12-12-2022

Management Information Systems - Experiential Learning for Undergraduates

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Live Client Project Management and User Experience

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Professors Martin and Lavin re-designed their product management and user experience undergrad courses to include a semester-long, live client facing project. The students apply concepts taught in class to build a website and digital assets for a client from the industry. Recent clients have included a Nonprofit Sexual Violence Prevention Association (SVPA) and a national mental wellness nonprofit organization (The Reflect Organization). Over 15 weeks, students not only learn, but also apply Agile Project management techniques and User Experience concepts to their client work, delivering the assets in a live final presentation to the client.

"Educational research has shown that it is not possible to fully understand how people learn or work if dimensions of context are left out." (Hung and Wong, 2000) Specifically, the Project Management course is taught in a studio format, traditional lecture is limited, and class time is spent engaging in activity-based learning and discussion. Throughout the entire class experience, the students are engaged with the client – simulating their experience in future careers.

Midway through the semester, a client review is scheduled during which each team presents their progress and provides a live demonstration of their assets (website and other products). This allows the students to adjust their work as needed per the client(s) requirements, in a real-life design environment. The semester culminates with live presentations to the clients, and the client selects the winning asset. It is worth noting that these assets are delivered to the client for immediate use.

While many courses offer the possibility of building prototypes or working on case studies or simulations, this class provides students with real time client interaction, managing a live project with all the challenges that accompany it. The ability to work with an actual client is the secret sauce to this class. Students gain real-world experience with an outside stakeholder - an opportunity that can't be matched through a project simulation. A direct quote from a recent student - "What really sets MIS3535 apart from the traditional courses we take is that we learned the textbook concepts and then applied them right away to a live client. I am certain that conflicts and differences will arise when I am working with a live client, but I feel much more prepared for the experience after completing the SVPA project. In addition, we worked on a very important and timely project."

Hung, David W.L., and Wong, Angela F.L. "Activity Theory as a Framework for Project Work in Learning Environments." *Educational Technology*, (40:2), 2000, pp.33-37

Presentation at TREO Talks in conjunction with the 43rd International Conference on Information Systems, ICIS 2022
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