Navigating Feasibility: Choosing Service-Learning Projects for Academic Fit*

Conference Tutorial

Stan Kurkovsky[1], Chad Williams[1],
Mikey Goldweber[2], Nathan Sommer[3]
[1]Central Connecticut State University, New Britain, CT 06050
{kurkovsky,cwilliams}@ccsu.edu
[2]Denison College, Granville, OH 43023
mikeyg@denison.edu
[3]Xavier University, Cincinnati, OH 45207
sommern1@xavier.edu

Service learning can be viewed as a strategy in teaching and learning where meaningful community service is integrated with instruction and reflection. Service learning experiences can go a long way to enrich student learning, expose them to the concept of civic responsibility, strengthen communities, and show them the role that their profession can play in contributing to the common good [3]. Participation in service learning projects has been shown to strengthen students' interest in computing and related careers, especially among female and minority students [1].

Instructors and institutions looking to adopt service-learning projects face a broad range of questions. How to embed a project into one's existing curriculum without adding a new course? How best to supervise students, provide meaningful formative feedback, and assess and evaluate their work? How to work with the project partner to assess the project scope and ensure its feasibility? How to evaluate project success and make sure the project partner gets what they need? How to provide project maintenance after delivery?

Many existing practices of working with externally sourced projects often rely on established frameworks rooted in and supported by existing institutional infrastructures, additional staff, and technical resources. However, many institutions may not have such resources and/or experience. Those looking to

adopt such practices can often find reports about positive experiences with externally sourced projects, e.g. [2], but none of them provide the depth of detail that would enable an institution to readily adopt that work.

We are currently working on a larger project aimed to equip instructors with curricular materials, how-to guides, sample project portfolios, and ample engagement and training opportunities to adopt a robust service-learning framework with minimal resources. A successful service-learning experience depends as much on following a curricular process, as it does on a careful choice of a project partner, right project scope, fit of student capabilities, and many other characteristics.

This tutorial will introduce our service-learning project feasibility assessment model. Participants will be guided through a set of structured questions designed to facilitate meaningful discussions with project partners. These discussions aim to collaboratively complete a scoring rubric, providing an objective evaluation of the suitability of service-learning projects. The tutorial's focus is on aiding instructors to make informed decisions regarding course fit and identifying the most suitable projects for their institution and program curriculum. We will present a hands-on case study where participants review one or more potential projects with a hypothetical external partner and determine the fitness of the project within their academic program.

The tutorial builds on the experience accumulated by CCSU's Software Engineering Studio which connects community project partners with teams of 4-5 seniors working on software development projects spanning one or several semesters. Since 2014, the Studio facilitated over 65 distinct projects and engaged over 500 students.

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References

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