute Writing Program, to research the rhetoric of health care.

"It put a face on these issues," McCusker said. "It makes you more compassionate - that's what's kept me interested. . . . I do the administrative work and I go to all the committees because I have to, but this is the stuff that I love doing."

McCusker hopes to keep on doing it, first through the class offered this spring by the Shepherd Poverty Program, Poverty and Human Capability, and then through a Shepherd internship next summer. The Shepherd programs also fall under the CORE umbrella.

CORE has joined with Washington and Lee University's Nabors Service League, with cadets participating in Nabors Service Day in September. Future plans include a service week, timed to coincide with the service day, with speakers and possibly a conference.

Also under the CORE umbrella are cadet club service projects, international projects such as the Engineers without Borders projects in Haiti and Bolivia, and faith-based and character-building programs sponsored by the chaplain's office.

The CORE program and website are the culmination of a year's work by members of VMI's Service Committee, chaired by Col. Jim Turner, head of VMI's biology department. The committee's report found that approximately 800 cadets - more than half the Corps -were already involved with service projects.

"With the launch of the VMI service website, cadets will be able to find service projects that align with their own passions more quickly," said Maj. Meagan Herald, assistant professor of mathematics and chair of the Service Committee's Activities Subcommittee. "Our cadets are supposed to be good citizens,

and service is part of citizenship. We want to make sure that students are aware of that and give them plenty of opportunities."

Herald said the CORE program is reaching out to cadets using new media, such as QR codes to be read by cell phones, and developing a photo/video archive.

"I have seen the difference our cadets have made by working with the local school children and can only imagine the positive impact VMI can make on a global scale."