Outreach Project Materials - Project Management

The following details how an outreach experience is incorporated within the curriculum for this specific course.

Course(s): Project Management (ITSCM 385; ITSCM 785), Undergraduate & Graduate, Traditional & Online
Format: Group consisting of around 5 members completing a semester-long project worth 40% of course grade
Semester: Since fall 2011, over 100+ distinct group outreach experiences
Faculty: Andrew Ciganek (ciganeka@uww.edu); Christina Outlay (outlayc@uww.edu)

Background

The faculty introduced a group project activity in the fall of 2011 to replace a text-based case study approach to teaching project management. This curriculum change coincided with the introduction of LEAP to the UW-Whitewater campus and specifically addressed the civic engagement LEAP ELO skillset. During the first semesters, an outreach partner identified by the faculty member was assigned to student groups. This approach was relaxed in the fall of 2012 to allow student groups the option of selecting their own outreach partner. Students are encouraged to select an outreach partner that they are confident they will have good, regular communication with for the duration of the semester – which is the most significant factor determining project success.

The outreach experience provides several benefits for students. Students receive real-world/hands-on experience spanning the project management lifecycle (i.e., initiating, planning, executing, monitoring & controlling, closing). The projects selected for students to work on are considered “safe” projects, meaning they are not mission-critical initiatives for the outreach partner - this allows for students to potentially “fail” in executing their project without significant consequences (for the students, partner, or program), which is important for an entry-level or first time experience using project management tools and techniques. By executing the project, students are eligible to receive credit for community service hours from the College of Business and Economics (all business majors must complete 20 hours of community service), and potentially for project management experience (for students looking to eventually pursue project management certification). Finally, students may choose outreach experiences related to their major – e.g., IT majors could propose web design, data management and similar IT-focused projects, while management majors might propose program development projects, and marketing majors could propose sales/fundraising projects.

Step-by-step guide

Project description

Include information about the project in the course syllabus and/or D2L site. Optionally, talk with potential community partners regarding their project needs and desire to work with students in the class.

- Example project description
- Example list of projects from community partner

The following are the significant project milestones (deadlines) for the group project activity, which corresponds with each of the phases of the project management lifecycle. Each milestone consists of multiple documentation to be submitted by each student group which are evaluated with extensive feedback by the faculty member, which each student group must address by subsequent milestones:

Project Phases (Milestones)

- Team Project 1: Project Proposal (around week 4)
  - Due: projectProposal.docx, sponsorAgreement.docx
- Team Project 2: Project Initiation (around week 5)
  - Due: projectCharter.docx, kickoffMeetingAgenda.docx, teamContract.docx
- Team Project 3: Project Planning (around week 7)
  - Due: projectPlan.docx, scopeStatement.docx, projectSchedule.mpp, communicationsPlan.docx, riskRegister.docx, qualityChecklist.docx
- Team Project 4: Project Website (around week 8)
  - Due: Google site (see "Creating and submitting project documents section below for more information"
- Team Project 5: Project Executing, Monitoring & Controlling (around week 11)
  - Due: Revisions to project planning documentation, changeRequest.docx (if necessary)
- Team Project 6: Project Closing (around week 14)
  - Due: Executive summary, projectCompletion.docx, lessonsLearned.docx, individual reflection (see "Project reflection" section below)

Forming groups:
Students are either automatically assigned to a group at the start of the semester (Dr. Ciganek’s classes) or allowed to self-select their groups (Dr. Outlay’s classes). Groups collectively decide on one person who will serve as project manager, who serves as the individual ultimately responsible for the timely delivery of all documentation and as the faculty’s primary point-of-contact for that group. Team project managers earn a small amount of extra credit for successfully leading their projects to completion, based on progress reports, the contents of the project report, and the lessons learned assignment submitted by the team members. Project managers will submit progress reports periodically throughout the course. Each team member are expected to spend at least 20-40 hours on the team project, although several individuals exceed that for various reasons (e.g., interest level, commitment to detail, scope of project undertaken, etc.).

Creating and submitting project documents:

By the fourth week of class, student groups are required to submit proposals (projectProposal.docx) for outreach experiences they wish to conduct along with a commitment from the outreach partner (sponsorAgreement.docx), which is evaluated by the faculty for revisions and/or approval. The following week, student groups formally submit the project they will undertake for feedback (projectCharter.docx) along with documents important to establish group norms and structure (kickoffMeetingAgenda.docx, teamContract.docx). Two weeks later, student groups address feedback from previous work and submit documentation describing what will be completed as part of this project (projectPlan.docx, scopeStatement.docx, projectSchedule.mpp, communicationsPlan.docx, riskRegister.docx, qualityChecklist.docx).

By the eighth week of class, student groups are required to create and maintain a public Google Site. A Google site can be used to manage all project tasks, versions of documents, and aide team communication. The faculty member has the ability to showcase good work that is being done during the semester, but by making all sites public, teams can benchmark their progress to other teams. Student groups are given access to the 100+ Google sites from previous student group projects. Students may leverage these as well as other previous projects for insights into completing their own projects.
- Instructions for creating Google sites
- Example Google site template
- Example Google site 1
- Example Google site 2
- Example Google site 3

By the eleventh week of class, student groups submit revisions and subsequent versions of documentation while executing their project (e.g., the project schedule, risk register, scope statement, etc.) and submit a change request form for approval (changeRequest.docx) for potential adjustments to the project plan that are expected to significantly impact the project schedule, scope, and/or budget. By the end of the class, student groups complete their project and submit an executive summary along with additional documentation to formally close-out the project (projectCompletion.docx, lessonsLearned.docx).

Project reflection

Students also individually complete a reflection of their outreach experience. Example reflection questions:

1. Identify the role that you had on your team project. Was this role well-suited to your abilities? Why or why not?
2. Describe two (2) of the greatest contributions that you made on the project.
3. Did you take advantage of any unique skills, knowledge, insights, connections, or abilities during this project? Please explain.
4. You and your project team followed a structured process submitting various deliverables for milestones based on the Project Management Institutes’ PMBOK Guide. Although associated with increased project success, these structured deliverables can be rigid and not suit all of your project needs.
   1. Were there informal actions taken by you or others on your team at any point during the project? This would include actions either in place of or in addition to the required course deliverables.
   2. If so, were these informal actions successful? Why or why not?
5. Do you think that you can apply the knowledge and tools that you learned from the project in future personal or professional projects that you undertake?
   1. If yes, what are the project management concepts or tools that you would most likely use in the future?
   2. If no, why not?
6. How has completing a ‘service-learning’ project benefitted you? Please explain.
7. If you had the ability to change the ‘service-learning’ project for future students, what would be the first thing that you would change? Please explain.

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