Service-learning partnerships involve students taking part in structured community service that relates to their academic course experience. Students who major in information systems are increasingly being provided with real-world experiences. These real-world experiences offer numerous benefits. Students can immediately apply their course knowledge to real-world situations. Students can gain the experience of grappling with political, social, and ethical issues in a workplace setting. In addition, students can develop a sense of civic responsibility, by contributing their skills to their communities. This chapter presents the issues involved in implementing the service-learning paradigm in an information systems curriculum. Examples of successful service-learning courses are presented, and new possibilities for service-learning courses are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Courses in the information systems curriculum are increasingly incorporating hands-on experiences for students. Student evaluation is no
longer limited to exams and research papers. Projects are becoming an increasingly common part of the information systems curriculum. It is one thing to describe to students how an information system is developed, modified, or maintained. It is a totally different experience for students to experience first-hand an information system being developed, modified, or maintained. If the students can work with real users in a real-world experience to develop an information system, this is a valuable experience.

The major question is how to place students in an appropriate real-world project setting. An educational paradigm called service-learning would seem to be appropriate for forming a partnership. In service-learning, students take part in structured community service experiences relating to their coursework (Jacoby, 1996). At the same time, students learn about the social and cultural dimensions of computing, and may start to question their own role in systems development, and how they can apply their skills to help the community. This chapter will discuss opportunities for implementing the service-learning paradigm in the information systems curriculum.

**SERVICE-LEARNING**

Service-learning is an educational paradigm in which students take part in community service (Jacoby, 1996). This community service is structured to relate to course material, with the goal of strengthening the program experience. The idea is that the service-learning projects offer an opportunity to immediately apply the material learned in the classroom. Instead of simply discussing the concepts in a classroom setting, students get a chance to use their knowledge to assist others (Jacoby, 1996). At the same time, while gaining experience working in their community, students also strengthen their sense of civic responsibility. Service-learning can provide a strong educational experience for the students involved.

Community-based non-profit organizations are in need of assistance with technology. Non-profit organizations tend to have smaller budgets for technology, and therefore cannot afford to hire many people to work on their technology needs. For instance, schools frequently cannot afford to provide Internet training for their teachers (Lazar and Norcio, 2000). In some cases, schools might be required to spend their technology budgets on capital expenses such as hardware and software, instead of developing new resources or managing existing resources or providing training (US General Accounting Office, 1998). Other non-profit organizations, such as parent groups, and support groups, usually are dependent on donations...
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