

Melissa Zelniker

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"I'm on a crusade to fight apathy," says Melissa Zelniker, 21, of her number-one goal of motivating students to realize their volunteering can change society. As director of Volunteer UCF, the campuswide service center that houses 10 separate initiatives, Zelniker says, "Once you get a student involved, 80 percent of the time they'll continue. Getting them to see the problems is the challenge."

Zelniker's personal epiphany came in 1996 when she began volunteering as a victim advocate for Spouse Abuse, Inc., a local United Way agency she discovered through UCF. "They always tell you one person can make a difference, but that was the first time I felt it. It was a springboard to make me want to change the world," she says. For years, the North Miami Beach native has been encouraged to serve others by her mother, a nurse and AIDS instructor. "The people that push me and give me my drive are the victims and the offenders—real-life people who have stories."

In summer 1998, Zelniker helped create Suddenly Service to match as many as 30 students weekly with on-campus volunteer needs. She also started SPARK—monthly



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volunteer events for which students simply sign up and show up. Launching a literacy program, increasing campus blood-drive donations by 200 percent with the "Are You MY Type?" campaign, and revamping her agency's look with the slogan "Igniting Volunteerism" are just a few of the projects Zelniker manages.

All of Volunteer UCF's initiatives are guided by the agency's three-part goal of starting new programs, increasing student awareness about the importance of service, and strengthening relations between the college and

area agencies. To combine resources, she has matched 30 UCF organizations with local agencies since fall 1998 for joint service projects. Recently, Zelniker and her team organized a Volunteer Expo with 60 community service groups and started the "Get Carded" organ- and tissue-donation partnership with Translife of Florida Hospital, signing up 5,000 new student donors last year.

Service isn't Zelniker's only strength—she also has held numerous offices for Zeta Tau Alpha sorority, served on the campuswide Panhellenic Council, and helped organize fall rush for more than 1,000 newcomers. "We pulled 18-hour days—getting the lists out, meeting with advisors, and working with women in different chapters," she says. "My view has changed—I couldn't see limiting myself to my chapter anymore." In addition to her Greek involvement, Zelniker also is a member of UCF's President's Leadership Council and has been active in Student Government since last fall. As a senator, Zelniker makes getting students' direct input a priority. "I talk to people around campus, and lots of organizations come to me for advice. They know I'll do what's right and that I'll voice their concerns."

Among her commitments, service is Zelniker's passion. "I see Volunteer UCF as a platform for being proactive—that's what we were lacking," she says. "When I want to do something, I never think it won't happen. I always see the light at the end of the tunnel." ▀