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Teaching Design and Communication through Project-Based Service Learning: Past, Present and Future

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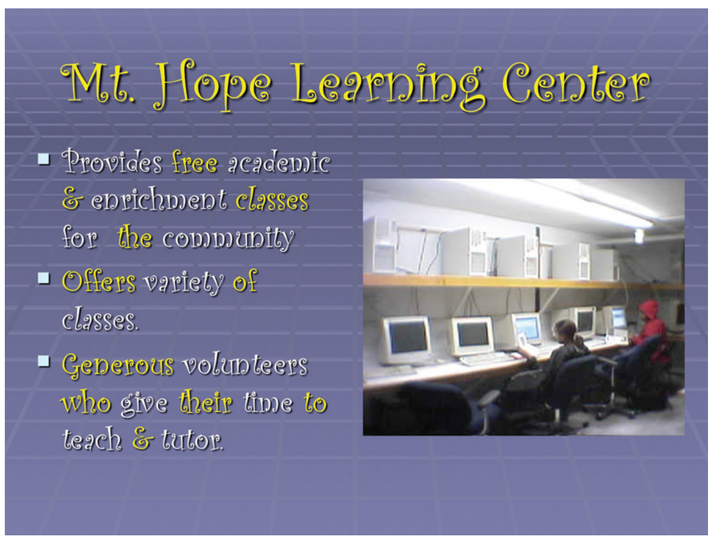
Teaching Design and Communication through Project-Based Service Learning: Past, Present and Future

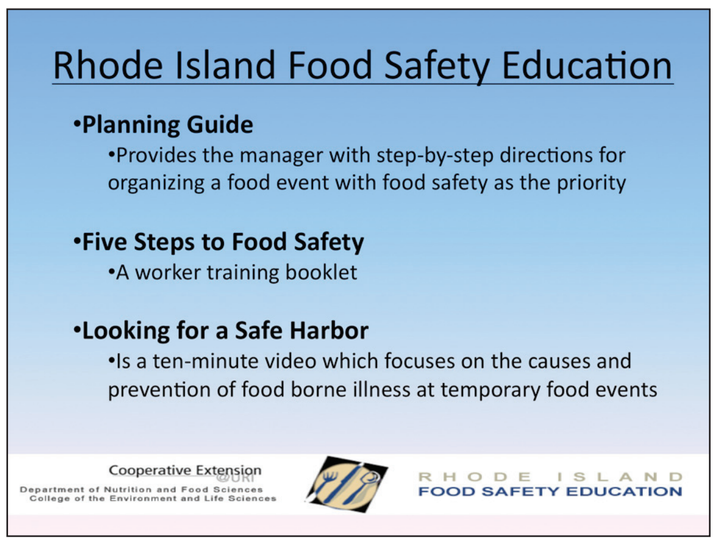
PAST:

Technical Writing

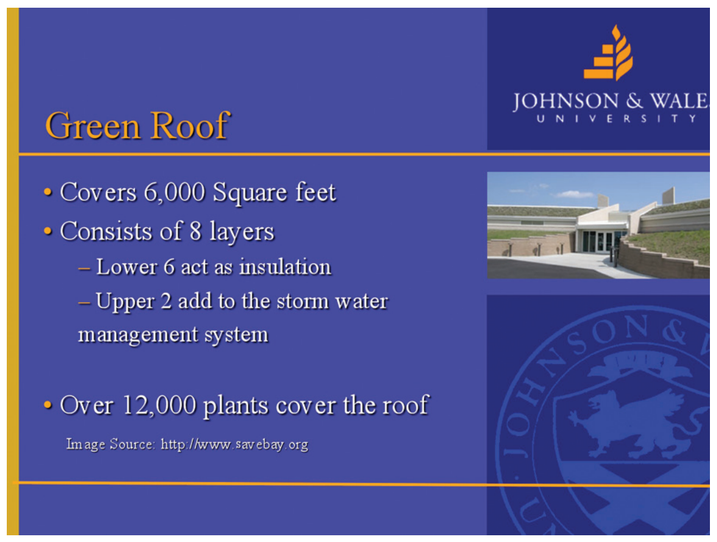
From 2001-2008, students in the technical writing course helped to solve community problems by preparing reports and manuals for our partners in the local non-profit community.



At the Mt. Hope Learning Center in Providence, a donated computer lab helped give elementary and middle school-aged children a safe place to go after school. A team of students developed a lesson manual to help volunteers teach the kids word-processing, PowerPoint, web development, and Internet use.



For volunteers at Our Lady of the Rosary Food Pantry in Providence, a training and operations manual was developed.



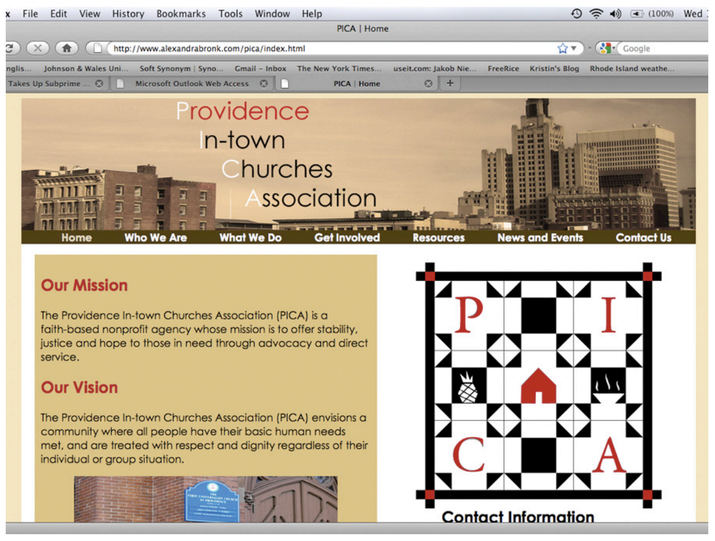
For the environmental education facility Save the Bay on the Narragansett Bay in Providence, students designed a tour for environmental science experts.

PRESENT:

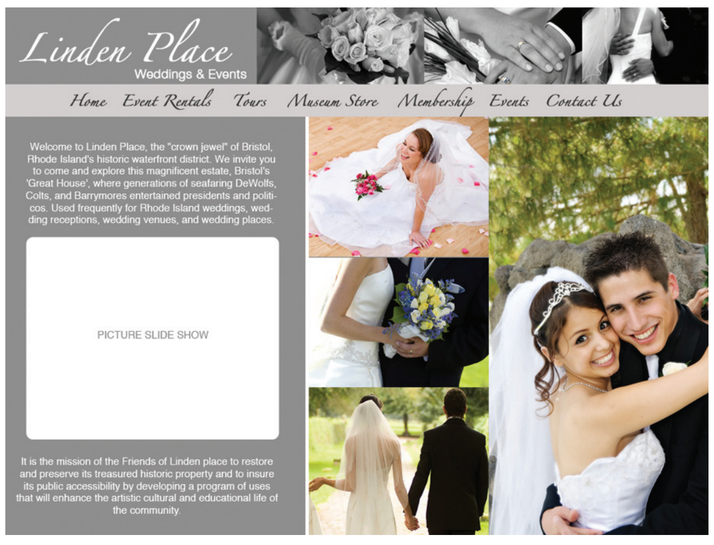
Feinstein Center for Technology and Design, School of Technology Community Service Learning Courses

Since 2004, students in the Web Solutions and Graphics Solutions practicum courses have worked in a state-of-the-art design studio—generously donated by our local philanthropist—to produce web sites and graphic designs for our local non-profit community partners.

The poster for V-Day was designed by students in the Graphics Solutions practicum course.



Web Solutions Team students designed websites according to the specifications of the non-profit clients. Here, Providence Intown Churches Association.



Here, Web Solutions Team students redesigned a website for Linden Place museum, a non-profit historic mansion in Bristol, Rhode Island.

FUTURE:

Future: Project 1. Collaboration between the School of Technology and the English Department

This year, we have formalized the interdisciplinary connection between career fields and communication by developing an new English Department course.

The new Advanced Business Communication course may be linked in a collaborative teaching agreement with an internship or practicum course in any of our major fields in Technology, Business, Hospitality or Culinary Arts.

Here is the catalogue description of our course:

"This course prepares students to perform high-stakes written and oral communication tasks in organizational or entrepreneurial settings in a 21st-century global economy. Building on skills introduced in earlier composition and communication courses, students will plan, compose and deliver documents and presentations for a diverse range of external and internal audiences. The course requires the highest level of professionalism not only in producing quality documents but also in interacting with external and in-house contacts."

In the School of Technology practicum courses, as in the technical writing course in the past, students experience every level of interacting with a client, from initial contact to reviewing draft options to final formal presentation.

During a project, written correspondence and informal oral presentation form an important link between student consultants and community clients.

The School of Technology Web Solutions Team of Winter 2009/2010 participated in a short documentary film and had the opportunity to try out the new Advanced Business Communication course material.

Future: Project 2. Survey study of impact on local non-profit community

Since the impact of student service contributions on community well-being has become an important focus of research in service-learning, we propose to study the impact our students' projects have on the success of our community clients' organizations in accomplishing their missions.

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