Creating Win-Win Opportunities: Integrating Community Engagement into the IS Classroom

TREO Talk Paper

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Abstract

With more emphasis being placed on experiential learning experiences in the curriculum, the Information Systems discipline is positioned perfectly to increase the value provided to our students, our local community organizations, and our university by integrating community and civic engagement opportunities into our curriculum. In addition to being able to give back to the community, engaging in these interactive, real-life activities provides students and instructors a deeper level of learning and collaboration that go far beyond the walls of a classroom or a student’s time in college. In this TREO talk, I would like to share my experience incorporating community engagement into both a beginning level systems analysis course as well as a capstone-level, advanced systems analysis course, highlighting student benefits, challenges, and lessons learned. As a starting point, it is important to recognize that decisions to incorporate community engagement activities should match with the pedagogical and learning goals of the course. For example, depending on the skills that students should have at the completion of the beginning versus the capstone systems analysis course, how community partners and projects are chosen, types of product deliverables, and level of client interactions will vary. Similarly, my role will also vary, often from instructor to coach to mentor. In addition to discussing the challenges, such as project selection, managing client expectations, student-client interactions, and project closure, I will also discuss the benefits that students receive from this learning experience. From a competency standpoint, the types of skills that can be achieved by integrating a community engagement project includes technical, managerial, communication, team, and problem-solving skills. I hope that attendees of this talk will walk away with ideas of how they can integrate community engagement into their own Information Systems courses.