

Patrick Fischer

Senior Seminar

Service Reflection

I have had many wonderful service opportunities during my time at Lipscomb. Lipscomb offers a variety of service learning classes that allow students to give back to their community. During my junior year I had a great opportunity to take one of these courses.

During my Principles of Software Engineering course I was assigned a semester-long group project. This project involved creating a website for a fictional company documenting how my group went through the software development lifecycle. My group approached our professor, Dr. Simmons, and requested that we be allowed to modify the project to receive service credit. Luckily, Dr. Simmons had a non-profit in mind that needed a new website: the Brentwood Leadership Foundation. The Foundation had many other problems aside from needing a new website. They had trouble communicating with their members, they had trouble collecting donations, and they had issues with properly scheduling their events in an easy-to-access format. My group discussed the Foundation's problems, and we designed a new website to solve their issues.

The Foundation needed a new home page, and we created one that displayed information about their objectives, their program, their purpose, and a list of members in a given year's class. The home page also displayed a small calendar that contained information about upcoming events. The home page could also display a dismissible announcement specified by the site administrators. To solve their issues

with scheduling and to ensure that all members would have easy access to a listing of events, we also designed a page devoted to displaying a calendar. This calendar pulled information from the same source as the one used on the home page, but it was in a larger format to allow for easy printing. We wanted the calendar to be extremely easy for the administrators to edit, so we used Google's online calendar. This allowed the administrators to edit the calendar by simply clicking on it to add new events.

The Foundation also wanted to have a section of their website devoted to displaying their contact information. As my group was not planning on providing long-term support for the website, we knew we had to create a solution that would allow the administrators to modify this information easily. To accomplish this, I wrote a small PHP script that allowed an administrator to upload a picture of someone and specify his or her contact details. This information would be stored on the server in a database, and whenever the contact page was accessed it would be used to automatically populate the page. Conversely, I wrote another PHP script that allowed the administrator to pick any contact and remove them from the page.

The Foundation also required that part of their site display information about their various corporate sponsors. The only requirement for this section of the website was that a picture from the sponsor be displayed alongside a small snippet of text denoting what event the company sponsored. This was quite easy to accomplish, as my group could simply modify the script that I had written for editing contact information.

My group was only able to create a mockup donation page for the Foundation, as we did not have access to their PayPal or financial institution. We created a single page that prompted users to enter their financial information for the donations. The page would not actually do anything with the payment information, as the site administrator would need to decide if they wished to use PayPal for donations or go through the process of acquiring an SSL certificate and handling payments directly.

Finally, we came to the issue of communication with members. My group decided to attempt to solve this by setting up a mail server for mass emails. This did not work as well as we hoped, and we had to consider other options. I eventually stumbled upon a service that allowed users to create email templates and send mass emails. The service had the added bonus of being free if the total number of emails and subscribers was under a certain threshold. The thresholds were in the thousands, so it was fairly unlikely that the Foundation would ever hit the free limit. We simply had to set up an account for the administrators, create a basic email template, and let whoever was in charge of emails customize the rest of it.

This was a great opportunity to give something back to our community, and I am extremely happy that Dr. Simmons was able to find a non-profit for my group to work with. Service learning is an extremely important part of Lipscomb's curriculum, and I am quite thankful for the chance to take part in it.