

# The Role of Service Learning in a ‘Future University’

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**Abstract.** In 2016, Dongseo University announced its vision of becoming a ‘Future University’ in connection with a detailed plan involving ten changes for achieving that goal. This paper outlines the importance of service learning in the development path of Dongseo University. It begins with the university’s early history, where service learning figured prominently as a founding principle. It then presents a specific example of a service learning program that has been successfully operated by Dongseo University and Petra Christian University for roughly 20 yr, namely the International Tech Corps. Next, the paper examines four potentially harmful societal trends and suggests ways they might be counterbalanced through innovative higher education. Finally, it provides an overview of some relevant aspects of Dongseo’s vision of a Future University, including the role of service learning within that paradigm shift in the provision of higher education.

**Keywords:** Dongseo university, future university, service-learning

## 1 Founding of the Dongseo educational foundation

Dongseo is a young university established in 1992. However, it is one of the fastest developing universities in Korea, especially within its areas of specialization, which include the fields of Film & Video, IT, Digital Contents, and Design. To give only a single example, the US-based entertainment magazine *Variety* recently included Dongseo University in its list of twenty standout schools offering competitive, world-renowned cinema instruction [1]. Although Dongseo is still young, it operates under the older Dongseo Educational Foundation covering three separate institutions: Kyungnam College of Information and Technology, which has the longest history among 2 yr colleges in Korea; Busan Digital University, which offers all of its courses online; and Dongseo University, which is a 4 yr university. This initial section presents the early history of the Dongseo Educational Foundation.

Dr. Chang Sung Man, who established the Dongseo Educational Foundation, operated a ‘church extension’ in Busan following the end of the Korean War in the 1950s. By chance, an American missionary spreading the gospel in Kagoshima, Japan, visited Busan and held a worship service at that church extension. He invited the Founder to Japan and then to the USA, where the Founder received an opportunity to study at a Seminary abroad. In the

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USA, he saw that America had already succeeded in industrializing and becoming a developed country by the early 1960s. At that time, Korea's GNP per capita was about USD 100 [2]. The Founder was shocked to see that every house in the USA had a refrigerator and a TV, and the streets were full of cars. It was then that he decided to establish a college for vocational education in Korea after completing his studies abroad. To realize this dream, he visited churches and preached Sunday sermons all across the USA. The Americans he met made small donations to help fulfill his dream. Then, with these donations, he returned to Korea and searched for the cheapest plot of land that would enable him to establish a school.

The spot chosen resembled a wasteland on the hillside. He worshiped on that spot and prayed hard that the school would become a cradle for modernization in Korea. The motto chosen for the school was 'Holding up the Bible and the plowshare.' This signifies that those who practice the teachings of Christ shall be nurtured in life. With this conviction, the Founder recruited 19 students. The school that began with such humble beginnings was Kyungnam College of Information and Technology. What was once a wasteland has now been entirely transformed. Some people say the Foundation's development is a miracle, yet it may more simply be believed to have resulted through God blessing it with his grace.

Following this early experience with higher education, Dongseo University was established in 1992. Among its founding principles was the idea that "Based on the Christian spirit, students' personality should be nurtured through proper harmony of study and school life and through service to God and humankind". In this idea, Dongseo may especially note the focus on Service. Another motto of the Foundation is that "In education, learning is by the head, healing is by the heart, and working is by the hand." This, too, is closely related to the founding principles. Specifically, it emphasizes that education does not involve only learning by the head but also includes working by the hand, a type of work directly connected to the concept of service-learning.

There are numerous definitions of service-learning to be found in the literature, and they often tend to vary by region based on the influence of national organizations or programs, yet a useful initial definition views service-learning "as both an educational philosophy and a pedagogical technique for combining community service with academic objectives" [3]. Another definition more particularly suitable here is that of Bringle and Hatcher [4], which views international service-learning as

...a structured academic experience in another country in which students (i) participate in an organized service activity that addresses identified community needs; (ii) learn from direct interaction and cross-cultural dialogue with others; and (iii) reflect on the experience in such a way as to gain a deeper understanding of global and intercultural issues, a broader appreciation of the host country and the discipline, and an enhanced sense of their own responsibilities as citizens, locally and globally.

The features of international service-learning included in the definition above all apply to the service-learning program to be introduced in the following section.

## **2 International tech corps**

Among the many programs at Dongseo University, the International Tech Corps is most closely associated with service-learning. This student volunteer group was established in April of 1996 when Dongseo University and Petra Christian University (PCU) signed an agreement for international cooperation. At the time, PCU was DSU's first collaborating sister-school overseas. The International Tech Corps was jointly organized as a way for students to develop practical skills and a better understanding of civic life through direct

community involvement and interaction. Since the program’s inception, Dongseo has continued to recruit participating students through open applications. So far approximately 600 Dongseo University students have benefited through their volunteer service experiences in the International Tech Corps, including teams of roughly 30 students sent annually over the past 5 yr. Figure 1 shows the team from 2017 prior to their departure to volunteer in six different Indonesian villages.



**Fig. 1.** Ceremony for departing team of the 22nd International Tech Corps (2017.07.07).

Figures 2 to Figure 5 illustrate some types of service-work conducted by the 22nd International Tech Corps team during their month-long stay in Indonesia.



**Fig. 2.** Infrastructure development project.



**Fig. 3.** Beautification project.



**Fig. 4.** International collaboration.



**Fig. 5.** Community outreach.

Dongseo students who are selected receive training throughout the semester after deciding which type of service they intend to provide. They may choose among the following fields. **First**, education. The student volunteers teach Taekwondo, computer skills, English, Science, balloon art, make-up, nail art, skin care, etc. This field is very popular with local children and teenagers. **Second**, cultural exchange. These activities introduce Korean food, the Saemaul movement, Korean culture and recreation. **Third**, technology support. This service provides solar-powered streetlights, water-power

generation, waste water and water treatment processes. It also offers instruction on developing fruit products, crafting ceramic wares, and making household items from bamboo. This is often a favorite since it can light up the local village with solar power and bring electricity into the homes of residents. In the summer of 2017, the company Top Tech, which is operated by the chairperson of Dongseo University's alumni association, will donate 100 sets of solar-powered streetlights to bring light to low-income villages in Indonesia. Finally, Living Environment Improvement. This involves repairing or constructing public facilities in the villages, painting buildings, mending old clothes, and making new clothes. After receiving training in their chosen field, the students visit remote villages in Indonesia during the month of July to offer volunteer services.

The students stay in the remote villages and serve people in need of their talents. At first, the students sometimes have difficulties adjusting to what feels like a strange and inconvenient life. However, after living together with the local people for one month, they become so close that they hug and shed tears when the time comes to leave. Some students who have participated in the International Tech Corps have later returned on holiday to visit the villages where they once volunteered even after graduating and getting a job.

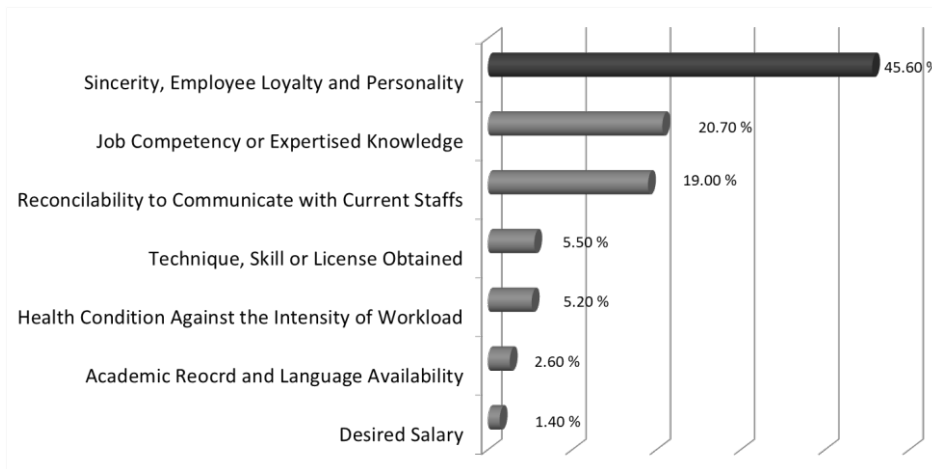
International Tech Corps students learn many things through service. **First**, they get a chance to self-discover their own God-given talents. **Second**, as the Bible teaches, "Freely you have received, freely give." The students come to understand that what they have is granted through God's blessing, and they see the importance of caring for others. In other words, they learn what it means to practice love. **Third**, they get training and experience in overcoming difficulties. This is very important as they pursue their own life journeys. **Fourth**, they learn about communal living. In society these days, self-centered ways of thinking often prevail despite the human need to live together in society. Students in the International Tech Corps learn the value of communal living and caring for one another, especially in difficult times. **Fifth**, they sense gratitude toward their parents. Living apart for one month, they realize how much they take their parents for granted. **Sixth**, they can develop a global mindset. Now is an era of globalization, and this is reflected in the International Tech Corps itself, which can involve students from six countries, including Korea, China, Japan, the Netherlands, USA, and of course Indonesia. The students from different countries stay and work closely together, thus enabling them to form lasting international friendships. This experience increases their understanding of other cultures and can be naturally inspiring.

The International Tech Corps has an alumni organization in Korea. This network of previous participants has stronger bonds than any other similar organization at Dongseo University. It also always takes the lead in volunteering to provide services for school events, and alumni organization members even contribute funds to encourage and support their juniors on departure for Indonesia. Such tight connections between past and present participants are illustrative of the impact the program has had on those selected to engage in this form of service-learning.

There is a beautiful story that deserves mention about prior International Tech Corps students. In July of 2013, Mr. Ji-woong Park from the Advertising & PR department at DSU participated in the program. In his homestay family, there was an 11 yr old girl named Siti who had a congenital heart disease. She could not see a doctor because of her family's circumstances. As a result, the Tech Corps team from that year felt very sorry for her and decided to start a fund-raising campaign. In addition to this campaign, they planned a charity concert with talent donations and other fund raising events. In the end, they collected KRW 11 000 000 (about USD 10 000) through activities involving SNS messages, posters, street promotions, and video promotions. They conveyed the money they had raised to Siti's family. Now she is very healthy following the surgery for her heart disease.



A final noteworthy aspect of the International Tech Corps is that students who have participated in the program have often found jobs easily following graduation. This is partly due to the fact that they were able to cultivate a good character through service-learning. Large Korean conglomerates have begun to shift away from placing emphasis almost entirely on prestigious school names, high grade point averages and high English fluency test scores in favor of personal characteristics [5]. Evidence of this shift is further supported by survey results published by The Federation of Korean Industries, which are shown in Figure 6. In particular, the findings illustrate that good character is highly valued by companies seeking human resources.



**Fig. 6.** Priority consideration in staff recruitment by small and medium sized enterprises (new staff)  
 Source: The Federation of Korean Industries [6]

The International Tech Corps offers students invaluable opportunities to develop good character and other important skills through service-learning. The following section will show why such positive personal attributes are becoming increasingly important in the current era with newly emerging trends and challenges.

### 3 Loss of humanity in a rapidly changing world

The current era is often associated with the fourth industrial revolution. It is characterized by social features including widespread automation, the need for creativity, and rapid globalization. According to Klaus Schwab of the World Economic Forum, the fourth industrial revolution is fundamentally different from previous ones. He attributes the difference to three factors: *Velocity*, which signifies that technological evolution is occurring at an exponential rather than a linear pace; *Breadth and Depth*, which emphasizes that unprecedented paradigm shifts are broadly affecting the economy, business, society, and the individual; and *Systems Impact*, which indicates that the transformation involves entire systems across and within countries, companies, industries and society as a whole [7]. In this era main concerns should be about how influences like AI, creativity decline, and globalization can have negative effects and even lead to a loss of humanity within the rapidly changing environment.

**First**, this is an era of automation and artificial intelligence (AI). A recent study estimates that 47 % of jobs in the US are at risk of being automated within the next 20 yr [8]. It has already been a long time since search engines like Google surpassed the limits of

human knowledge. In this era, humans are competing with AI, but they can also collaborate. Consider the medical field as an example. IBM has developed the Watson Cancer Diagnosis Solution which uses artificial intelligence to diagnose cancer and prescribes suitable medicine [9]. No amount of memorizing textbooks on the part of doctors can compete with Watson's AI in terms of accurate diagnoses. It thus seems likely that the best doctors of the future will be those who are best able to utilize machines like Watson. Another example is that of the attention-getting Go matches between the Alpha Go and Lee Sedol. The human lost nearly all games, which suggests that AI is coming of age [10]. Indeed, ideas that were once science fiction could soon be realized. There is a substantial threat that the society might one day come to resemble the movie *I, Robot* in which the main character played by Will Smith has to fight against an army of robots. This is causing concerns that this era might become one when humanity succumbs under pressure from increasingly sophisticated mechanization.

**Second**, this is an era when creativity is crucially important. In fact, creativity and innovation are viewed as top priority by executives across a wide range of industries [11]. These skills have perhaps become even more important than any others. The world is now such that anyone who fails to keep up can become an instant loser, and this also has the potential to cause frustration and loss of humanity. The example of Uber and the London taxi cabs clearly illustrates this phenomenon. Taxi drivers in London have a proud history and distinctive traditions. To become one required passing an almost incredibly test referred to simply as "The Knowledge." To pass, one had to memorize the names of over 25 000 streets and 100 000 landmarks in London. It took people 12 attempts on average to pass the test. However, Uber is presenting a challenge to the existing system [12]. In this sense, the current era might also be called an Era of Sudden Death. The taxi drivers experienced an outcome of sudden death, just because they were behind in creativity. Encyclopedia Britannica is another good example. This book collection used to be considered a repository of world knowledge. Nevertheless, it was not long after the arrival of Wikipedia that demand for Britannica's encyclopedias disappeared. Indeed, the S&P rankings of the top 500 companies changed comparatively little from the 1950s to the turn of the new century, yet it is now assumed that 75 % of the companies listed will be replaced by 2027 [13]. Even the giant companies of today like Amazon, Tesla, Apple, and Google are relative start-ups with a history of only about 20 yr. In this era when people are likely to feel frustrated when they fall behind in the race of constant creative development, it is more important than ever to foster the talents needed to create new ideas, for the people who can are more important than any other resource.

**Third**, this is an era in need of global mindsets and global talents [14]. Companies like Google and WhatsApp have made a huge leap forward within a short period of time. They have a common reason for being used worldwide. Similarly, talented people should seek to succeed on a world stage. They should not allow themselves to be limited by their place of birth or of their academic career. For instance, students who study in Korea should not be limited to Korea, and those who study in Indonesia should gain an education that spans far beyond Indonesia alone. In this era, universities must prepare their students for global pursuits.

## 4 Dongseo's vision of a future university

Last year Dongseo University declared its vision for becoming a Future University that provides innovative education and prepares students for a changing world. This section overviews some key values underlying the plan along with the operational forms in which they are being implemented. For instance, Dongseo is operating Talent Development,

Creativity Education, and Service-learning to counterbalance the potential evil influences caused by loss of humanity.

**First**, The Only One education. All people are born with their own talents. Dongseo focuses on helping each student find and develop his or her own talents. To this end, the Talent Development Office is operated. No other office of this kind can be found anywhere in Korea. The Talent Development Office runs various talent-discovery programs. For example, they ran a program called, “Who is the laziest person on campus?” Nobody applied. This is perhaps because the candidates were all too lazy even to sign up. More seriously, however, other programs run through the Talent Development Office have been very helpful at finding talents through examinations, advice and experience. Once students find their talents, the most important thing to do is to develop those talents. In this regard, Dongseo advises students on how to plan their own Self-brand Development to suit their unique talents. Based on the advice received, students can select their own curriculum to pursue their self-brand. Intensive guidance by academic advisors is provided throughout the process. In this way, Dongseo aims to teach students to find their own talents, and cherish and develop those talents, without comparing their talents to those of others.

This aim is also connected with the idea of Education without Failure. At Dongseo, there is a belief that no one should fail. Indeed, if everyone has innate talents, why should anyone fail? The answer is that failure usually results because the talents possessed by a given individual do not accord with some artificially-made standard. However, as observed above, many previously accepted standards can quickly become meaningless in the current era. Thus, rather than feeling frustration, it might be better to take pride in the fact that such talents do not conform to an accepted standard. The notion of Education without Failure might be further clarified with a concrete example. Dongseo operates Study Abroad Programs that give students chances to study foreign languages abroad. In SAP-USA, DSU sends 100 students for two semesters to its branch campus in the US. Many students apply for this program because the university covers the costs of airfare, tuition, and accommodation. One easy and efficient method for selecting students would involve comparing only their GPA scores. However, this is not the method used. Instead, a certain portion of students are selected based on their passion and potential rather than their academic results. This selection process is part of the Life Reset Program. Students who have low GPAs, perhaps because of family difficulties, may nevertheless receive a special chance at Dongseo. For example, consider the case of a student in DSU’s English Department. Even though his major was English, his TOEIC score was only 280 out of a possible 990. His score was the same as his shoe size. However, after being selected for SAP-USA through the reset program, he gained confidence to speak English and discovered his own talent. After that, he focused on studying English and now he is married to an Australian woman and working as a simultaneous interpreter. This provides an excellent example of the benefits to be gained through Education without Failure and Life Reset Program.

**Second**, Dongseo values creative education, in the sense of education that fosters creative thinking. Regardless of their major, all freshman students at Dongseo University take a Design and Creativity class to evoke the creativity that has been dormant in them since they began studying for the university entrance examination. Also, Dongseo operates a Capstone Design education program. This is aimed at improving students’ workplace capabilities through manufacturing and design experience rather than through the pursuit of research theses. Additionally, DSU has opened a Creativity Development Center involving many of the school’s academic division, including Media Communication, Digital Contents, Mechatronics Engineering, etc. Another plan involves implementing a Free-learning Semester system. This would give students the chance to independently design their own semester, and Dongseo would encourage them to be as creative as possible in their designs.



**Third**, Dongseo emphasizes globalized education. It has been actively building a broad global network and has already established branch campuses in California, USA, and Wuhan province, China. Furthermore, plans are currently being discussed for a new branch campus expansion. These overseas campuses enable DSU students to gain immersive language training and acquire cultural experience. Moreover, every year Dongseo sends a large number of students abroad through its extensive network of roughly 189 universities in 37 countries. Efforts have recently focused on Asia, since it is generally believed that the coming era will be one where Asia plays a predominant economic and political role. To prepare, DSU has developed many Asia-centered programs. For example, through the Dongseo Asia Initiatives Program (DAIP), students can choose one of ten Asian countries to visit during the summer vacation to conduct independent research projects. The Asia Summer Program (ASP) lets Dongseo students study abroad together with students of its sister universities in Asia. Moreover, Dongseo hosts Global Access Asia (GAA), which is an online courseware system through which students can take excellent courses from various Asian countries without leaving home.

**Finally**, Dongseo University places great importance on service-learning. In fact, this is among its core educational features. As previously suggested, it may not be an overstatement to say that we are living in an Era of Lost Humanity. Therefore, it is essential in this era is to develop talented people who love and treat one another with consideration and compassion. This type of personality cannot be fostered through sitting at a desk and studying from textbooks. Instead, it has to be gained through personal experience. Universities should educate their students accordingly. Investing in personality education will make the young people stronger and help them to pick themselves up without frustration when they face difficulties. This is a key aspect of the role to be played by service-learning. Dongseo teaches students to worship God through weekly chapel classes, and it helps them to spread God's love through volunteer programs. In addition to the International Tech Corps, Dongseo University offers many other opportunities such as the Nakdong River Environment Volunteer Program, which focuses on conserving the Nakdong River that flows like a lifeline through Gyeongsang province, the Sorok Island Volunteer Program, which provides services for patients with Hansen's disease, and the Habitat Program, which inspires pride in Korean children born overseas.

## 5 Conclusion

The Dongseo Educational Foundation was established to provide Christ-centered education that fosters students' personal as well as academic development. At the heart of its founding philosophy is the idea that becoming a compassionate and civically responsible member of society requires a more diverse range of learning experiences than can be made available in the classroom. Dongseo University has extended the practice of service-learning to a global context through the International Tech Corps and other international learning opportunities, especially in Asia. Programs such as these offer students great advantages by enabling them to address the needs of local communities, learn through direct interactions in a foreign environment, and reflect upon their experiences to gain both global awareness and self-recognition of their duties as citizens of the world.

In the era of a 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution, there is a growing risk that societal trends will lead to frustration and even the loss of humanity. These trends include increasing automation through developments in artificial intelligence, the pressure to stay ahead of changes resulting from creative innovations, and the challenges of competing beyond national borders within an ever more global setting. To counterbalance the potentially evil effects of such changes, it is essential for universities to provide students with education that can prepare them for the workplace of tomorrow.

Dongseo University has announced a vision of becoming a Future University, in the sense that it will operate under a new paradigm for higher education where individual talents are discovered and developed, creativity is encouraged and fruitfully guided in meaningful directions, boundaries are expanded through internationalized education, and important life lessons are gained through the practice of service-learning.

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