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Ensuring sustainability in a community-based project module

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Community engagement is a form of experiential learning aimed at accomplishing tasks that meet genuine human needs in various local communities. It focuses on the execution of tasks that serve as educational and learning tools for students to acquire a number of important life skills. It is very challenging to sustain a community-based project module in an educational environment where accountability and evidence-based practice are important. The success of such a module rests to a large extent on the strength of the relationship between the faculty and the community. The successful running of the module also depends on the triad of student, lecturer and community partner. The commitment of all the parties involved in the outreach projects and in community development, in general, is of crucial importance for the success of community-based projects.

Volhoubaarheid van 'n gemeenskapsgebaseerde projek-module

Gemeenskapsbetrokkenheid is 'n vorm van ervaringsleer wat gerig is op take wat die werklike behoeftes van verskeie plaaslike gemeenskappe aanspreek. Dit fokus op die uitvoering van take waardeur studente belangrike lewensvaardighede verwerf met behulp van onderrig- en leermiddels. Dit is 'n groot uitdaging om so 'n gemeenskapsgebaseerde projek-module te onderhou in 'n onderwysomgewing waar aanspreeklikheid en bewysgebaseerde praktyke belangrik is. Die sukses van so 'n module rus grootliks op die verhouding van die gemeenskap en die betrokke fakulteite, asook die driediedige verhouding tussen die student, die dosent en die gemeenskapsvenoot. Al die betrokke partye moet ten volle toegewyd wees aan die uitreikprojekte en aan gemeenskapsbetrokkenheid oor die algemeen. Dit is van uiterste belang vir die sukses van die gemeenskapsgebaseerde projekte.

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In 2005, the Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology (EBIT) at the University of Pretoria (UP) implemented a new compulsory undergraduate module, namely Community-based Project. On registering for this module, students have an opportunity to offer services to various communities. The main aim of the module is to develop students' awareness of personal, social and cultural values, as well as multi-disciplinary and life skills, such as communication, interpersonal and leadership skills, while they provide a service to the community.

Students may attempt the eight-credit module (80 hours) in any one of their undergraduate years of study. They need to work in the community for at least 40 hours to address a specific need identified in the community and to transfer knowledge or a skill in the process. In 2010, 1 495 students registered for this module and 432 projects were carried out. These projects included basic computer training, mathematics and science revision for secondary school learners, the development of websites for non-profit organisations, and specific technology-based projects identified by the community, for example, designing and building jungle gyms.

Only one lecturer is responsible for coordinating and presenting this module. Various structures have been established to ensure the projects' sustainability and to manage the workload of run-ning the module. This article discusses the processes involved in sustaining projects and campus-community partnerships in a community-based project module.

1. Background

Community-based learning is a relatively new field in South Africa. It has only been included extensively in academic programmes at universities for approximately 15 years. It is a form of experiential learning aimed at accomplishing tasks that meet genuine human needs in various local communities. It focuses on the execution of tasks that serve as educational and learning tools for students to acquire a number of important life skills.

It should not be confused with other types of well-known experiential learning activities, such as typical professional experiential training projects and periods, or charity-oriented community service projects, where the only objective is the provision of a service and the only beneficiary is the service recipient (Mooney 2001: 181).

Community-based learning involves students in making a positive contribution to individuals in their communities (Dukhan 2008: 21) and developing a combination of knowledge, skills, values and motivation in order to make a difference and to promote the quality of life in a community (O'Connor 2006: 52).

As part of the attempt to mitigate the legacy of apartheid in South Africa, the new democratic government requires tertiary institutions to become more involved in the social, economic and cultural fabric of the community. With its programme of transformation from a racially divided past to a democratic dispensation, South Africa relies on the wisdom generated and transferred by universities to cause change in society. One of the goals of higher education in South Africa is to promote and develop social responsibility and awareness among students (CHE 1997: 2).

The Education White Paper 3 indicates that higher education institutions should demonstrate social responsibility by making their expertise and infrastructure available to the communities. Therefore, such institutions should produce graduates who are not only knowledgeable, but also have a sense of responsibility towards society at large (CHE 2009: 81). Higher education institutions need to demonstrate their sense of social responsibility and commitment to the common good by making available expertise and infrastructure for community service programmes. The UP established a Department of Community Engagement in 2008, thereby integrating service initiatives into the academic enterprise (UP 2008: 11).

In 2005 EBIT implemented a compulsory module, namely Community-based Project Module (JCP) for all undergraduate

students. This initiative was a new endeavour for the faculty and the first of its kind for its students in South Africa. Community-based learning was not included in the existing modules at the time, and therefore the establishment of a new, separate module was necessary.

One of the challenges was to design and develop such a module taking into account the demanding time schedules of EBIT students. The solution was to offer the module on an open-ended and project-oriented basis. Students are required to submit ideas and topics in the form of a proposal, for evaluation and approval. They have to attend compulsory orientation sessions before they start with their envisaged projects.

Students have the option of attempting the eight-credit module (80 hours) in any one of their undergraduate years of study, but preferably not during their final year. Depending on the nature of a specific project, it can be attempted in the course of a semester, during vacation time, or both.

Projects may be executed by individual students or in teams. The condition for team projects is that a distinct task be allocated to each team member. Multi-disciplinary project teams consisting of team members from across the various schools and departments in the Faculty are encouraged. The main reason for this is that many of the students enrolled for this module are in their second year of study and are not yet qualified to conduct projects related to their specific field of study, such as electronic or mining engineering.

Students must choose projects in an area about which they feel passionate, thereby supporting the approach to learning of communities of practice on which the module is based. Students must also determine the community's needs before they choose a project. Learning opportunities are created in both work practices and a social context. The projects help students solve problems in real-life learning situations.

Popular projects among students and the communities are computer training for community members, designing and

uploading websites for non-profit organisations, assisting secondary school learners with Mathematics and Science, renovating rooms in orphanages, and designing and building jungle gyms.

The Community-based Project Module was formally accredited by the Engineering Council for South Africa in 2006. It was also one of the finalists for the MacJannet Prize in 2009. One of the criteria for nomination is sustainability. The nominee must indicate how the programme will find the resources to continue running in the future and what policies or mechanisms support the ongoing success of the programme. The nominee must also indicate whether communities are engaged in sustaining the programme in the long term.

2. Theory underlying this module

The UP Teaching and Learning Strategy aims to align teaching and research through enquiry-led curricula. The Community-based Project Module's educational approach is aligned with this strategy, as it integrates project-based and enquiry-based learning (EBL). The students' learning experience is aligned with Kolb's (1994) theory of experiential learning.

In order to understand the integration of project- and enquiry-based learning, it is important to define both educational approaches. This will provide insight into the reasons for in-tegrating both approaches, as project-based learning has many similarities with enquiry-based learning.

Thomas (2007: 1) defines project-based learning as a teaching model that organises learning around projects. These projects are complex in nature, as they require students to implement problem-solving activities. These activities allow students to work autonomously over extended periods of time and produce realistic products or presentations. Project-based learning is closely linked to problem-solving.

Mills & Treagust (2003: 9) argue that problem-based learning would appear to be a logical extension of design education in engineering, and it is therefore implemented in engineering

education. They claim that problem-based learning may only be a partial answer for resolving the critical issues of engineering education. In order to implement an approach that is aligned with the professional behaviour of an engineer, project-based learning must be integrated into the curricula of engineering students. Project-based learning is aligned with what is used in engineering practice and professional reality. In a project-based course the students work in small groups, while the lecturer functions as advisor. The projects can be undertaken throughout the duration of the course or within a few weeks.

According to Kahn & Rourke (2005: 4), enquiry-based learning covers various approaches to learning such as problem-based learning (PBL) and fieldwork, as well as small case study investigations. Barrett *et al* (2005: iii) state that problem- and enquiry-based learning is complex in nature. They describe both not as mere teaching techniques, but rather as total educational strategies.

Kahn & Rourke (2005: 2) state that EBL is ideally suited to collaborative student teamwork in which students are expected to construct their own knowledge and understanding of a learning opportunity. They emphasise the importance of the starting point of the enquiry as it needs to be sufficiently open to provide the basis for the enquiry, such as an interesting case study or a “real-life” project (Kahn & Rourke 2005: 6). The characteristics of EBL are closely linked to the outcomes of the JCP module. One of the characteristics of enquiry-based learning is that students engage with an open-ended real-life project, allowing them to find one unique or a variety of solutions to the problems. In order to find the solutions, the students draw on existing knowledge, but the task at hand may also stimulate and encourage them to explore new evidence or solutions. Students therefore take responsibility for their learning and present evidence of the learning in appropriate ways.

Assessment must drive the learning experience. Kahn & Rourke (2005: 9) view assessment as a further means to support learning. A range of assessment methods are acceptable in the

implementation of EBL, as it needs to match the complex open-ended nature of an enquiry.

Both project- and enquiry-based learning encourage students to ask questions in order to develop a unique or contextual solution to real-life problems by exploring possible solutions. In order to arrive at the solution, the students need to work collaboratively to construct new knowledge. This new knowledge may, in turn, lead to more questions and further investigation. Students may apply this new knowledge in their own lives or future careers. The learning process can be viewed as an ever-expanding cyclic process.

Kolb's theory of experiential learning underlies the student's learning experience in the community-based project. This theory provides a holistic model of the learning process and a multilinear model of adult development, both of which are consistent with regard to how people learn, grow and develop. Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Kolb 1984: 38). Students derive meaning from that experience by transforming it into new knowledge.

According to the four-stage learning cycle, immediate or concrete experiences are the basis for observations and reflections. These reflections are assimilated and distilled into abstract concepts from which new implications for action can be drawn. These implications can be actively tested, and serve as guides in creating new experiences. In this cycle, experience leads to observation and reflection, which then leads to the development of concepts, to experimentation and thus to the acquisition of further experience (Train 2001: 69). The cycle ensures that the learning outcomes is a continuous, upward spiralling of intertwined processes (Kolb 2009: 308).

3. Objectives, outcomes and assessment

One of the important critical cross-field outcomes stipulated by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) is that

students should be encouraged to think for themselves and be able to work in teams. The acquisition of general intellectual, communication, and time management skills, as well as attitudes and values should attract more attention in higher education (Coetzee 2002: 11). The Community-based Project Module endeavours to accommodate these issues, as reflected in its objectives and learning outcomes.

The main objectives of the module are to conduct a community service-related project, aimed at achieving a beneficial impact on a chosen section of society, preferably but not exclusively by engagement with a section of society that is different from the student's own social background; to develop an awareness of personal, social and cultural values, an attitude of being of service and a deep understanding of social issues, and to develop important multidisciplinary and life skills, such as communication, interpersonal and leadership skills.

The main learning outcomes of the module are as follows, depending on the nature of the project chosen by the student. In order to demonstrate that learning outcomes relevant to the project have been achieved, students must exhibit the following: a deep and broad understanding of the social issues relevant to the project; the ability to communicate effectively with the community at large; the ability to communicate effectively through writing and presentations; the ability to perform leadership functions; the ability to work effectively in a multidisciplinary environment and to perform critical functions (Pienaar 2004: 3), and the ability to do basic project management, including logistics, budgeting and the completion of a project to the satisfaction of the community.

The outcomes are endorsed by the concept that reflection is an essential aspect of the module. Eyle & Giles (1999: 171, 181) claim that reflection is the connection between the student experiences in the community and academic learning. Reflection is based on the theories of John Dewey and David Kolb which emphasise the importance of action and reflection in learning. The students will thereby show personal growth, contribute to

humane conditions and engage as citizens in association with one another.

When a student's work is assessed, the mark allocation is based on what the student has learned and on the extent to which the above learning outcomes have been achieved. Thus, a student's grade is awarded specifically for the quality of learning exhibited, and not for the quality or quantity of service provided.

Assessment in the module consists of the following components: attendance of compulsory sessions and assignments on these sessions; evaluation and approval of the project proposal; self-assessment, peer assessment and assessment by a supervisor from the community and the community-based lecturer, during the execution of the project; three reflections written during the project; a report in the form of a blog, and a presentation to the project coordinator, peers and the community with which the student was involved (Jordaan 2010: 19).

4. Number of students enrolled for the module

The number of students enrolled for the module has increased steadily since 2005 (*cf* Table 1). Since the module is a compulsory undergraduate module only for the Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology, this may be attributed to an increase of first-year students in the Faculty (*cf* Table 2).

The enrolment for the second-year Community-based Project Module correlates with the increasing first-year enrolment at UP. In 2005, the module was still voluntary, but with accumulation of the eight credits. By 2008, all the departments of the Faculty included the module in their curriculum. During 2008, students also had the option to choose between the Community-based Module and another module.

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Table 1: Number of students enrolled for the module

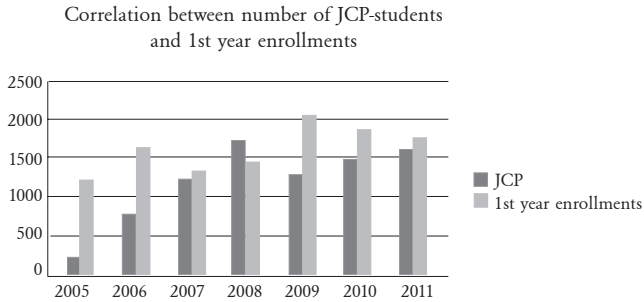
	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
JCP 201* (School for the Built Environment)	103	156	250	226	248	262	264
JCP 202* (School of Information Technology)	14	165	218	258	231	316	367
JCP 203* (School of Engineering)	121	417	742	1 213	816**	919	960
Total JCP students	238	738	1 213	1 697**	1 295	1 495	1 591

*Code of the module

**Students initially had the option of choosing between two modules. From 2009, this choice has not been available, hence the lower enrolment figures.

Table 2: First-year intake for the Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
School for the Built Environment	205	268	221	225	283	281	258
School of Information Technology	231	281	244	230	588	481	429
School of Engineering	800	867	871	989	1 147	1 107	1 074
Total	1 236	1 616	1 336	1 444	2 018	1 869	1 762



5. Projects conducted

Community partners vary from schools to non-profit organisations. Students choose their own team members and the projects in which they would like to get involved. They may execute the project any time from February until the end of September.

Certain restrictions and requirements govern the type of project selected. The restrictions are that students may not conduct a project that is linked to a political party; entails the preaching of a religious gospel; results in financial reimbursement for themselves, or is part of the annual fundraising (“rag”) drive. The requirements for projects are that they must address the needs of a specific community, and practise an appropriately high level of cognitive skills, which means that projects that require routine tasks are not acceptable.

Table 3: Number of projects undertaken and community partners

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Number of projects	47	244	345	475	445	432	523
Number of community partners	31	186	267	381	288	265	398

As can be expected, the number of projects increased as the number of students increased. The average size of the groups is two to four students.

6. Sustainability of the module

It is very challenging to sustain a community-based project module in an educational environment where accountability and evidence-based practice are important. Sustainability can be defined as the ability to maintain or increase programme efforts by building constituencies, thereby creating strong and enduring partnerships. This includes the generation and leveraging of resources and the identification and securing of funding sources (Learn and service [54]: 1).

The Community-based Project Module is a compulsory module, which means that over 1 000 students enrol annually. It is therefore imperative that a sustainable module be created to ensure the continuation of the module as accredited by the Engineering Council of South Africa. To comply with the set criteria, sustainability must be created in terms of the students, the relations with the community partners and the funding of the community projects.

The considerable number of students enrolled for the module, the large variety and number of projects, as well as the different community partners, make the sustainability of the Community-based Project Module extremely challenging.

6.1 Sustainability of community engagement on the part of students

All students in the Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology at UP are compelled to complete the community engagement module in order to graduate. For the majority of South African students, this is their first experience with community engagement and it is very important that it should be a positive experience. If, for any reason, the experience generates negative feelings, it is

improbable that those students will continue with community engagement later in life.

Students are orientated with regard to the objectives and outcomes of the module during a contact session at the beginning of the year. Because the structure of the module differs completely from the structure of their other modules, some students find it difficult to understand the expectations of the module.

A contact session is organised at the beginning of the academic year, where aspects such as professional ethics and confidentiality are discussed (CHE 2006: 105). Students from previous years showcase their projects at the session and a guest speaker discusses safety when doing fieldwork.

Critical reflection also plays an essential role in giving students the knowledge and skills they need for the workplace and for the possible continuation of their involvement in the community after graduation (Koth 2005: 2). Students must reflect on the planning and delivery processes of the project, their networking with the community, their emotional involvement in the community through their project and the skills they acquired during the project. Where students reflect sincerely, it leads to a stronger and deeper understanding of their social responsibility (Jacoby 1996: 286). For this purpose, the students carry out various reflection activities by using the UP's learning management system (Blackboard™). They also maintain a blog report and prepare a presentation.

When students are given an opportunity to comment on the different phases of the community project, it has a marked effect on their academic and civic engagement, since it allows them to engage in problem-solving, decision-making, planning, goal-setting and helping others (Billig 2007: 21). During and at the end of the academic year, students are invited to express their opinions on various aspects of the module by means of the learning management system. Their opinions are taken into account in the development, adaptation and restructuring of the module.

Students who work hard and are enthusiastic about their project usually develop a sense of social responsibility towards the community concerned. They want to ensure that their project will continue and that the partnership with the community will be sustainable. If at least some of the students stay involved in the project and the outcomes of the module are already established, it is easier to continue the partnership (CHE 2008: 43). Therefore, a mentorship programme was established where former Community-based Project Module students could act as mentors for students during the following year. Community-based Project Module mentors not only ensure the continuation of their project, but also assist new Community-based Project Module students in executing their projects, and assessing them after completion. These students also assist in assessing the students' fieldwork.

The Community-based Project Module office has only one permanent staff member. Former Community-based Project Module students are employed as office assistants and drivers to handle the considerable number of students and the various administrative tasks, including basic administration, booking transport and organising drivers. They interview applicants for posts and train them, thereby taking ownership of the process. Students are preferably appointed as assistants in their third year so that they are available for two more consecutive years.

To establish a feeling of unity between the Community-based Project Module students, a corporate image was designed for the module. Students were requested to design a logo and the various designs were voted for via the learning management system. The logo is printed on T-shirts that students receive before they do their projects. A mascot was also designed and made for the Community-based Project Module. Students who exhibit notable dedication to their project receive a small version of the mascot and a certificate at the end of the year.

At the end of the year the successful outcomes of the module are celebrated with a "JCP Swank". Representatives of the communities, future and former Community-based Project

Module students, members of the Faculty and other departments are invited to the celebration.

6.2 Sustainability of relationships with community partners

It is of critical importance that tertiary institutions and communities collaborate to enhance the education of tertiary students. Sustainable partnerships provide opportunities to leverage mutual benefits through the diverse array of partner knowledge, expertise and resources (CEAL 2009: 97). Tertiary institutions need to become active members of their local communities. Community-based projects cannot be developed in a vacuum without consulting members, organisations and leaders in the community. Sustained community involvement through community-based endeavours is essential to achieve the reciprocity that is fundamental for supporting community-based projects (Robinson 2000: 5).

The first level of establishing campus and community partnerships is by ensuring institution-wide commitment to collaborating and working with local communities (Jacoby 1996: 93). The second level is by establishing contact between the campus department or office and community-based organisations. The success of a community-based module rests to a large extent on the strength of the relationship between the Faculty and the community (Jacoby 1996: 251).

To ensure the sustainability of those partnerships and to continue with the already successful relationships with different communities, the Community-based Project Module office compiled a database of over 500 community partners where students could do their projects. These community partners identify their specific needs and submit their lists of needs to the Community-based Project Module office annually. New community partners are visited and the identified needs of those community partners are scrutinised to establish whether the project complies with the criteria of the module. Prospective community partners are also invited to discuss possible new

projects and development needs. Many community partners contact the Community-based Project Module office and request assistance. Students also identify possible new partners and projects.

To ensure the sustainability of involvement with community partners, it is important to establish good relationships with a particular contact person at each institution or non-governmental office where the students conduct their fieldwork. An empathetic and dedicated supervisor or contact person on site ensures the successful execution of a project and generates positive feedback from students on their experiences. An adult facilitator should ensure that students receive the assistance and support they need, and that they have the opportunity to learn from their mistakes (Billig 2007: 22).

It is also essential that the community, the students and the faculty (lecturer) perceive that they will be able to make a worthwhile contribution to the initiative. Establishing common ground among all the partners, as well as transparent goals and objectives, is an important requirement for sustaining a project (CHE 2008: 43).

The community partners are required to assist in assessing the students on their project outcomes. Such assistance is acknowledged in the blog reports written by the students. The Community-based Project Module office also sends thank you notes to community partners after the completion of each particular project. Feedback with regard to module outcomes and possible new projects is requested from the community partners.

The Community-based Project Module requires that students work in the community for at least 40 hours. Most community projects can be completed within the time scheduled, for example, building a jungle gym or training community members in basic computer skills. Projects that require continuous interaction between students and the community, such as social entrepreneurial projects, are more difficult to sustain. Students only get involved in such projects if the community partner is

already part of a sustainable project. Students then assist with the specific well-defined tasks required for the project, such as developing a website.

One of the most critical administrative problems is how to minimise the disruption to the community outreach caused by the academic cycle. At the end of the project, the student's participation may end, but the community's realities remain. Communication mechanisms between the community and the faculty must be sustained by means of continuous feedback (CHE 2006: 105).

Some community partners become very involved in the module and are always willing to accommodate student projects. These institutions are invited to become special partners of the Community-based Project Module and the Faculty of Engineering, Built Environment and Information Technology. Their support of the Community-based Project Module is acknowledged at a special ceremony. They are subsequently invited to other functions of the faculty and could become members of the community advisory committee.

6.3 Sustainability of funding for community projects

The most difficult task in a community-based module is to source sustainable funding. Although the module receives some funding from the faculty, it is insufficient to run all the community projects effectively. Most of the money is spent on transporting students to and from their project sites.

Students receive a limited amount of funding to conduct their Community-based Project Module. In a case where their expenses exceed the allocated amount, the students themselves must find sponsors. They use the facilities of the Community-based Project Module office, namely fax machines, telephones and e-mail, in their fundraising efforts.

One option for addressing the problem of finance is to approach companies to assist in funding community projects. These companies then take responsibility for a particular

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project, which is either identified by or linked to the company. The company then assists with expenses incurred. Companies may report the outcomes of the projects in their annual reports as evidence of their community outreach endeavours.

Funding companies are acknowledged for their contributions via the Community-based Project Module link on the UP's website, as well as in the students' blog reports.

7. Examples of projects conducted

The following examples of campus-community partnerships and successful projects demonstrate how projects could be sustained.

7.1 Projects with the National Zoological Gardens in Pretoria

The National Zoological Gardens in Pretoria was one of the first partners of the Module. Over 35 projects are executed at the National Zoological Gardens annually. At the beginning of a year, a project coordinator at the National Zoological Gardens identifies possible projects for the students. Students have the opportunity to select any of these projects. The majority of the projects require technical and engineering skills. Examples of successful projects are designing and installing a shower for the elephants, hoist feeders for the giraffes and okapis, and an offloading slide for hay. Students find these projects very interesting and creative and they apply skills already acquired during their studies.

The success of these projects can be attributed to an identified contact person at the National Zoological Gardens, the identification of possible projects at the beginning of each academic year, and the accessibility of the National Zoological Gardens. Students are also allowed to do their projects in the National Zoological Gardens workshop, where the equipment and material are provided.

7.2 N'Wa Vangani Primary School

N'Wa Vangani Primary School is a public primary school situated in the township of Mamelodi, adjacent to Pretoria. Various projects have been undertaken at the school. Students built a jungle gym, renovated classrooms, developed a website for the school, and trained staff members and learners to develop computer skills.

At the end of 2008, the school requested that the students assist with the establishment of a library. The library was developed by various groups of students. The first group cleared and cleaned the room, built cupboards and painted the room. Two groups received donations of books and indexed the books. One group built a reception counter and another group rebuilt a computer and electronically indexed the books. The library is now in use by assigning many groups to one project.

The success of the projects at the school can be accredited to a very passionate and positive principal and staff. At the beginning of each academic year, the principal and staff identify possible projects and forward them to the lecturer of the module. Students may choose projects from the list provided. The school is easily accessible and close to the campus. The students feel appreciated and experience the school as being accommodating and positive.

7.3 Projects in the students' home towns

Students have the option of identifying their own projects or choosing from a list of possible projects provided to them. Many students identify projects in their home towns. The majority of these students are the first generation of their families to study at a higher education institution. They are the role models for the youth of their community. Their involvement in their own community also shows that they are willing to plough back their expertise, knowledge and skills into their own community. Many of these students continue with their projects after the official completion of those projects.

knowledge of information technology. The communities have an enormous need to become computer literate. Various community centres where computers are available are used to train community members in basic computer literacy. They are also trained to become facilitators (train-the-trainer) so that the training can continue.

In addition, students develop websites for non-profit organisations and load them onto the World Wide Web. Members of these organisations are trained to update the websites. Students continue to assist these communities with their websites until some community members are able and confident to update the websites themselves.

8. Feedback from students

After their fieldwork, the students responded very positively. On their blog reports they also had to reflect and indicate what they have learnt during their fieldwork. The following reflections are very common in the module:

The module has taught me in these 40 hours that I can really give back to the community. Not only by the skills I have learned through life but also by applying the skills I have learned at University. This is also an excellent way to get in practice for work in real-life situations.

Our experience opened my eyes to situations, areas and people that I wouldn't have experienced in my normal day-to-day life. I learned how to handle social settings that I'm not accustomed to and I challenged my way of thinking and certain perceptions. The projects that we were involved in also gave me the opportunity to see certain basic constructional elements first-hand and the success that a team can achieve by working together.

I learned how to adapt in a new community that differs from ours. To see the people and try to understand them, because we all have different social needs and different ways to satisfy them.

Former Community-based Project Module students often also motivate new Community-based Project Module students to take over their projects.

7.4 Projects using specialised information technology skills

Although most of the Community-based Project Module students are only in their second year, they already have advanced

9. Conclusion

Many lessons were learnt in the implementation of the compulsory Community-based Project Module at the UP. It is extremely challenging to facilitate the module with its large number of diverse students, various community partners with differing needs, and few resources. The successful running of the module depends on the triad of student, lecturer and community partner.

The students' intrinsic institutional responsibility of promoting the UP's image in the community, their dedication to their studies and their commitment to achieving good results have a definite influence on their commitment to their projects. Communities continue to accommodate the students, because they really need help. They are aware that all students will not necessarily deliver the same level of outputs, but they value the opportunity to transform the student into an engaged citizen, or even to develop a lifelong relationship between a student and a particular cause or non-profit organisation.

Various structures and strategies have been established in the Community-based Project Module at the UP in an endeavour to ensure its sustainability. Commitment to the outreach projects by all the parties involved and a deep commitment to community development are of crucial importance for the success of community-based projects.

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