



The Computerworld Honors Program

Honoring those who use Information Technology to benefit society

Final Copy of Case Study

LOCATION:
Broomfield, CO, US

ORGANIZATION:
Rafael Belloso Chacin University (URBE)

YEAR:
2011

ORGANIZATION URL:
<http://www.urbe.edu/>

STATUS:
Laureate

PROJECT NAME:
Community Service application

CATEGORY:
Training/Education

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Rafael Belloso Chacin University (URBE), located in Maracaibo, Venezuela, is known for improving teaching and learning processes by offering the latest technological tools, such as computer labs, fast Internet connections via campus-wide Wi-Fi, video projection resources and home computer classrooms. URBE also offers a distance-learning program that 28,000 students have taken advantage of through six websites that are updated dynamically. To support these technology initiatives, the URBE data center follows international standards, and the flagship application of the data center, URBE Digital, automates the integration and management of all academic and administrative processes across the university. In 2007, the government of Venezuela enacted the Community Service Act, which established community service requirements for college students at the undergraduate level. This law required the development of community social-impact projects and was meant to make students aware of social issues faced by Venezuela. The Community Service Act also sought to educate the general public, community leaders, social teachers and university leaders about the social needs of Venezuela citizens. When the law went into effect, URBE took the lead among Venezuelan universities and faced the social responsibility challenge head-on. The university sought to make information and communication technologies available to students to help them manage the process of community service in a fast, organized, efficient and effectively way. The university also sought to create an application that would facilitate the creation, development and monitoring of the proposed social projects, which in turn was expected to generate greater social impact. To achieve these goals, URBE created an application called Community Service. The initiative allows students to manage all information related to the provisioning of a community service project in an automated manner. This includes registration of community projects, development of services for communities, planning and monitoring activities, academic indicators, and the academic administration of the courses offered as part of the university's community work. A key feature of the Community Service application is that URBE also makes it available to remote communities using a mobile computer lab with

13 personal computers. This allows citizens in remote areas to benefit from workshops that are part of many of the community service projects designed by students. To complement the service, URBE created a website at which students and communities can find information of interest, such as proposed community service project objectives and how well those objectives were achieved. The website also allows students to be aware of all community services projects and provides a list of communities visited; the details of each project within each community; delivered courses; and testimonies of those who have benefitted from the projects.

SOCIETAL BENEFITS

The Community Service application facilitates the management of community service projects for 38 municipalities and communities while providing free advisory services to help communities plan and develop project initiatives with profound social impact. The application also facilitates the planning of courses related to the needs of the communities.

PROJECT BENEFIT EXAMPLE

Community Service has greatly benefitted the university and the Venezuelan communities that interact with the application. The application is now facilitating the management of community service projects by 6,000 students every year for 38 municipalities and communities in the region surrounding URBE. The project also provides a planned and professional advisory services for free to communities in planning and developing project initiatives with profound social impact. URBE students use the application to plan courses in different fields related to the needs of communities. An actual community service project called: "Introduction to Computers" is giving the opportunity to many communities around the south-west of the state of learning the basic skills and knowledge for using computers and software. Thanks to the mobile lab using technology is very easy for them in places where access to technology is really difficult. Michailor Avila, the Social Responsibility Director for URBE, said, "The many advantages are reflected in the organization, control, speed and fluidity with which the Community Service application processes function. The system is flexible and adapts to the needs that arise, and that feeds the rest of the applications used by the institution, which helps resolve any issues. The Community Service application also helps automate the services offered to communities." "The Community Service technology has caused a drastic change in the management of community service projects within Venezuela," Said Ana Montiel, representative of the Community Council Fuerza Indigena III of Ciudad Lossada. "Were it not for the application, the process of providing services to communities would be slower, less effective and the scope of the services would be narrower." "Given that community service has become a requirement for Venezuelan college students, we benefit greatly from a tool like Community Service," Said Edilier Bauza a Graphic Design student "Without a system like Community Service, it would take longer to manage community service projects, which might mean it would take longer to graduate."

IS THIS PROJECT AN INNOVATION, BEST PRACTICE? Yes

ADDITIONAL PROJECT INFORMATION

The Community Service project has greatly benefitted those for whom it was created. The application has been welcomed as a helpful tool, and from the beginning, URBE employees (especially those in charge of managing community service), could see how much more effectively they could view



and manage information related to community service projects. Secondly, students can automatically handle the entire community service project process, from registration to execution. And finally, the communities who benefit from the service projects designed by the student have also greatly benefitted. In general, the technology caused a drastic change in the management of community service in Venezuela. Were it not for the application, the process of providing services to communities would be slower, less effective, and the scope of the services would be much less comprehensive. In addition, if students did not have the information provided by the tool, it could significantly delay their time spent at the university, as the fulfillment of community service is now required to qualify for graduation.

