

EFFECTIVE PRACTICE: USING TECHNOLOGY TO CONNECT STUDENTS TO VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

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Issue Being Addressed:

A tool was needed to easily distribute information to many college students about volunteer opportunities at local non-profit agencies.

Actions to Consider:

What are the best and most effective ways of disseminating information to students? The Community Service Learning Center (CSLC) at Grand Valley State University (GVSU) receives many requests for volunteers from local nonprofit organizations. It can be difficult to disseminate these opportunities to students without overwhelming them. The CSLC operates within the Office of Student Life at GVSU. The opportunities the CSLC passes on to students are co-curricular. Sometimes students visit the CSLC looking to volunteer to meet a class requirement, but most students are looking for co-curricular volunteer opportunities. Many of today's college students, often referred to as "millennial students," are technology savvy and are accustomed to having information at their fingertips. By using a database driven website to disseminate volunteer opportunities, the CSLC is able to meet student needs in a manner they prefer to receive information.

Overview:

The CSLC at GVSU has created a tool called Volunteer Net. Volunteer Net is a custom database designed specifically for the CSLC. The database is accessed through a website that has many functions. One of the benefits of Volunteer Net is that it streamlines the amount of time and efforts spent gathering volunteer opportunities and passing them on to interested students.

There are three main groups of Volunteer Net users: community agencies, college students, and CSLC staff. The community agencies use the website to advertise volunteer opportunities. College students can search through these opportunities and agencies for those that interest them as a place to volunteer. When students volunteer, they can track their hours through the website. CSLC staff members maintain the site, approve new opportunities, and are able to run reports detailing the total hours volunteered by an individual, specific agency information, weekly e-mail recipients and more.

These user groups use Volunteer Net for three main functions: entering and searching opportunities, tracking volunteer hours, and running reports. The database can be searched either by opportunity or agency. If students know the name of an agency that interests them, they can enter the name of the agency in the appropriate field and find out about current volunteer opportunities at that organization.

The reporting function of Volunteer Net allows staff members to track many things. Staff members can report on the total number of agencies listed in Volunteer Net along with their contact information. It is also possible to create reports about total hours volunteered by individuals, student organizations, or community agencies. This function allows staff to easily track an increase in student volunteers.

Key Features:

- Letters are sent to local non-profit agencies to inform them about Volunteer Net and to ask them to post opportunities.
- Agencies have the ability to post opportunities or can return a form to have a staff member in the CSLC do so manually.
- A staff member from the CSLC must approve opportunities before they are posted online.
- Students may search by agency or opportunity in Volunteer Net.
- Students may post completed volunteer hours to keep track of them for various other programs on campus.
- Students may list what classes in which they are required to volunteer.
- Staff members may run reports that include information such as: active volunteers, opportunity matching, total hours volunteered by an individual, student organization or agency.
- Staff members may send e-mails to users who have indicated they wish to receive a weekly e-mail with information about volunteer opportunities.