Importance and Challenges of International Service-Learning

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IMPORTANCE AND CHALLENGES OF INTERNATIONAL SERVICE-LEARNING

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Parul Chaube is a Purdue Graduate in Economics at Purdue University. In 2018, she co-founded an organization within Krannert School of Management called Consult Your Community. This organization aims to provide pro-bono consulting services to small businesses around Indiana. In this article, she shares the value she gained from the international service-learning experience in her Business Writing class at Purdue.

INTRODUCTION: CODE FOR NEPAL, SERVICE-LEARNING PARTNER

Service-learning is a vital aspect of a holistic college experience. It helps students gain a better understanding of how classroom knowledge can be applied to create a difference in the real world. Sapp and Crabtree (2002) argue that service learning can "develop more actively responsible citizens who possess democratic values" (p. 413). Similarly, other scholars have argued that service learning provides students with avenues for experiential learning. It also provides engagement opportunities with the local as well as international communities (Eble & Gaillet, 2004; Sapp & Crabtree, 2002; Scott, 2004). In this regard, providing students with experiential learning, our English 420: Business Writing class engaged with an international organization called Code for Nepal that works to increase digital literacy among the minority groups in Nepal. This allowed the students to put their knowledge and ideas that they learned in the class to good use. Our class partnered with Code for Nepal and helped them to expand the reach of their mission. Their main goal is to "empower Nepal by increasing digital literacy and the use of open data" (Code for Nepal, n.d.).

In working together with Code for Nepal to increase digital literacy, our class engaged in "finding digital content, creating it, and communicating it" (Heitin, 2016) in various digital platforms including Facebook. Code for Nepal refers to the use of technology and other forms of digital communication to find, use, and interpret information and data. Open data refers to any information that can be shared and used freely and easily (Shueh, 2014). Additionally, the skills applied in this class were also transferable to other organizations and clubs that students are involved in on campus and could be expanded even beyond the university environment. By illustrating the work that we did in our Business Writing class, in this article I share the importance of international service-learning experiences and its challenges. I argue that adding international service-learning experience in writing class provides students with an opportunity to engage with the global community and aids student development.

BUSINESS WRITING AT PURDUE AND CODE FOR NEPAL PARTNERSHIP

Code for Nepal is a nonprofit organization focused on increasing digital literacy among women and the rural Nepali population. They have organized various

workshops at several schools in the area, so their main target audience is women who are between 15 and 30 years old. Code for Nepal is registered as a nonprofit in the United States, but the major focus of their work is in Nepal where they conduct events and trainings. The organization focuses on providing workshops and user-friendly application-based activities for women and young adults in Nepal. Increasing digital literacy enables people to obtain a competitive job. It also increases their chances of securing higher skilled work. Code for Nepal's main work started during the aftermath of the 2015 earthquake, when the organization worked to provide accurate and reliable information regarding resources available in proximity to a person. This significantly improved the connectivity between people in the affected areas and allowed them to obtain information on shelter, food, and water quickly (Code for Nepal, n.d.).

Our class, English 420: Business Writing, is a class designed for "workplace writing in networked environments for management contexts" (English Master Course Descriptions, 2015). It focuses on training students to conduct "project planning, document management . . . research [and] team writing" (English Master Course Descriptions, 2015). It also places emphasis on verbal and written communication skills. These are relevant for job applications, conducting research effectively, and identifying accurate information easily.

Meeting the major objectives of the course, our specific course was involved in conducting extensive research on various subjects within the realm of digital literacy and working in close partnership with Code for Nepal. It is mandatory for all majors in Krannert to take this class during their course at Purdue. When I took the class in spring 2019, we researched how print communication, data analysis, and digital marketing can make an impact on donor and volunteer engagement for Code for Nepal.

There were three central themes in this class: Multicultural Communication, Service-Learning, and Global Social Justice. We initially started this class by learning about writing white papers and conducting primary research. Our research was focused on learning about digital literacy and supporting Code for Nepal. This research aided Code for Nepal in spreading their vision across Purdue University's campus and beyond to increase donor and volunteer engagement. Our class collectively organized a Coffee and Donuts event where we also distributed buttons, stickers, and brochures that contained more information about the organization's mission. In the following section, I will expand on our partnership including the detailed process of research, writing, and producing deliverables.

Understanding the Context of Digital Literacy in Nepal and Code for Nepal

The process of working with our service-learning partner stretched over the majority of the semester. We initially conducted research by having Skype calls with Ravi Kumar, the co-founder of Code for Nepal, and understanding his requirements (Figure 1). He gave us insight as to how the organization was founded and how they

Figure 1. Ravi Kumar, co-founder of Code for Nepal, in a Skype call with the English 420 class, February 15, 2019.

have evolved. Ravi Kumar explained about how the need for open data was evident during the 2015 Nepal earthquake. He also shared the main problems the organization was facing in terms of lack of donors and volunteers. He spoke about how volunteers were always busy sorting and interpreting data. This mean that workshops were conducted less frequently than required. He also shared the possible ways that our class could help them in expanding their work. We illustrated our class goals of what we wanted to achieve through this project, including our own exposure to international projects to learn more about needs in other countries. Mutually, we agreed to work with Code for Nepal in order to increase their donor and volunteer engagement and to alleviate pressure on current volunteers. We also conducted our own research to understand the best practices when it comes to marketing through print and digital media. Additionally, we learned how to spread messages to college students more effectively to enhance donor and volunteer engagement.

Grant Writing to Meet Code for Nepal Goals

After learning about Code for Nepal, our class was divided into four different teams: print communication, digital media, data analysis, and donor/volunteer engagement. Each team shared their goals with Code for Nepal to help spread their value message across campus by organizing an event. As part of the course, we were also encouraged to write a grant. Our class worked in teams and wrote a grant proposal, which was submitted to the Purdue University Office of Engagement. In four distinct groups, we wrote about the goals of the project and how it was beneficial to our learning at Purdue. We described the purpose of the goals and the outcome we intended to achieve. We explained the breakdown of how the finances would be managed. This way we were able to secure a $1,500 grant from Purdue's Office of Engagement to conduct our project. This grant allowed us to purchase merchandise, create digital marketing material, and organize an event at Purdue University that focused on donor and volunteer interest on campus. After the event, the final process of completing the grant work was giving a summary of what we were able to achieve and its impact on Purdue University's campus. Our partners at Code for Nepal were pleased with the work. We were able to give final presentations to our partners with specific details about the overall goals that were accomplished, and the team was certainly excited to receive our help.

Research and Teamwork

Our research regarding effective print media and digital media marketing was conducted in the first section of the class. We spent time learning about best practices when it comes to marketing, with the intent to engage donors and volunteers. In terms of ensuring that there are people interested in donating, it is essential to target them differently. Möller and Parvinen (2015) mention that finding themes that pertain specifically to donating for scholarship programs or for data education classes will be more effective than just donating to the organization. This is why fundraising for a specific event can be more effective because people can clearly see the effect their donation is having on the community. This is all part of the marketing concept, customer relationship management (Möller & Parvinen, 2015).

Understanding the customer base will in turn be the most effective way of retaining them in the future, too. This was a study we referred to while planning our project.

Moreover, our work required exchanging ideas with the directors, who are based in the United States, as well as the marketing team, which was based in Nepal. This meant that we were working across different time zones and cultures. Additionally, the research regarding engagement with organizations talks about the importance of consumer and producer interaction. It helps to ensure that the donors and volunteers are knowledgeable about the product (González et al., 2006). Sufficient interaction between consumers and producers will also help keep the products more up-to-date and relevant in the market. This was applicable for Code for Nepal because they were able to interact with college-aged students in the United States to see how to adapt their scholarship programs in Nepal. It was beneficial for our class to learn more about Code for Nepal's work to design better products while keeping our target audience in mind.

For our Coffee and Donuts event, we had multiple audiences in mind: the Purdue students, the global audiences, and the local Nepali women whom Code for Nepal serves. Hence, our class decided to distribute buttons, stickers, and brochures that contained more information about the organization's mission to the Purdue students. Similarly, the other audience for Code for Nepal was a larger global network. We reached out to them by purchasing advertising rights on Facebook and Instagram and created posts to increase their digital presence. This allowed Code for Nepal to increase the donor engagement from countries all over the world. According to the Facebook and Instagram marketing feedback, we observed that the use of digital marketing increased visitors to their page by over 300,000 people. This meant that we were successful in promoting the organization through social media. Having

more knowledge about the organization would inspire people to get involved as volunteers. We were also able to give away a large portion of our 150 buttons and 150 stickers. Our event was extremely successful as half of the merchandise was distributed to students who attended the event. Furthermore, to meet the needs of our audiences in Nepal, we produced T-shirts and brochures about fellowships that Code for Nepal provided. All these materials were sent to the Code for Nepal directors in Virginia, who then took the merchandise to Nepal where it was used for other large-scale digital literacy workshops.

Producing Deliverables

Among the four teams in class, my team was focused on print communication. Hence, we conducted extensive research about print media communication methods and ways to attract volunteers. This was used to develop appropriate print materials to meet the needs of Code

for Nepal. Additionally, throughout the entire project, we consulted with Code for Nepal to ensure that the merchandise was aligned with their mission. Based on this, we created five different items. The main goal of the print communication group was to distribute merchandise and information packets about the organization. The goal was to inspire more volunteer as well as donor interest in Code for Nepal. These products were distributed at the Coffee and Donuts event as well as with potential donors and volunteers in Nepal and abroad. With the grant that we had, we specifically designed and purchased the following things.

1. Buttons
Since buttons are very popular merchandise and easily recognizable on college campuses, we decided to opt for 2.25-in. buttons. We chose a white background with the simple Code for Nepal logo so that it stands out clearly. This allowed the organization to distribute the buttons at their workshops and with volunteers, as well as at any fundraising events. Our aim was to create something memorable that people could use to remember Code for Nepal (Figure 2).
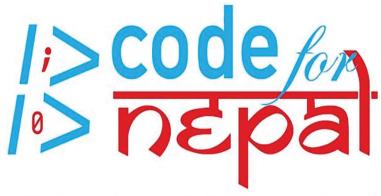
2. Stickers
Similarly, we also decided to design stickers, which can easily be used by people on their laptops and other technology product cases. These colorful stickers with the Code for Nepal logo were 1.95 in. x 3 in. They were big enough to attract people's attention. We also chose to add a slogan below the logo to inspire people to take action when picking up a sticker.

3. T-Shirts
The T-shirts were designed for the Code for Nepal team as well as students in the class (Figure 3). College

Figure 2. Buttons and stickers that were distributed at the Coffee and Donuts event as well as given to Code for Nepal.

Figure 3. Front and back designs for the T-shirts.

students like to wear T-shirts and it is a popular way to advertise various organizations. The main objective while designing this product was to keep it casual enough for students to wear on a regular basis. Additionally, Code for Nepal volunteers could wear the shirts to show a sense of unity when conducting their workshops and fundraisers.

4. Brochures

The brochures were designed with the intent to educate students at Purdue to learn more about the organization (Figure 4). The color schemes were according to the color pattern selected by the organization. The brochure depicted real pictures from events Code for Nepal had participated in and were taken from their Facebook page. Topics in the brochure consisted of Code for Nepal's mission statement, the steps one takes to volunteer, and the possible benefits students can get while volunteering their time. Contact information, social media usernames, as well as a QR code linked to Code for Nepal's website where students can learn more about the volunteer process as well as donate to the organization were also included.

5. Volunteer and Donor Video

The volunteer and donor videos were designed in order for Code for Nepal to show the importance of volunteers for the success of their work. It was essential for us to showcase the importance of our actions in creating such a large difference. We borrowed pictures from the Code for Nepal Facebook page to help show their efforts in the community they strive to help (Figure 5). This video was sent to Code for Nepal for use in advertising.

Some of the most effective marketing strategies involve product differentiation and market segmentation (Shaw,

Figure 5. Example of post on Facebook and Instagram.

2012). Such strategies allow firms to understand how to enter a market successfully. Product differentiation involves being able to create a variation of the product that is in the market whereas segmentation is categorizing the different groups of people with different levels of demand. This was applicable to Code for Nepal's project because we designed buttons and stickers that came under the product differentiation category. Having print media ads and social media ads fulfilled the segmentation category as we were able to appeal to local university students, as well as Nepalese who were interested in the organization's mission.

CHALLENGES OF SERVICE LEARNING

There were several hurdles we faced while completing this project. The biggest obstacle was communicating with people in Nepal due to the different time zones. Our

Figure 4. Brochure that was distributed at the Coffee and Donuts event.

Figure 6. Table set up for the Coffee and Donuts event.

class time did not overlap with business hours in Nepal; therefore, we would often wait for 24–48 hours to obtain a response. For larger items such as planning the Coffee and Donuts event (Figure 6) or deciding what merchandise to order, we had to set meeting times outside of their business hours. This was done to avoid conflict with our fixed class time. It was also challenging to agree on events that would be successful as Code for Nepal is much smaller than Purdue University. Our main focus was to spread the message about Code for Nepal and inspire students to contribute financially, as that goes a long way for the organization. In terms of Code for Nepal, volunteers and employees had to take time away from their regular work of data sorting to speak with us at odd hours during the day. Due to our time constraints, we were constantly asking questions and required almost immediate answers. Navigating this space required adjustment on both sides of the partnership, which was relevant to both multicultural communication and service-learning.

Group leaders were in charge of ensuring that typical marketing techniques that were effective on college campuses could be explained effectively to the Nepali Code for Nepal marketing team. Since the team was based in Nepal, they didn't have contextual information about college students in the United States. This is where our knowledge and experiences from clubs and classes were applicable. There were a few points where the organization differed from student views as the team was trying to spread more information about their goals. Due to differences in understanding the target audience, we took time to come to a consensus about effective marketing strategies. One thing we differed and worked together to solve was about information management on the merchandise. While Code for Nepal wanted to include more information on the buttons, we wanted to keep it simple. We suggested that students are attracted to simple, small merchandise that they can stick on their laptops or bags. Additionally, their previous marketing techniques were usually targeting those who already knew about the organization. However, our class was attempting to intrigue students at Purdue University about the existence of the organization. Therefore, we wanted to make the ads more eye-catching rather than information heavy to target students at Purdue. In past experience from recruitment for other clubs, it is evident that college students react to seeing things repetitively in contrast to seeing too much information just a few times. Therefore, we wanted to make our merchandise uniform so people could associate various products with Code for Nepal.

Through constant communication Code for Nepal was able to share the reasoning behind their goals. By spending more time communicating through Skype and e-mail exchanges, we were able to incorporate more text on the stickers and brochures but kept the T-shirts simple. We worked together to brainstorm ways to provide information in an easy and accessible manner in our ads. We worked together in coming to a collaborative decision: that less information would intrigue our audience to learn more about the organization. We also created multiple versions of the ads, which targeted various audiences (aged 18–40), leading to eye-catching and detailed information-providing merchandise. This collaborative work with Code for Nepal met our goals of reaching multiple audiences while keeping marketing simple but repetitive. While this was challenging, it was also a great learning experience for us in working to meet the needs of the organization by implementing what we learned in class.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

Our main goal in the partnership with Code for Nepal was to increase their donor and volunteer engagement by producing various marketing materials. One of the ways to achieve this goal also included increasing Code for Nepal's social media presence. Through the creation of new ads on Facebook and Instagram, we were able to increase viewership to 300,000 people. We also increased likes by 500 people. Since this is a small volunteer-based organization, Code for Nepal does not have the same level of resources that we have as Purdue University students. Through our partnership and the service-learning grant, we were able to achieve our major goal of raising awareness and promoting Code for Nepal on Purdue University's campus and beyond. Overall it was rewarding because Code for Nepal was able to benefit from the merchandise that we created. Hearing about their outreach and stories, we were able to see that they were a great partner for this project.

One of the underlying goals of this class was global social justice. Global social justice is defined by the Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs as reducing inequalities caused by an increase in the ability to interact with people all over the globe (Global Social Justice, 2020). This was mainly attracting global audiences and understanding the impact of your actions for those around the world. By Skyping with Ravi Kumar and communicating with his team via e-mail, it was extremely satisfying to see how excited the team was to learn about the products that we were making. The Code for Nepal team was very grateful for our help. I could

see how volunteers may be more inclined to join because there are added incentives to volunteering with the organization. Without physically being in Nepal, we were able to impact the organization's workshops and goals. This was probably the best learning experience we could obtain from a semester-long class.

According to Ravi Kumar, the founder of Code for Nepal, "At Code for Nepal, we really appreciated partnering with Professor Sweta Baniya and her students. As a small non-profit organization which is mostly supported by volunteers, we benefited by using T-shirts, buttons and stickers, and brochures. Our fellows who graduated from our programs benefited from these products. As part of this collaboration, we appreciated our ability to provide meaningful experience to college students while enhancing our own institutional goals." This was evident in an e-mail following the event (R. Kumar, personal communication, March 7, 2020). Code for Nepal was able to distribute the merchandise among the volunteers in Nepal. The main benefit of social media advertising was that it strengthened Code for Nepal's presence on social media by at least 1,000 likes.

STUDENT IMPACT

The skills I have learned from this class can certainly be implemented outside of the classroom. I have had the opportunity of using similar skills to organize a conference on Purdue University's campus. The conference is affiliated with a consulting organization within the Krannert School of Management. For this conference, we had to raise money, order a variety of merchandise to distribute, and raise awareness about the organization. Persuasive writing skills and timely communication were two of the most important skills to ensure the success of the event.

When starting this project, I did not know much about grant writing. Since the first portion of the semester was spent learning about persuasive writing, I was able to improve these skills. The project allowed us to further develop and exhibit leadership over small portions of the project and focused on the multicultural communication goal of the class. My main contribution was being the point of contact for Code for Nepal, as well as overseeing the designing and printing of our merchandise. I was able to use basic technology very effectively and quickly to design the merchandise, which we printed. I was also responsible for overseeing the financial transactions and ensuring that my group adhered to the required timeline. We learned along the way, such as that T-shirts could have been distributed at the event if we had placed the

order earlier; however, an escalation in prices resulted in delays in ordering. I was also a liaison between my group and the English Department's transaction team. Thus, I was required to get approval from the team for the way we were spending our budget and what documentation needed to be provided for expenditures. Overcoming these challenges allowed me to become more flexible in a group setting as well as ensure that we had a backup plan to be able to meet our final deliverables. These skills are definitely important to develop as they can be utilized in other class projects as well as outside the university. As an extension of this project, I was also able to present a poster talking more about the work that we did for Code for Nepal at the Purdue Office of Engagement Summit. It was a display of various projects funded by the Office of Engagement showcasing the types of projects people have been able to accomplish under Purdue's grants.

Most students in the class had never completed a service-learning project before this partnership. Therefore, we spent some time researching effective marketing techniques in the form of writing white papers. We learned about best practices and implemented them for our project. If I were to complete a service-learning project in the future, I would spend more time interacting with the organization to ensure that I fully understand their objectives before starting the project. As this was a semester project for a class, there were limited opportunities for interaction between our whole class and Code for Nepal. While our event was successful and we were able to achieve our goal of increasing awareness about Code for Nepal on Purdue's campus, we could have focused on other aspects apart from marketing and communication. If this partnership were to continue, it would be useful to consider helping Code for Nepal increase the efficiency of data collection and sorting.

CONCLUSION: IMPORTANCE OF INTERNATIONAL SERVICE-LEARNING

Service-learning is an integral part of education as it allows students to work on projects in their passion. Students can derive satisfaction from the difference that these projects make on areas they touch. Students use the skills learned in class to implement their knowledge in areas such as research, analysis, marketing, and more. This was not entirely new for me as I have done service projects before, but the learning aspect was not as clearly defined as it was for this project. We learned about the ways to spread positive messages and how advertising plays a role in spreading messages effectively. This was seen in crafting the message to advertise Code for Nepal

at Purdue University while keeping their mission intact. The design aspect of this project allowed me to see how people around the world would interpret the same product differently. Service-learning can be very beneficial for business students, especially as it prepares them to work with tight deadlines, understand clients' requirements, and meet clients' expectations. Overall, it was a great learning opportunity and a very rewarding experience that I enjoyed.

While this was a semester project and our class will no longer work with the organization, Code for Nepal is willing to work with Purdue students in the future. Future students in this course can continue to partner with Code for Nepal to help design and improve the effectiveness of their workshops. Based on the work done by our class, they can build upon the connection we have made. Since we aided with marketing techniques, they can further help in creating interactive workshops that can be conducted virtually or help with data collection and interpretation. This will not only build upon the existing marketing and promotion work we have done, but it will also help alleviate the workload of Code for Nepal's volunteers. From having worked on this project, I would recommend global service-learning projects in all university courses to encourage students to apply their communication skills to aid organizations looking for assistance. Future students can read about our projects through the English Department at Purdue and continue to expand this partnership.

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