

Students in Cartography Class Learn Map Design While Helping Local Youth with Homework

Students in the Connect & Collaborate pilot service-learning course allowed students to learn the art, craft and science of creating maps while at the same time helping local K-12 youth with their school work.

Throughout the semester, more than 90 students in the class served once a week in 10 Columbus Metropolitan Library Homework Help Centers. Most of the time they helped elementary and middle school children with homework, but they also developed a mapping project as a final assignment for the course to close out the semester.

“The best part of this project was applying the GIS mapping skills we learned in class and in labs to produce a map-based activity entirely of our own design and that could help the students at the Homework Help Centers,” said Cynthia Jennings, a double major in geographic information science and international studies. “I think it impacted the students at the library by helping them see maps and geography as something fun and interesting versus just something to look at or memorize.”

The pilot class is taught each semester, alternating between a ‘regular’ lecture-lab format and a service-learning format. The instructor has noticed a different dimension in the attitudes of the students enrolled in the service-learning version of the course.

“It is clear to me that students feel a lot more engaged in their learning when they can see that someone other than me is interested in their work. When they do their final project, I often hear that they put more effort into it because they feel a greater sense of responsibility. “

“I was really glad to be able to make a contribution to my hometown community,” said Anthony Gillespie, an Earth sciences major. “I think it made a big impact showing the children that older students were interested in helping them with their academic success.”

Civil engineering student Amanda Padamadan had such a great experience in the class that she is staying on as a community volunteer at the library.

“My overall experience in both the class and at the library was so positive that I have decided to stay on volunteering at the Hilltop Library. I really like helping and interacting with the kids. The staff at the library was so nice, and I was really made to feel at home. I felt like I was really encouraging these kids to try hard and never give up.”

The library partnership was intentionally designed to fit many different types of courses,” said Ahlqvist. “The only requirement for this model to work is that the student-learning experience is enhanced by engaging with local youth, and what our students learn in the course is of interest to those kids. It’s a recipe that I’m convinced many Ohio State courses could buy into.”