Computer Science for the Common Good:
Connecting the Bowdoin Computer Science Department
with Community Non-Profit Organizations

Danielle McAvoy Class of 2013

My project this summer had two parts. The first half of my work this summer was to find projects that Computer Science students could do with community organizations and non-profits in the Brunswick and Portland area. The second part of my project was to figure out what kind of Technology Day would really benefit non-profits and begin to organize it.

I began my summer by emailing the McKeen Center’s entire online list of organizations. That email gained the interest of over 50 organizations. I meet with 40 of the organizations either over the phone or in person. Over the summer I found a total of 49 projects. In the end the list was cut from 49 projects to 20. The final list of projects is for the Projects Class, which will take place in the spring of 2011. These projects will not only benefit the community but will be used to advance the learning of the Computer Science students, who will gain valuable programming experience. Some of the projects on the final list are an interactive science game, electronic burial record, community service manager for high schools, and interactive online maps. The projects that did not make the final project course’s list of projects are being dealt with in different ways. Many of the projects that did not make the list were things that could become workshops at Technology Day or could be a Common Good Day project. In addition to all the projects I found this summer I had a really awesome opportunity to explore Maine. I learned a lot about Maine, non-profits, and how difficult computers can be for other people in the process. I travelled all the way up to Georgetown and all the way down to Portland to have meetings with organization. I got to see the back streets of Brunswick, listen in on a Senior Citizens meeting at Thornton Hall, and play with cats at the Coastal Humane Society just to name a few of the fun and interesting places this project has lead me to.

The Technology Day, the second half of my project, is going to be a half-day of workshops this fall for non-profit organizations. Many of the ideas for workshops came from discussions with non-profits this summer, however some came from a survey done by the United Way of Mid Coast Maine. The day is going to consist of workshops and presentations by students. It will be a day that connects the Information Technology Department, Computer Science Department, Joseph McKeen Center For The Common Good and many different non-profit organizations. Some of the possible workshop options include Access Databases, using everything Google, and making Websites. Possible student work that will be on display includes Robocup and iPhone applications. This event will further the organizations’ understanding of computers and how computers can aid them, as well as provide them with some new skills for using computers.

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