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THE IMPORTANCE OF SERVICE LEARNING

Service learning projects aim to strengthen the students' relationship with the community, with a view to their personal development and civic engagement (Wildstein & Reiher, 2001). The essential elements of this strategy entail the active involvement of students in solving a need identified in the community, the clarification of skills or knowledge to be developed, and the provision of spaces intentionally organized for reflecting upon the experience (Leming, 2001). In other words, service learning projects encompass the implementation of the action-reflection conditions set by Sprinthall (1991) through his strategy of deliberate psychological education: an opportunity for taking significant roles in real contexts, balanced with systematic occasions for the careful integration of the meanings of experience, supported by professors and colleagues, with temporal continuity.

The development of service learning projects has been part of the

implementation phase of the UNIBILITY project. Within each partner university, the students involved have been supported in developing USR service learning projects to have an impact on local communities. All the service learning projects have been documented interactively and will be available on the project website as examples of how universities can connect to the local community. Through the service learning projects, UNIBILITY wants to contribute to improving the relevance of HE for society, promoting cooperation between universities and the non-academic world. In the latest newsletter we presented examples of projects developed in Austria, Romania and Slovenia. In this newsletter you will find 2 examples of service learning projects from Ireland and Spain.

DCU RAISING & GIVING SOCIETY (Ireland)

Dublin City University's student-run [Raising and Giving \(RAG\) Society](#) has cultivated extensive links with the local community. This academic year, student volunteers have provided cookery classes, sports training sessions, inter-generational coffee mornings, and music, arts and drama events. They have worked with various local groups, from small children to the elderly. Students also have the option to integrate their volunteering activities into their academic work, through the [Uaneen Module](#) which offers academic credits for extra-curricular activities.

Recent months have also been particularly challenging for student volunteers in DCU: all students working with vulnerable groups have to receive clearance from the Gardai (Irish police), and recent procedural changes in the clearance process meant that many volunteers had to wait several weeks before they could recommence working in the community. Reflecting on this unanticipated difficulty, student volunteer Ruth Lynam wrote:

This has taken away from my time in RAG, my sense of place and has meant the work we have been doing for the local people had come to a halt. We felt as if we had let our volunteers, our community and our committee down. It was quite a disheartening and difficult time with little resolution until recently.

Despite the challenges, the work that RAG does has considerable benefits within the community and for the volunteers

themselves. In her UNIBILITY documentation, Scout Mitchell wrote:

I believe that the work we are doing is having an extremely positive effect on the local community, which is applicable to each demographic. For example, by engaging in after-school activities that emphasise culture, collaboration and team-work, the children are being surrounded by student volunteers who will hopefully inspire them to go on to college themselves one day and gain the confidence they need despite coming from a disadvantaged background. I believe that I have made a positive contribution with my involvement as it was rewarding to see how something so small can make such a difference to someone else's social growth.

RAG is a self-sustaining enterprise whose work continues on an ongoing basis. It will continue to demonstrate DCU students' sense of social responsibility for the foreseeable future.



ClinHab (Spain)

ClinHab is part of the *Right to Having Rights* service-learning project. Right to Having Rights is a joint project conducted by members of the university community, social organizations, public entities and professionals concerned with attaining the specific goals set out below:

- Improving and encouraging the defence and exercise of the rights of less fortunate individuals and minority groups
- Enhancing services aimed at groups that have greater difficulty gaining access to the social and legal resources required to defending their rights
- Providing better services to organizations working to the same ends
- Developing collaborative and working relationships between the Faculty of Law and public, social and professional organizations
- Enhancing the training of Law students.

Given the large number of participating organizations and teaching staff involved, this is something of a unique project in the university.

The project work is organized around law clinics on specific topics. For this article we have chosen the clinic named ClinHab. ClinHab provides free information on housing to people who need it, while contributing to the training of law students and very occasionally social work students.

ClinHab also promotes and provides free residential mediation as an alternative to the judicialisation of conflicts. As a result, this service-learning project encourages a way of learning based on acquiring experience by working on real-life cases. ClinHab has new students and others who have been involved in ClinHab during two years or even more.

On average, each student solves about 7 cases per semester. To face the cases, weekly meetings are held with the whole team of ClinHab. These meetings are used to share information about the cases, work together, and adopt a common response to the cases and conflicts.

The most common issues dealt with, in the area of housing, are loans and mortgages, rent contracts, the right to adequate housing and residential mediation.

<http://www.clinicajuridicaimmobiliaria.org/en/>



USR FINAL CONFERENCE IN BARCELONA

UNIBILITY is organising its [final conference](#) in Barcelona on the 22nd of September 2017. The conference will be hosted by the University of Barcelona and EUCEN and will be the venue where the results and final outputs of the project will be presented: the USR Toolkit of Ideas, the Training material and the Guidelines for universities to engage in local communities. In addition to presenting participants with active examples of how universities engage in the local community,

the strategic steps necessary to pursue the university third mission will be discussed, providing university delegates with ideas and tools to implement University Social Responsibility in their home university. Presentations will be done in the following topic areas:

1. Strategic Planning of Social Responsibility
2. Good Practices

USR – TOOLKIT OF PRACTICES

The USR Toolkit of practices developed by UNIBILITY is available on the project's website: www.postgraduatecenter.at/unibility or directly at this link: <https://www.postgraduatecenter.at/en/lifelong-learning-projects/lifelong-learning-projekte/university-meets-social-responsibility-unibility/unibility-products/usr-toolkit-of-practices/> where you can download the Toolkit for free in six different languages: English, German, Spanish, Romanian, Slovenian and Portuguese.

In the Toolkit you will find examples of good practices covering social responsibility and interactions between the university and their local communities.

The Toolkit contains 21 recent examples of already implemented USR-practices, which are collected using a common methodology: desk research of the existing literature describing these practices and with semi-structured interviews with project managers at universities.



CONTACT US

Project Coordinator: Katharina Resch
katharina.resch@univie.ac.at
EUCEN Office: office@eucen.eu



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