Clemson’s Service Alliance helps students develop into citizens, not just taxpayers.

"I can think of few other courses that have left such an indelible mark on me!" says undergraduate student David Duncan.

Duncan, a management major, is talking about his experience in Clemson’s Client-Based Writing program, one of several programs affiliated with the University’s Service Alliance. He’s among 2,300 juniors and seniors who have participated in the writing program over the past five years.

Writing for change
Client-Based Writing projects in the Advanced Writing program match classes with local clients who need communications materials. Clients are primarily nonprofits that address issues such as food and shelter for the poor, health care, the environment, arts and education, as well as government agencies and public schools in the Clemson, Anderson and Greenville areas. This program has involved more than 100 classes with 25 writing faculty and 47 clients.

The project that Duncan worked on was a proposal for Concerned Citizens for Animals in Greenville County. “When the professor taught us techniques for writing proposals and grants, I immediately put this knowledge into practice — detailing what my group would achieve for them,” he says. “Because I was able to apply what I was learning in class toward a worthwhile endeavor, I remembered more from the teachings. I still refer to it on a regular basis.”

Client-Based Writing, supported by the Robert S. Campbell Endowment, prepares students for the workplace by engaging them in projects that have relevance beyond the classroom. It was honored with the 2008 Education Service-Learning Award by the S.C. Commission on Higher Education.

Engaging the whole campus
Service-learning at Clemson isn’t limited to one program or even one college. By Debbie Dalhouse

"Our goal is to set the standard in public service for land-grant universities by engaging the whole campus in service and outreach," says Kathy Woodard, director of the Service Alliance.

In collaboration with the Office of Teaching Effectiveness and Innovation, the Service Alliance offers courses to assist faculty in developing service-learning classes. In addition, Service Alliance Faculty Fellows in all five colleges serve as mentors and conduct workshops for faculty and graduate students.

Clemson’s Community Scholars program provides scholarships to students who want to make a difference in S.C. communities. Up to 10 Community Scholars are selected for the program at the beginning of their freshman year. In their sophomore year, they begin participation in the Creative Inquiry program and focus on becoming effective change agents in their communities. By their junior year, the focus expands to an international overview of civic engagement with a study-abroad experience. During their senior year, students develop and conduct community-based research projects.

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The alliance also operates the Campbell Scholars program in which incoming freshman recipients serve as tutors for elementary and middle school students eight hours per week. The Campbell Scholars program is funded by the late Robert S. Campbell and wife, Betsy, through the Campbell Young Leader’s Corp.

From preventing obesity to saving landmarks
The Citizens and Scholars program — interdisciplinary service-learning and community-based research on health, socioeconomic and environmental concerns — addresses real-world problems facing communities, families and industries in South Carolina.

For example, “Understanding Grass-Roots Obesity Prevention and Control Efforts,” by public health science professors, joins Clemson students with the Eastside Neighborhood Alliance, Morningside Neighborhood Association, Partners for a Healthier Honea Path and Pendleton Pride in Motion to combat obesity-related illnesses.

Another project is “Rules of Engagement II — Community Engagement for Future Design Professionals,” led by architecture and landscape architecture professors and a community development Extension agent. Last spring, 16 graduate and undergraduate architecture students formed Stewardship South, a design/build studio focused on cultural and environmental sustainability (cu-stewardshipsouth.blogspot.com).

In Denmark, design students worked with local community members to create a master plan. In Pendleton, they expanded on an earlier Kesee Barn project to make the landmark more usable for the community. In Clemson, they concentrated on the Jaycee Park with plans for a stage canopy, educational signage, a stabilized stream bank and terraces to improve seating and viewing.

Offering a wealth of service support
As a network, Clemson’s Service Alliance combines Public Service Activities, service-learning and community service across the University. It provides financial assistance to students interested in service-learning. It provides faculty resources for service-learning course development, reflection, assessment and documentation techniques.

In other words, Service Alliance offers a wealth of support for service-learning — what President Jim Barker calls “the most important pedagogical change in teaching and learning in the past two decades.”

To find out more about the role of service-learning in the overall Clemson experience, go to www.clemson.edu/servicealliance.

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