Opportunities Fund Application - Statement of Interest

My name is [redacted] and I am a sophomore at Hunter studying Political Philosophy and Public Policy. I request use of the Opportunities Fund to fund my service-learning trip to New Orleans from April 6th – April 15th, 2012. When I look back to August 29th, 2005 and the subsequent events afterwards, I realize that I was unable to properly empathize with the citizens of the City of New Orleans. My adolescent naïveté transformed an opportunity to learn about the deep political, socioeconomic and racial issues surrounding a natural disaster into a superficial discussion of an “unfortunate event” overshadowed by my eighth grade interest in Kanye West’s antics. I was unwilling to see that the area was in great need of state and federal assistance in the form of a multilateral response. Credulously, I believed that the United States government, in assistance with various non-governmental organizations, would collaborate to rebuild the city’s economy, social welfare systems and infrastructure. Unfortunately, here is my application to study the “human inaction” that caused the “ongoing catastrophe”.

This service learning project is my opportunity to not only understand the disaster through several lenses, but also to develop critical attitudes towards government agencies that failed to properly implement necessary forms of aid. Past endeavors in academic classes have given me a broad overview of federal deprivation in impoverished areas; New Orleans will provide me with a first-hand specific application. My discoveries in my coursework have a recurring theme of oppression of minority groups. Each succeeding experience has piqued my interest in learning of overwhelmingly similar circumstances that caused, in some cases, sentiments of distrust, governmental atavism and public apathy.
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I do not want this experience to end in summarized hindsight; what the United States and the State of Louisiana did to refurbish New Orleans after Katrina is the natural response of a government to an area that yielded minute economic, touristic and social interest. What I hope to gain is the understanding of the mentality that led to such a weak response, and what considerations we must keep in mind at all levels of government moving forward. I hope to synthesize the ethos of the response with the understandings of philosophers such as Mill, Kant and Rousseau.

I consider Rousseau’s wisdom as I indicate the type of placement that I would like to participate in; he believed that various conveniences and lack of exercise introduced contempt into man’s environment. With that in mind, I would like to engage in strenuous, physically demanding activities that will challenge me to work very hard during the Service portion of the class. Although I am not adept at many forms of home repair and construction, any task that involves collective effort and assistance will be enough for me. Due to the important aspect of physical work in New Orleans in addition to the critical analysis I hope to make in the issues that have contributed to its recent fortunes, the service-learning program in New Orleans through Baruch qualifies for Macaulay’s requirements for community service projects.

By taking this class and participating in the service-learning program, I plan to overcome a buffer of indifference that comes with experiencing natural disasters from afar. This experience will benefit my work in Public Policy by providing an excellent case study. Positive interventions in the region beyond humanitarian groups and college students have been few and far between. Given the notable disregard of the needs of
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community amidst political claims of equality, I believe that New Orleans has an important story to tell. I want to learn the most I can of that story.