Community Engagement Showcase

April 2017

NIU’s Community Engagement Showcase is meant to give NIU students an opportunity to present the results of their community-engaged outreach initiatives completed in the 2016-2017 academic year.

Undergraduate students currently enrolled at NIU who have participated in a community-based project including work completed during a service learning course, internship, or with student organization, are encouraged to showcase their work.

Project Guidelines

Eligible projects must be completed during the 2016-2017 academic year and clearly state: (1) project outcomes, (2) learning objectives, and (3) reflection.

Project Proposal

Each group will be expected to submit a project proposal by November 11. This allows groups enough time to work with their community partners and team members to develop ideas of possible projects. This also allows groups to prepare an elevator pitch for their project that they will be previewing at the Mid-year reception on December 2nd.

Abstract (250 words)

Should include the following:

1. Background- *Describe* the needs of the community or group you worked with. Why is this project important?
2. Objectives- *What* problem does this project attempt to solve?
3. Methodology- *How* did you achieve these objectives? What did you do?
4. Results- *What* happened as a result of your project? What was the impact?
5. Conclusions- What do these results mean? What was learned? What does this mean for the future?

Presentation

Students will present their projects to the NIU campus and community on April 25, 2017 during the Community Engagement Showcase. Presentations formats can include:

- digital video/photograph montages
- poster presentations
- table-top displays

Students will be judged based on presentation skills, clarity, and design of their chosen presentation format (i.e. poster, digital video/photograph montage, etc.). There will be monetary awards given to first, second, and third place winners.
At least one person from your group is expected to be present at your station to present and answer questions from judges or other audiences.

At least one person from your group is also required to attend a CES poster design workshop. You will be notified of the dates, times and locations of these workshops as it gets closer.

**Sample Ideas**

- **Title:** The effects of active citizenship with the Boys and Girls Club mission to serve underprivileged youth.

  Abstract: Have you ever wanted to help enrich the lives of under-privileged youth? Every day the Boys and Girls Club of America reaches out to 4 million kids to provide safety, empowerment, and resources. While volunteering with the Boys and Girls Club of America you will be a mentor to young people by helping them with: Homework, having programs, activities and just being a friend/open ear. Our goal is to challenge our beliefs around under-privileged and ask-risk youth.

- **Title:** A Nation of First-Generations

  Abstract: The purpose of our project is to investigate the reasons why first generation students choose their colleges and majors and the relationship between the two. We will be conducting surveys on why they made their decision and we will be hearing their personal stories. Our goal is to provide first generation students more direction and seeing how personal mentors can further assist the students in their transition. We also want to understand how being a minority affects student’ decisions on what college and major is chosen right after high school. Our main focus is that we want more attention to be given to the first generation students on campus and to show them their importance/significance in their community and college community.

**Sample Abstracts**

1/ **Title:** Green Office Initiative

  Abstract: The purpose of the Green Office Initiative is to encourage offices around Northern Illinois University to take small steps towards creating a greener world. The offices can become certified in bronze, silver and gold levels. Both the bronze and silver certifications are achieved through self-evaluation. To achieve gold status, the office must meet with the Director of the Green Office Initiative (administrative offices) or the Coordinator of the Green Office Initiative (academic offices). This program started to take shape in 2011. In the fall of 2015, a marketing intern has been working with a group of students to revamp and appropriately market the program to offices on campus. At this point, the Student Association is ready to go through the program and help with spreading information. With the proper policies and support from key administrators, the green office program is more likely to receive wider acceptance and participation. There is quite a bit of synergy on campus for environmental initiatives. The Student Association is preparing to create an ad hoc student position for a Director of Environmental Affairs. NIU administration signed the American College and University Presidents’ Climate Commitment. The green office program fits well with the goals of the NIU Green Team, in that it...
challenges offices and departments to make small changes in daily operations that promote sustainability awareness. It also fits well with the efforts of ENVS and the NIU Facilities Division to better publicize the efforts being taken to reduce energy use and improve general sustainability on campus (see www.niu.edu/sustainability). Getting the Green Office program more supported from a policy and political perspective is important to its long-term success. Several universities in Illinois and across the country have established green office programs: University of Illinois - Urbana/Champaign, Illinois State University, University of Illinois at Chicago, University of Illinois Springfield, Harvard, University of Maryland, Georgetown, University of Washington, Arizona State, Boston University, and the list continues with a quick online search using “university green office programs” as the search terms.

2/ Title: STEM Exploration Labs

Abstract: NIU STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) Exploration Labs are exhibits showcased at STEM Fest that are put together through a variety of activities to educate people of all ages interested in STEM fields. These labs were showcased at the first STEM Fest in 2010, through the coordination of NIU STEM Outreach. We use multiple activities that children, teenagers, and adults can learn through kinesthetic learning. Kinesthetic learning is a type of learning that requires you to manipulate or touch materials to learn. For example, the STEM labs have the Venda Gram, which is a physics tool in which a person places their hands on the globe and step on a plastic stool. When the Venda gram is on, it circulates electrons throughout a person, causing static electricity. Children love this activity because it makes their hair stand up and they enjoy it. The purpose of these activities is to show children that STEM fields can be interesting and are used for many things. We implement these labs as ways to interact with the public and demonstrate the fun and excitement of the various STEM fields. For some people, especially children, the STEM labs can be life changing, as this can evoke a curiosity in the subject or an interest to choose a career related to STEM in the future. As for the adults, the labs provide an insight, as well as ideas, that can be incorporated at home and independently educate their children about STEM.

3/ Title: Helping Families in Search of a Better Life

Abstract: Each year, many people risk their lives at a chance for a new life in the United States. Often these people come from crime-ridden countries and extreme poverty. NIU student volunteers will work with Catholic Charities of RGV to ensure that these people are received with compassion and are treated with dignity. Catholic Charities offers various services such as homelessness prevention, a pregnancy center, counseling program, immigration aid, and food program. Other students who have participated in a trip with Catholic Charities of RGV have stated it was a life-changing experience and provided them with a new perspective. This trip is especially relevant given the current political climate surrounding Americans’ beliefs about immigrants and immigration policies. Prior to participating in this trip, all students will be trained and receive education about the community partner and about facts and myths surrounding immigration in the United States.
Title: Preserve and protect our local water resources: Outdoor Adventure’s second annual Clean the Kish event

Abstract: Outdoor Adventures hosted a special free volunteer event for National Public Lands Day on Saturday, September 26 from 9:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. The second annual “Clean the Kish” event’s goal was to clean out trash from the Kishwaukee River on Northern Illinois University’s campus, as well as educate the community about the importance of taking care of the local natural resources. In total, 66 volunteers participated in this event in comparison to 27 the first year. Participants were provided with boots, waders, gloves, pickup sticks, and trash bags to assist them with this project. They were divided into two groups, one focusing on the northern section of the river at Hopkins Park while the second group went south to Prairie Park. After working for four hours, volunteers were invited to a picnic at the East Lagoon where recreational activities such as kayaking, canoeing, standup paddle boarding, slacklining, bags, and disc golf were arranged. Awards were given to those who found interesting items including a bicycle, traffic cone, golf balls, tires, televisions, a GPS, and an IPOD. Participants were able to reflect on the day using a large poster collecting comments about what inspires them, such as “When people volunteer!” and by emails following the day expressing thanks for coordinating the event. Before and after the event, articles were published by the Daily Chronicle focusing on the collaboration efforts between NIU and the DeKalb Park District. Overall, this event effectively brought the community together to make the Kishwaukee River a safer, healthier place for wildlife and people.