Promoting Service Based Learning Through Hands-on Opportunities

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In the winter of 2019, students from the Cal Poly Construction Management Department traveled to Chiang Mai, Thailand to complete a home build with Habitat for Humanity Global Village. This trip sparked their interest in promoting service based learning for other students looking for similar opportunities to participate in not-for-profit projects. In order to provide other students with information about not-for-profit construction, a website was created to highlight these organizations and the available opportunities to volunteer. The purpose of the creation of the website was to connect students with volunteer opportunities that fit their interests and time commitment. To accommodate various interests, it was imperative to include organizations located locally, nationally, and internationally during the creation of the website. In addition to the organizations included, research about the various fundraising opportunities and a comparison of expected out of pocket expenses was also included within the website.

Key Words: Volunteer, Service Learning, Web Directory, Not-for-Profit

Introduction

In the winter of 2019, students from the California Polytechnic State University at San Luis Obispo (Cal Poly) Construction Management Department traveled to Chiang Mai, Thailand to complete a home build with Habitat for Humanity Global Village. This trip sparked their interest in promoting service based learning for other students looking for similar opportunities to participate in not-for-profit projects. In order to provide other students with information about not-for-profit construction, a website was created to highlight these organizations and the available opportunities to volunteer. The purpose of the creation of the website was to connect students with volunteer opportunities that fit their interests and time commitment. To accommodate various interests, it was imperative to include organizations located locally, nationally, and internationally during the creation of the website. In addition to the organizations included, research about the various fundraising opportunities and a comparison of expected out of pocket expenses was also included within the website.

Background

In alignment with the university motto of “Learn by Doing,” the Cal Poly Construction Management Department encourages students to gain hands-on experience both in and outside the classroom. During winter break of 2019, Meredith Beckman and Avery Spector participated in the construction of a home with the organization, Habitat for Humanity Global Village in Chiang Mai, Thailand. The project presented itself as an opportunity to demonstrate the knowledge of construction gained through the construction management curriculum, as well as an opportunity to learn and compare means and methods in a foreign country.
After scouring the Habitat website for a project that fit both the interests and schedule for the students, Avery and Meredith chose the home build in Chiang Mai. The group leader, Carol Martin was elated to hear two college students were willing to donate their time and effort to join a team of retirees in the construction of a home. For months leading up to the trip, Carol shared information about the family the team would be building for as well as background information of Thai customs and culture. The process from selecting a trip to arriving in Thailand was about seven months, which included ensuring visas had not expired, medical documents were up to date, and fundraising for the project. Selecting the project well in advance allowed the students to feel they were adequately prepared.

In Chiang Mai, volunteers spent the entirety of the day on site working alongside the homeowners. Major construction activities included leveling the floors, mixing and pouring concrete, digging and placing septic tanks, and tacking CMU walls. Each day was fast paced and rewarding to observe the productivity of the home quickly progressing. Both the team of volunteers and new homeowners dedicated immense effort and craftsmanship to create a building that the residents would be proud to call home.

During the two-week program, volunteers supported the building process of a home for a local family in need of more sufficient living conditions. As an organization, Habitat for Humanity volunteers contribute time and money into the building process while working alongside the selected homeowners to complete the construction of the project. Like many other not-for-profit build organizations, Habitat continuously looks for volunteers to get involved with their ongoing homebuilding efforts.

This opportunity served as a capstone experience, allowing the students an opportunity to demonstrate what they had learned through their hands-on educational experiences at Cal Poly. However, finding a program to participate in, such as Habitat for Humanity, was not easily accessible. To encourage more students to participate in volunteer building opportunities, a website conveying viable not-for-profit organizations was created. The purpose of the website was to make volunteer information more readily available to students. Like Habitat for Humanity, there are many organizations all over the world looking for volunteers to aid in the construction of various projects.
Project Purpose

To encourage more students to participate in volunteer building opportunities, a website conveying viable not-for-profit building organizations was created. The website was organized in the form of a website to act as a consolidated and accessible place to inform students and provide comparisons between the opportunities offered by different organizations. Students seeking ways to apply their construction education in the field can use the site to connect with not-for-profit hands-on building opportunities. The organizations included seek continuous volunteers for ongoing efforts and these organizations will benefit from inclusion in the website where students are also actively looking for ways to volunteer.

Project Process

The organizations that are included on the website all went through a selection process to ensure they all had similar requirements of being beneficial for future senior projects. After looking through past projects on DigitalCommons and completing an exhaustive internet search, the students compiled a list of organizations that were actively seeking volunteer help. The students then reached out to individual organizations to get more information about the volunteer requirements such as time invested and personal funding for the project.

In order to make the website relevant for years to come, the organizations and project types that Meredith and Avery inquired about were ones that either have reoccurring construction needs or ones that partner with disaster relief and have different volunteer needs depending on current events. The organizations selected were chosen with the intent to stay relative for years to come and remain a reliable source of information for future students.

The information collected by the students was then displayed on the website with the intention to ensure future students can navigate the website with ease. Categorizing the organizations based on their location was intended to make it easier for students to compare various volunteer experiences based on their region.

Website Deliverables

In order to create a useful website for students with a wide range of interests, displaying projects with different scopes and located in different regions of the world created a valuable platform for all types of students. To represent a variety of volunteer opportunities, the website was set up to display information about organizations located locally, nationally, and internationally. This set up allows students to compare organizations based on their location in order to gage the various requirements of different experiences.

About

All sections of the website were generated with the intention to give students a cohesive and engaging information about the available opportunities to get involved with hands-on building all over the world. The website’s interface was designed to display an ‘About’ page to give readers insight about
the purpose of building the website and background knowledge about Meredith and Avery’s project in Chiang Mai that originally sparked the interest for creating the website.

**Our Project**

This section of the website highlights the student’s Habitat for Humanity Global Village project in Chiang Mai. It was written to explain the scope of the project, insight gained from the students, as well as photos from the jobsite.

![Jobsite Photos](image)

**Central Coast**

The ‘Central Coast’ section of the website provides information about not-for-profit organizations seeking volunteers in San Luis Obispo County. Like the other sections of the website, this page includes brief background information about the organization, its location, the types of volunteer work typically done, as well as a link to the website. The organizations included in this section of the website are those that have relationships with Cal Poly through previous volunteer work done by students. Project scopes highlight available work such as home builds, landscape construction, as well as facility improvements in San Luis Obispo County.
National volunteer opportunities selected for the website included organizations that are located all over the United States. This section of the website was created to give students an opportunity that still want to experience building in other parts of the country without feeling the need to travel overseas to experience construction in an unfamiliar place.

This portion of the website also includes organizations that aid in disaster relief. To ensure the website was kept timeless, the organizations included such as the American Red Cross are ones that have a continuous need for volunteers even when their type of humanitarian work changes based on current events. These disaster relief organizations have many volunteer opportunities to match a wide range of interests and time commitments. The contact information of these programs was provided on the website to ensure students have the ability to contact a desired chapter to find out current volunteer positions available in the area.
The international section highlights many other organizations similar to Habitat for Humanity Global Village that allow students to construct buildings for communities within developing countries. The international work provided on the website included a wide range of project types such as homes, libraries, and even bridges. Due to the countless not-for-profit project types all over the globe, finding diverse organizations to include within this section was done with relative ease. Outside of the local and national level, there are so many organizations that provide aid to developing communities in need.

This section provided valuable information associated with experiencing construction in another country. It was created to provide students with knowledge about experiencing construction work in a different country and give accurate expectations about selecting a project overseas. Many students have a desire to choose a project that requires long-distance traveling but by providing knowledge of international organizations, this section was created to give students insight on whether or not choosing international work is the right choice.

No matter the student, providing information about organizations on three different scales of location was important to ensure any student interested in participating in a hands-on build, had the information to make an informed decision about the location and a cause they want to build for.
One of the most important aspects to be considered by a student selecting a project to get involved with is the funding required to supply materials and travel to the project. The purpose of creating the ‘Funding’ section was to give students a better understanding of the costs and fundraising associated with any volunteer project.

The funding tab features the cost break down from a few past projects on the local, national, and international levels. The chart included was generated with the intention to provide students with insight about the out of pocket expenses and funding required when selecting a project. By comparing the costs correlated with different project scopes and locations, students are given a more accurate expectation of the costs needed as seen from past projects.
A list of grants and endowments given by the CAED Department was included to give students an idea of the different wants to get funding for a project. Although there are countless sources to apply for grant money towards a project, this section was created with the intention to give students an idea of the many types of funding opportunities available depending on the project type and scope.

In addition to available grants, it was important to showcase the many industry sponsors that have helped make senior projects possible due to their generous donations to students. Due to the close relationship between the Construction Management Department and CMAC industry members, it was important to highlight a few of the many companies that provided both time and money to make past projects possible. By highlighting a few projects and the companies involved, students would be able to get a sense of the types of projects that have requested involvement from industry partners.
Conclusion

During a two-week volunteer home building trip in Thailand, Meredith Beckman and Avery Spector learned about Thai culture, foreign building styles with familiar techniques, and were able to reflect on the impact a program such as Habitat for Humanity Global Village made on a family in need. At the end of the project, the new homeowners exchanged their gratitude to the volunteer group and explained how their new home would change the rest of their lives for the better. The experiences gained in Thailand ignited an awareness in the students about the privilege of having a home to feel safe in and the importance of organizations around the world that do their best to provide such fortune.

Through their involvement with Habitat for Humanity, Meredith and Avery grew to understand the significance of their efforts to the beneficiaries of the project, the future homeowners. Building a home for a family in need without the expectation to receive anything in return was an extremely humbling experience, knowing a positive impact was made on genuine people. The original Habitat trip influenced Meredith and Avery to ensure that their senior project reflected the lessons learned both during the build and their time at Cal Poly.

Having the ability to have built something that is not conceptual is an extremely unique aspect of the Construction Management Department that students get to be a part of. The website was created to outline all the opportunities and available resources in order to promote more students to continue to create life-changing homes and structures. Students in the Construction Management department have been given the tools to create positive change to those around them so this website is needed to make students aware of the available resources to continue to do so. The main goal of creating a website was to continue to promote student involvement with communities and create a lasting impact through construction.
Website Resources
