

**Fundamentals for IT Professionals II**

Year 2 (2022/23), Semester 4

**SCHOOL OF INFOCOMM TECHNOLOGY**

Diploma in Cybersecurity & Digital Forensics

**Assignment 1**

**Service-Learning Part 3**

**(Reflection)**

**Duration:** Weeks 2 - 12

**Weightage:** 30%

**Individual/Team/Both:** Individual

**Deadline:** Report

Softcopy (submit to BrightSpace)

**6 Jan 2023, 8.30am (Friday) OR**

**2 weeks after project execution whichever is later**

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| **Module Group** | **P02** |
| **Grade** |  |
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**3.1 Pre-Reflection / Preparation Phase**

The purpose of the programme was simple yet elaborate. It was for Pathlight students to learn more about Ngee Ann Polytechnic in addition to learning Python from us, and for us Ngee Ann students to broaden our horizons by dealing with special needs students, an experience that is rare. Through our planning, we will also learn how to teach concepts in layman terms which will improve our teaching and explaining skills and teach us as a class to work as one collective unit.

After hearing of the FP2 assignment brief, I immediately dreaded the idea of having to teach special needs students python as well as show them around our campus. I believed that the whole event would be extremely awkward and unfulfilling for both parties. Additionally, with my limited knowledge of Pathlight and its students, I believed them and us were like oil and water. Meaning that we were too different, so different that there would be apparent gaps in the way that we deal with others as well as perceive reality to a point that it did not make any sense for us to have an activity like this. I was arrogant in the way I saw Pathlight and its students. Furthermore, the class was put on short notice and had only 3 weeks to plan the entire event out, together with the fact that I believed we had too many students (23) planning for 2 activities, I did not envision this event going well.

After the entire first week of not planning anything, I decided that I had to take initiative like what Dr Divyan said as this event was graded. As such, I signed myself up to be the Design IC as well as a member of the python group. In hindsight even though this was a small step, it was the catalyst to me contributing and planning for the event which I am grateful for.

I created telegram group chats for the respective teams that our class agreed on. This included a python, design, and campus tour telegram chat. Through this medium, our class collectively started to make some progress in planning for the project and this was obviously spearheaded by Sherlena. Speaking of which, I also had a takeaway from Sherlena. I found her boldness and proactiveness to be particularly admirable and when I asked her why she replied that she wanted the event to go well. This greatly contrasted the reason why I was trying, which was to get a good grade and you could say it was at this point I decided to put in more effort to plan and make this event fruitful.

The design team is small compared to the other teams. However, it was here that the best collaboration took place.

We created two items to give to the students which included a certificate and a keychain. During the design and planning process for both items, the group was responsive, gave constructive criticism, and never shut anybody’s opinions down but rather talked through the differences. Together we managed to design the certificate during the second week of school as well as design, plan and make the keychains for the students with a very tight schedule. Having the privilege to be a part of this group, I learned what good communication meant, what cohesiveness was, and the means to be a useful contributor.

As the design team leader, I was responsible for designing the certificate to make it presentable to both students, teachers, and parents such that it was something that they could be proud of having. I aided in the keychain design, from choosing the font of the words, to the dimensions of the keychain, and lastly printing out prototypes of the keychains. Lastly, I also helped with the Python slides by creating the Data Structure portion of the slides.

**3.2 Post-Reflection / Event Phase**

During this event, I learned many things which I will divide into 3 categories, Academic, Civic and Personal Growth. Academic learning relates to the things that are more academic in nature, Civic refers to how my views towards my actions and responsibility to society has changed, and personal growth relates to what I have learnt about myself and the special needs students during this event.

* **Personal Growth**

I have always enjoyed dealing with children but as the event neared, doubts grew in me as I had no understanding of how a child with special needs would operate and the necessary actions which had to be taken to properly care for and mentor them. These concerns were quickly cast away soon after meeting the students. After interacting with the students, I realized that they were generally very easy to talk to. I also learned more about their tendencies and how to better deal with high-functioning autistic children. For instance, they are a lot more honest in their way of speech and will not sugar coat their words to make them sound better, their line of thinking is more focused and direct, and they tend to express their emotions differently compared to other people. This has greatly helped broaden my horizon allowing me to better empathize and understand people who have or who are dealing with people diagnosed with autism. During the icebreakers, they would use phrases such as "I hate him less than (name)" or "(name) is not a nice person". These figures of speech really shed some light on the minds of these students for me.

During the python lesson, I was mentoring a student named ZX (name is changed for privacy reasons) and prior to this, I had no grasp of these students’ intellectual capabilities. Initially, I expected him to struggle greatly with concepts that were going to be brought up due to his young age and perhaps condition. To my surprise he was able to grasp the concepts taught and beyond, many of the things I taught he understood immediately which was more than impressive.

This cleared another misconception of mine, which was that even high-functioning autism influences one's intellectual capabilities. However, more strikingly, his enthusiasm for learning really struck me as a breath of fresh air. He listened to whatever I said attentively, practiced willingly, and was receptive to feedback whenever it was given. He showed me what the love of learning looked like and inspired me to do the same in my life.

Lastly, we gave the students a campus tour around Ngee Ann Polytechnic, showing them places of interest that our school has to offer. Here, I noticed the difference in the ways the teachers dealt with the students compared to what I normally saw. The teachers would laugh along with the students, and they would affirm the students if they did well, but they would also discipline the students in a very direct manner and reason and debate with students should the students misbehave. This was a stark contrast with how normal teacher-student dynamics were in my experience. Yet again, this reinforces the point that it is vital that you be direct in your communication with these students as lingo such as sarcasm will be taken literally and have an unintended effect. It also shows a lack of a language filter in the way these students communicate.

These interactions I had with the student I was teaching clearly paid off as in the feedback he commented about how me and my peers were extremely friendly to be with even going as far as asking for my phone number.

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I did not learn gratitude from this service as I am already a rather grateful person. Rather, this service enforced to me how fortunate I am that just to be able to function normally, something that many of us take for granted. To me gratitude is being happy and contented with life. It is about appreciating the blessings and embracing the challenges you are currently facing, understanding that there is always someone out there going through something way tougher. That someone would trade life with you in an instant. Gratitude is a mindset that must be gradually introduced into one’s life and the best way to be more grateful is to learn to enjoy the simplest things in life e.g., walking. God is the person I am most grateful for because even though I am undeserving he has still blessed me abundantly. I am most grateful that my biggest challenge in life is to worry about my education as I understand that there are others my age with way bigger problems. I do not think Ngee Ann is doing anything special with regards to teaching its students about practicing gratitude, but such events are extremely eye opening to students and having more of these would definitely be a good step in the right direction.

* **Academic Learning**

The skills needed can be divided into skills that needs to be used to teach, as well as the skills that are needed to have a fruitful experience with the students. Skills needed to teach would include good communication skill as both Python and Campus Tour require us to explain things to the students. Furthermore, as I was a Python presenter, proficiency in python coding is required in order to effectively teach the students. To have a fruitful experience, intangible skills like listening were needed.

I applied these skills throughout the day, when talking to the students making sure that my speech and mannerisms were catered to the students.

I coded out simple python programs and explained it to the students during the python learning and this was the way I used my IT skills to aid the students in learning their first programming language.

My rating for my application of the above-mentioned skills a 9 out of 10. This is mainly because of the student’s survey responses which are listed below. Their responses were overwhelmingly positive.

Through the preparation of the python planning, I learned a lot about how to better teach concepts in programming in a very simple manner which in turn has strengthened my understanding of the language. This is supported by the student’s responses as shown below.

Chart, pie chart

Description automatically generated

It was also particularly comforting to know that many of the students found the presenters (I was one of them), to be engaging as shown below.

Graphical user interface, table

Description automatically generated with medium confidence

Overall, I would say the python workshop was a success as the students found the presenters engaging and learnt something new.



* **Civic Learning**

A school like Pathlight exists to provide a holistic education where students with special needs can learn without being left out. It is important that such a resource is available for these students as without it, it will be difficult for them to find proper education which is something that they should not be denied of because of their condition. I would enjoy learning more about how Pathlight aids these special needs students aside from the academic aspect of life. I believe that it is important to support such an organization because it makes us a more inclusive society which is what is most important at the end of the day. However, it is important to note that organizations like Pathlight are not the most responsible and important entities to help people with special needs. It is us individuals that are most responsible when dealing with the issue of special needs students and people. Our dealings with these people, the kindness and respect that we treat them with when encountering them, the responsibility that we put on ourselves to care for them. That is what is most important when aiming for an inclusive society, the love and respect from all individuals in society towards those with special needs is the backbone of organizations like Pathlight and without it, no matter the efficacy of the system, it will crumble.

Additionally, from the programme, I was able to better understand these special needs students and as a result better empathize for them. I used to see a clear division between these students and normal students but after this event I realized that we really are not that different. This has made me more motivated to have society see them for who they really are and not have any preconceived notions about them. This way, not only will we be more inclusive to them allowing them to integrate better into society.

These goals can be achieved with both a practical and theoretical solution. The theoretical solution is to educate the masses on the similarities and differences between normal and special needs people. This can be done through social media campaigns, YouTube Videos or through organizing events and talks. The practical way is to organize more meet ups between normal and special needs people. This will be the most effective way of letting the masses be more embracing and caring for them. Events such as this service-learning programme are an awesome way of carrying out such a solution.

**3.3 Conclusion / Post-Event Phase**

Overall, I greatly enjoyed my time at this event, I had my first experience interacting with and teaching special needs students and have learned a lot about and from them.

From the preparation phase of the event, planning for the event in under 3 weeks, to the event itself, having to overcome my nerves and doubts in dealing with the students to enjoying the companionship of the students, I have newfound understanding and respect towards people with special needs and I have also learned a lot about how to be a better teammate, a better teacher, and a better man.

This learning is important as there is not society without love and if we do not put this learning into action, people with special needs will be ostracized. How can we say we are a society when we ourselves discriminate against another group?

Through my learning, in the future I will aim to clear the misconceptions my peers have of special needs students. Furthermore, I will aim to better care for and treat people with special needs and make them feel love in society.