

Community-based Service Learning: Best Practices in Software Projects with Community Partners

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Community-engaged learning is an emerging term for a wide spectrum of learning activities that bring together students and community partners in a mutually beneficial way. Service learning is a subcategory of community-engaged learning which traditionally involves the students using their skills or expertise on a project that will directly benefit the community partner. In computer science, service learning projects often include a deliverable, such as designing and building an application. Community-based service learning is service learning with a community partner, usually a non-profit, whose mission is to improve the social, environmental, or economic situation for community members.

Undertaking service learning in general and community-based service learning in particular presents significant challenges. Some of these include the identification of an appropriate non-profit community partner and project, project skill alignment, managing partner expectations (failure is an option), and the reconciliation of the variable length of meaningful service-learning projects with the fixed length of a single term. However, given how these unique learning opportunities are known to be highly beneficial to students, educators continue to pursue them in spite of their inherent difficulties.

This BoF seeks to gather together seasoned hands, novices, plus those interested in trying out community-based service learning to

- Build a community of practice? among those who undertake community-based service learning,
- share best practices,
- present innovations, and
- illuminate pitfalls and other practices to be avoided.

Keywords: Service Learning, Community-engaged Learning,

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