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Developing a service-learning model: An effective educational tool in higher education for Sri Lanka

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Service-learning, is a structured learning experience that blends voluntary community service with academic learning. This addresses challenges that require intellectual capacity, effort and funds to overcome community identified problems thus creating an opportunity for the development of university-community partnerships. Service-learning projects are not reported in the university undergraduate curricula in Sri Lanka. This paper reports the research based development of a Service-learning course in the Faculty of Science, University of Colombo with the facilitation of the Career Guidance Unit of the faculty.

The pilot programme of Service-learning launched by the Career Guidance Unit (CGU), Faculty of Science, University of Colombo in 2012 was developed as a design-based research, a model used to solve a real world problem and to develop re-usable design principles. This process includes four steps; i) analyze real-world problem, ii) strategize design experiment, iii) conduct context specific design experiment, and iv) reflect on entire project. Following intensive literature review and discussion with teaching faculty, CGU obtained formal approval for the integration of “Service Learning” to the curriculum.

The faculty collaborated with three corporate sponsors and identified three Service-learning projects connecting with academic learning goals. The CGU received positive feedback on the program from all stakeholders. All stakeholder groups indicated that this program is a catalyst for a mutually beneficial interaction between academia and the corporate sector. The strongly encouraging outcomes of this pioneering exercise for the undergraduates included academic achievement, acquisition of transferable skills required for the world of work, and inculcation of civic attitudes and social, professional and ethical responsibility. Thus, Service-learning can be recommended as an effective pedagogy for the Sri Lankan university system.