Letter from the Editor
Service Learning Can Lead to Positive Outcomes

Susan R. Feather-Gannon

How do we provide meaningful and relevant experiences for our students? One way that institutions of higher learning are addressing this challenge is to include a service learning component in their courses. Service learning has been defined in a number of ways, including:

> A form of experiential learning where students and faculty collaborate with communities to address problems and issues, simultaneously gaining knowledge and skills and advancing personal development. There is an equal emphasis on helping communities and providing valid learning experiences to students (Bounous, 1997, p. 5)

Although the concept of service learning via civic engagement has been utilized in a variety of disciplines, this instructional strategy in IT is still breaking new ground. At the same time, I like to think that OSRA members are at the cutting edge in terms of creating new ways to deliver top-notch instruction. For example, for the past 15 years at Pace University, one of our courses in the Technology Systems Department—Computers for Human Empowerment—has traditionally offered a community service component, while simultaneously fulfilling a University core requirement providing students with a requisite foundation in computer skills. Long after this course was developed and running successfully, faculty and administrators set upon the task of creating a new core curriculum. The outcome of that initiative resulted in a service-learning requirement and the various disciplines in the University quickly figuring out how to incorporate this component into their courses. Our Computers for Human Empowerment course was a natural for fulfilling this part of the University core.

Another example of OSRA members being at the forefront in using service learning in IT is Harry Reif's IS course at James Madison University. For the past five years, he has included a service learning option whereby students complete an application process to undertake a project that aids needy clients in their use of IT within the environs of the University. Student teams, carefully screened by the instructor, complete projects and sometimes even continue IT support for clients after the semester has ended.

One caveat to bear in mind, however, is the careful and thoughtful planning—identifying and meeting with potential clients, etc.—required in incorporating service learning into a course. It is not for the faint of heart! The bottom line, though, is that whatever service-learning model is used in IT-related courses, students, clients, and educational institutions alike have the potential to reap tangible rewards. Students participate in real-life situations while experiencing the positive feelings associated with civic engagement, clients receive help in the use of technology to fulfill their immediate needs, and the University receives good publicity while simultaneously engendering positive relations with the community at large. As IT educators continue to seek innovative ways to deliver instruction in preparing students for work environments where the only constant is change, why not include a service learning component by linking what transpires in the classroom to practical experience in real-life settings?

In This Issue

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This issue is a combination of classroom research and research that might be applied in the classroom. The first article in this issue, authored by Thomas Dillon and Harry Reif (both of James Madison University), identifies motivational factors associated with young people who use e-commerce. They looked at variables, such as attitude, demographic information, purchase and product perceptions, shopping experience, customer service, and consumer risk in their research.

The following article by Judith Lambrecht of the University of Minnesota, Donna Redmann from Louisiana State University, and Wanda Stitt-Gohdes of The University of Georgia describes their research of on-the-job practices of computer users in an effort to provide guidance in the improvement of instruction of application programs.

A frequent contributor to the *Information Technology, Learning, and Performance Journal*, Sheila Smith of Ball State University, researched the variables of self-efficacy, or confidence, compared to performance (competence) of students participating in introductory computer concepts courses.

Lastly, Jensen Zhao of Ball State University and Sherry Zhao, a Ph.D. candidate in the Harvard-MIT Joint Program of Health Sciences & Technology completed a comparative study of Internet and Web technologies used on *Fortune 500* and *Inc. 500* corporate Web sites. Their findings revealed that although both groups made effective and efficient use of their Web technologies, the *Fortune 500* group was more likely to accept advanced and emerging technologies, whereas *Inc. 500* companies gravitated toward those technologies categorized as mature and easy to use.

Reference

Bounous, R. M. (Ed). (1997). New directions: Teaching and research (Working papers series on service-learning, Vol. 1). Ithaca, NY: Cornell University.

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