

Student Name

Date

**A proposal to evaluate how speed of impact in a humanitarian crisis affects student philanthropic response**

According to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), a humanitarian crisis is defined as any event or series of events (such as armed conflicts, epidemics, famines, or natural disasters) that represents a critical threat to the health, safety, or wellbeing of a large group of people (IFRC 2010). Around the world, an overwhelming array of these humanitarian crises exists. There are arguably more crises than even the most aware, well-intentioned and compassionate person could possibly dedicate her or himself to. What drives individuals to respond to different humanitarian crises throughout the globe? This proposed research project will examine that crucial question as it relates to students at the College of William and Mary.

In order to better understand why some humanitarian crises garner more philanthropic attention than others, it is necessary to decide on a more precise research question. The specific research question that will guide this study is how the speed of impact of a humanitarian crisis affects student philanthropic response among students at William and Mary. Two recent humanitarian crises—the earthquake that hit Haiti in January 2010, and the floods beginning in Pakistan in July 2010—catalyzed interest in this research question and serve as specific cases that will be examined in order to reflect on the factors that shape philanthropic action in general.

Better understanding how speed of impact affects William and Mary students' philanthropic response is important for a variety of reasons. For one, this research question can

assist in empirically describing reactions to recent humanitarian crises and the reasons behind these reactions on campus. William and Mary students' varying responses to the Haiti earthquake and the Pakistani floods is an issue that has spurred dialogue among students and faculty about the larger question of why people get involved in a cause, and this study will inform this ongoing conversation with instructive data. In addition to explaining the past, this question has many future implications. This research will be able to inform any future student groups or outside philanthropic organizations, such as the Red Cross, who may strive to elicit student response to a humanitarian crisis in the future. These organizations may be able to use this study as a tool to help predict why and how students are likely to respond to events in the future, allowing more efficient mobilizing and eliciting of donations.

This study will follow a deductive logic, examining the hypothesis that disasters that have quick, sudden impacts (such as the earthquake in Haiti) generate more philanthropic action among WM students than disasters whose impacts are more long-term and therefore harder to precisely pinpoint (such as the flooding in Pakistan). This hypothesis is based on my observation of students' responses to the Haitian and Pakistani crises, but I have drawn on some of the relevant sociological literature listed below to inform my expectations. Winniford et al. (1997) find social networks and media coverage of particular issues are important for understanding why college students get involved in volunteer work. Other studies (e.g., Wilson and Janoski 1995; Silver 2007) show that religion and class-based identities are important for understanding why some people become involved in philanthropic work and others do not. Religion, class and students' cultural familiarity with the affected regions and peoples are all alternative hypotheses I will consider. If this proposal is approved, I will conduct a more thorough review of the literature to identify additional explanations for variation in students' philanthropic responses to

disasters, and to inform the writing of my survey. A review of the literature will also help me better conceptualize and operationalize my dependent variable, student philanthropic response; at this time I'm thinking that it will be important to include measures for both students' actions and students' emotional reaction to humanitarian crises.

### *Research method*

This research will collect data using a survey in the form of an anonymous questionnaire to be distributed to respondents who are current William and Mary students. This method is appropriate to the research question and goals of this project for multiple reasons. First, a survey allows for a large sample size, which if chosen using random sampling techniques will allow me to generalize about a larger population (William and Mary students and, possibly, all American college students). Second, a survey can clearly and consistently operationalize key concepts like philanthropic response, which is critical for obtaining valid and reliable data. Direct observation of philanthropic response to humanitarian crisis of all current William and Mary students using field methods would not be possible at this time, several months after the crises.

As this study aims to generalize about a large population, precise sampling and a large sample size are priorities. This research attempts to understand the William and Mary student population, defined as people currently enrolled as undergraduate students at the College. While studying all 5800 undergraduate students at the College would be ideal, gathering a representative sample of this population is more practical because it is more efficient, inexpensive and feasible. To ensure generalizability of the sample to the larger study population, probability sampling techniques will be used to choose a sample of 200 students. Random

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selection from a sampling frame of the online student directory should produce a representative sample with appropriate variation that reflects variation in the total population. The survey instrument will be administered through an online form sent to each of the 200 students selected. While of course participation in the survey will never be compulsory or forced, ideally the response rate will be as high as possible. One way to increase the chances of a high response rate will be to send follow-up emails reminding selected students to respond.

One important question is whether a sample that is representative of the William and Mary student body is an appropriate empirical basis for making generalizable claims about the wider population of American college students. In certain ways William and Mary is unique: it is a public university with a relatively small student body and very selective admission criteria, located in a small Southern town. It may be appropriate to generalize to students at similar universities based on a sample of William and Mary students. After completing the data collection I will look at the basic demographics of the sample in order to theorize the appropriate boundaries of what types of college students may be generalized about based on this study.

The completed surveys will be coded and entered into a spreadsheet for quantitative analysis with a statistical program such as SPSS or Stata. Once coded and entered into the spreadsheet, basic descriptive statistics such as the percentage of respondents who donated money to each humanitarian crisis will be calculated, along with more complicated analysis of the relationship between variables such as religiosity and responsiveness to each humanitarian crisis.

*Related literature*

- Winniford, Janet C., D. Stanley Carpenter, and Clint Grider. 1997. "Motivations of College Student Volunteers: A Review." *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice* 34, 2: 134-146.
- Wilson, John and Thomas Janoski. 1995. "The Contribution of Religion to Volunteer Work." *Sociology of Religion* 56, 2: 137-152.
- Silver, Ira. 2007. "Disentangling Class from Philanthropy: The Double-edged Sword of Alternative Giving." *Critical Sociology* 33, 3: 537-549.
- Hustinx, Lesley et al. 2010. "Social and Cultural Origins of Motivations to Volunteer: A Comparison of University Students in Six Countries." *International Sociology* 25, 3: 349-382.