Pacademics: Developing A Collaborative Service Learning Portal To Facilitate Experiential Learning

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PACADEMICS: DEVELOPING A COLLABORATIVE SERVICE LEARNING PORTAL TO FACILITATE EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

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Abstract:
This tutorial discusses the benefits of integrating service learning into technology specific classes and Management Information System (MIS) capstone courses. The literature discusses the benefits of integrating service learning into the curriculum from both the students and the community partners perspective. Despite the numerous benefits, there are also a variety of hidden pitfalls and challenges for faculty. This session will discuss some of the problems associated with integrating service learning into the MIS curriculum. The session will also provide a demonstration of a web based portal www.pacademics.com that is being conceived to alleviate these problems by creating an efficient web2.0 workflow system for managing the service learning process. This tutorial will also discuss the opportunities for research that will be available from the data collected from the system.

Keywords: pacademics, service learning, experiential learning

I. Introduction
Service Learning is a method whereby students learn and develop knowledge through active participation in thoughtfully organized service that meets the needs of communities. Service learning is integrated into academic curriculum to enhance learning experience and fosters civic responsibility. There is now a growing body of literature that describes how service learning can be incorporated in to technology focused curriculum such as computer science (Chao & Randles, 2009), technical writing (Barton & Evans, 2003), software engineering (Chang, 2005), Programming (Gilles & Roshandel, 2008) decision science, Computer science (Brooks, 2008) and MIS (Christensen, Rundus, Perera, & Zulli, 2007) Capstone Courses (Patten, Keane 2009-AIS). These research studies all show that by incorporating service learning in technology related courses the student experience can be enhanced. Although there is an abundance of research that discusses the benefits of Service Learning, there is a lack of research that focuses on the experiences of faculty (Dipadova-Stocks, 2005). Most of the research discusses the benefits to students (Zlotkowski, 1996) and community partner (Stuteville & Ikerd, 2009) where there is direct contact between these constituents, there has been little attention given to service learning that relies heavily on virtual collaboration between the students and community partner.

The main purpose of this initiative is to investigate the impact of virtual or online service learning experience on these three constituents (faculty, students, and community partner). There are some researchers who profess that students engaged in the service learning project must visit the service site and must also reflect on the visit and the experience (Zlotkowski, 1996). The notion or the importance of reflection (Dubinsky, 2006) is not in question but the fact that working virtually with a client can be just be as productive as working onsite is just one of the questions being investigated. This research is deemed an open research project because any researcher can collaborate and form research questions based on the data that is being collected from www.pacademics.com.
II. Pacademics Portal Overview

The portal that will be demonstrated is called Pacademics which means Practical Academics; it aims to provide tools and templates for online collaboration between the faculty, students and community partners. In the future the system will be similar to the Scholarone Journal and conference paper review workflow system as it will provides registration features, templates, email reminders, document storage, and feedback capture. The system also provides functionality to make the interaction between the three parties more efficient by using a collection of web2.0 tools such as three way video conferencing feature, document sharing, screen sharing capabilities, virtual world space, and social networking portal for e-portfolios.

![Screenshot of home page](image)

It is no secret that real-world software engineers, technical designers or analysts deal with complex problems on a day to day basis. Yet many MIS courses do not involve projects of enough complexity to give students the experience equivalent to a real world perspective (Chang, 2005). Although technical based service-learning projects can be difficult to manage (Ferguson, Liu, Last, & Mertz, 2007) from a faculty perspective (Cyphert, 2006) they can serve a crucial role in providing the complexity and real world experience. One of the problems faced by faculty is finding suitable projects, typically any community or commercial project that just happens to be available with a reliable stakeholder will be chosen. This may not necessarily be the best choice for the technology being taught or may not be a cause that the students feel passionate about. But the workload of
faculty does not allow them the luxury of finding and matching multiple projects to students based on interest.

Pacademics will provide a web services tool that will allow students and faculty to create a personalized profile of what type of projects they require and suitable projects will be identified from around the world and presented to the students. The Pacademics portal is currently used by members of the Southeast Michigan Collaborative for Community Engagement, the collaboration consists of 8 universities to co-operate on community led initiatives. The use of a website to manage opportunities was conceived at Madonna University and has been used as a way to manage requests for technical assistance from local non profits. In 2007 - 2008 Students in their MIS capstone classes were allowed to select projects from the website and contact the organizations to work with them to complete the projects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Title</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Southwest Detroit Development Collaborative</td>
<td>Collaboration Portal using Joomla, Open source system for sharing information and services.</td>
<td>MIS Capstone – team project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SDDC)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican Patriotic Committee</td>
<td>Website for organization.</td>
<td>Capstone Individual project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Health and Lead Awareness Education</td>
<td>Health Education Interactive Modules <a href="http://www.health-edu.org">www.health-edu.org</a></td>
<td>Collaboration between Capstone students on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modules</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nursing and MIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Infant Mortality Program (IMP)</td>
<td>Interactive modules for high risk mothers. IMP provides comprehensive services that reduce the high infant mortality rate among babies being born to women at-risk residing in Detroit and Wayne County. The Modules created. They were showcased on April 16th 2009 in Highland Park, MI.</td>
<td>Collaboration between Capstone students on Nursing and MIS programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Windsor Women's Interfaith Initiative</td>
<td>Website to promote the mission and services for the group.</td>
<td>Individual student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 : Mini cases of projects completed by students using Pacademics

The focus of Pacademics will be global not regional. The rational for the global focus is to encourage the incorporation of online or e-volunteering or virtual service learning into the curriculum at any university anywhere in the world.. This tutorial proposes a virtual service learning model that relies on collaboration and partnership between Academia and online volunteer sites. Our simple-to-use web application interfaces to collect information on volunteer opportunities anywhere in the world. The global search feature displays opportunities from organizations such as 1-800-volunteer.org,AARP, American Red Cross, craigslist, Girl Scouts of the USA, Habitat for Humanity, MeetUp, Mentor, ServeNet.org, TechMission, The Extraordinaries, Truist, United Jewish Communities, United Way, Volunteer2, VolunteerMatch and Youth Service America. The benefit of the approach is to provide a constant source of technology oriented community projects, that will allow students to select projects that are appropriate to their course; and they have an interest in. Each day 100 opportunities are selected into eight IT categories highlighted in Figure 2.
III. **Pacademics features that will be demonstrated**

The items below are the main features of the system that will be described and demonstrated with a view to generate discussion on how best to integrate these features into the curriculum. Viewing and selecting technology related projects from around the world:

- Viewing and selecting non technical projects that address any of the 8 Millennium Development Goals.
- Existing process flow for registering as a student or faculty to work on a project for a semester or year.
- Matching project to student volunteers or faculty classes.
- 3-way video collaboration.
- Sharing Service Learning resources.
IV. Development Timeline

The functionality for the site is being implemented by a phased approach; the table below provides an overview of the existing planned development timeline.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Phase 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 09 – Oct 09</td>
<td>Nov 09 – Mar 2010</td>
<td>Apr 10 – Sep 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alpha V1</td>
<td>Alpha v2</td>
<td>Beta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Content management site implementation</td>
<td>Project partners section</td>
<td>Social networking component and e-portfolio for students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registration functionality</td>
<td>3 way video conferencing feature</td>
<td>Define workflow for managing capstone course for faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Static Service learning articles, resources and document sharing capabilities</td>
<td>Database for storing and searching opportunities</td>
<td>Volunteer registration. Along with searching for Volunteers and faculty based on skill and interest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Viewing projects</td>
<td>Viewing Project</td>
<td>Open Id login</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Load 1000 IT Projects via RSS per day</td>
<td>Load 1000 non IT related projects by MDGs per day</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Showcase Member projects</td>
<td>Define Research Agenda</td>
<td>Advanced database search</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Development Timeline for Pacademics project
V. How can SIGED Members be involved?
There are many ways that faculty can participate in this project.

- Using the Pacademics portal to identify suitable projects for their classes (online or onground) and provide technology services to Nonprofits and NGO by integrating service learning into their curriculum for MIS, CS or capstone projects.

- Using the portal to identify research opportunities that address the Millennium development goals (Research that matters) for non technical projects.

- Assist with the definition of the most efficient online collaboration model and workflow to manage the relationship between the three constituents.

- Faculty with Service Learning experience can submit best practices along with relevant artifacts such as syllabus, contracts, lessons learned, grading matrix e.t.c

VI. References


