



Central Piedmont Community College's Home Grown Web Based Data Management System

Mark E. Helms

Associate Dean of Student Life and Service-Learning
Central Piedmont Community College

Dena K. Shonts

Service-Learning Center Coordinator
Central Piedmont Community College

Presentation Description:

This session is designed to discuss the need for a technology based solution to data management. We will begin discussing how it became quite clear to us in the first year of offering service-learning (S-L) that the paper trail can be quite cumbersome, inaccurate and expensive to instructors, students and S-L staff. It was then when we first started dreaming of creating a technology based system where students could fill out their paperwork on-line, instructors could have real time access to their S-L students and the S-L staff could easily pull reports on the criteria they desired.

Next we will go over our struggles to get a product that would fit our diverse needs. First we needed to determine if we should buy a product and customize it to our needs or start from scratch to develop a product that was exactly what we wanted and required. We put feelers out into the academic community to see if a product like this existed that we could purchase. We heard back that at that time no such product was out but that many colleges did have a need for something similar. So we decided to try and build our desired product from within our institution. The first step we took was to discuss our ideas with instructors and staff who work closely with technology. It was then that we discovered how different the philosophy and approach to addressing our need was between IT (Information Technology – curriculum and instruction) and ITS (Information Technology Services). We began developing ideas for the product by working with ITS. After months of waiting, we realized these folks are very busy and have a limited programming staff. We needed to try other options. It was then that we met with a S-L instructor who teaches internet technologies. He suggested that we turn our need into a S-L project for one of his best and brightest students.

Finally, we will address turning our need into a S-L project (where we became the clients) and the of the ups and down associated with it. In the beginning, as with every

new relationship, it was wonderful! The student was very enthusiastic, and reassuring that he could provide results. As the semester wore on, we saw progress and were very impressed. As the semester came to an end and the project was not completed, we began to contemplate what our options were at this point. The student had informed us that he had been accepted to NYU and was leaving after finals. We spoke with the student about completing the project from New York and that we would hire him to do so. Very excitedly he agreed. The progress kept coming and we were thrilled. Then very abruptly the communication from the student all but stopped. We later heard from the instructor who had recommended the student that he was very overwhelmed with classes and just did not have the time to devote to finishing the project in the timeframe we needed.

As of now (for the upcoming fall semester) we are planning on keeping all the documents that the students will need on our website along with a very thorough explanation of the procedures. We have also discovered that Boise State University has a technology based product out that manages their S-L students, faculty, agencies and reflection. Now that a product exists that can serve our needs, we are considering purchasing it. We plan to review and discuss Boise's website during the presentation.

At the end of our story we will divide participants into groups to discuss their own database needs, features and reports that would be helpful, and staff/organizational challenges to develop the technology in-house at their own College. After a brief 10 minute discussion between groups we will open up the floor for discussions/questions.