Project title:

First Fridays: A monthly technology clinic for members of the Emeriti and Retirees community at UCLA

Submitter’s name, title, and contact information:

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Names of project leader(s) and team members:

(1) Eddie Murphy, Director, Emeriti/Retirees Relations Center
(2) Jackie Reynolds, Director, OIT
(3) The UCLA Help Desk Consortium

A summary paragraph that highlights the significance of the project (about 100 words)

On a monthly basis, the Emeriti/Retirees Relations Center and the UCLA Office of Information Technology invites all UCLA retired faculty and staff to learn anything and everything they want to learn about their electronic devices and applications. Devices include cell phones, Blackberrys, iPods, digital cameras, projectors, Kindles, and PCs, etc. Training includes texting, uploading and downloading photos and music, scanning, printing, email functions, desktop application functions, set-up procedures, E-Bay exploration and much more. The clinic is held in an available computer lab/classroom on the First Friday of each month between 9 a.m. and 12 noon. The Emeriti and Retirees bring their electronic devices, manuals, and questions to the open clinic where they are matched up for a 30-minute one-on-one session with a UCLA Help Desk professional or a student lab assistant to address their particular needs in a fun, non-threatening environment.

A project description (not to exceed 5 pages), including relevant URLs:

This project doesn’t need much description. Eddie Murphy realized the problem that many of her Emeriti/Retiree Resource Center members were having with the new technologies and gadgets that were surrounding them. She first noticed it when an elderly retiree couldn’t get to her cell phone before it went to voicemail. The woman turned the phone over in her hand and said, “I think that people leave me messages, but I can’t figure out how to get them out.” Another visitor to the Emeriti Center wished that she could learn to text her grandson. And it got Eddie thinking. She talked to her boss, Tom Rice, Academic Vice Chancellor who raised it to Jim Davis, Vice Provost for IT at UCLA, who asked if I had any ideas. Eddie and I met, and within an hour, we had the idea for a monthly clinic with one-on-one volunteer help (classes were too generic and too much pressure for the clients). Within a few more days, we had a computer lab, and we had our title of “First Fridays” based on the idea that it would make it easier for our clients AND our volunteers to remember when to come. The Emeriti Center provided coffee and pastries for our clients, and I worked with the various Help Desks around
campus to make sure we had plenty of “tutors”. It was clear from the beginning that we didn’t need technical wizards because the questions would be fairly basic, and that proved true. Typical questions involved uploading and sharing photos, setting up voicemail on a phone, setting up virus protection on a PC, getting wireless working, setting up email groups or adding attachments, and so on.

Our first session, March 5th, had 45 attendees and 11 support staff. Most of the attendees asked if they could bring in more things the following month. Every support staff volunteer said it was incredibly rewarding and asked to be included for future First Fridays.

In addition to solving so many lingering and annoying problems for our clients (some of whom were 94 years old or older!!), key wins were:

(1) the emeriti/retirees talked and shared tech stories over coffee and clearly enjoyed themselves,
(2) the help desk support staff got to know each other better and started building a list of the most user-friendly books and documentation out there for between-clinic recommendations,
(3) the young students felt it was an incredible volunteer opportunity that opened their eyes to the impact that the things they take for granted have on these people born in such a different time, and above all,
(4) it showed some of the most valued members of our UCLA community – those that spent most of their lives contributing to the growth and success of UCLA – that we care about them and their continued success too.

- The technology utilized in the project:

The technology needed was simply an available room with about 12-15 computers, wireless access, a printer and a scanner, and a nearly-equal number of moderately technically-savvy, patient, friendly staff. All other technology was provided by the clients themselves.

- The timeframe of implementation:

It took about 10 days from the time we came up with the idea until a flyer was developed and mailed to the members of the Emeriti/Retirees Center. We needed to do paper flyers since many of the problems were with their computers and email!! 😊 In those 10 days, we picked a starting date and ongoing schedule, secured a room, and ensured at least 8 volunteers to staff it. We continued to get volunteer sign-ups after that date and we changed rooms after the first session when we found that the wireless access wasn’t what we needed in the first room.

- Objective customer satisfaction data (not to exceed 2 pages):
The most visible customer satisfaction was the way each person left the clinic satisfied that they had learned something new and valuable. Almost every person asked their particular Help Desk assistant if they would be willing to be a private consultant for pay, which told me that out “tutors” were being both patient and helpful. Almost every attendee signed up for the April clinic because they wanted to practice and then be sure they had a spot to come back and learn something new. In addition to that feedback, Jim Davis wrote something to people involved and I received a note from one of the clients. Both are included below.

From Vice Provost Jim Davis:

“You have probably heard about the first First Friday in which IT staff (generally help desk staff around the campus) volunteered 3 hours of their time to help retired faculty and staff with technology. Everything I am hearing (and I have talked to several people) is that this went way beyond just helping people with some technology. What I have heard is that we have a group of IT staff who went way beyond the call of the job and took up something because they wanted to give back to the community. We have retired faculty and staff who took it upon themselves to brave the technology world and learn how to use technology that to them is still pretty foreign. We have a program that turned out to be a social event for the retired faculty and staff and at the same time a program that brought the retired community together with the younger UCLA community, creating a greater appreciation for each other. We have a program that I know was personally satisfying to the IT staff and a program that I think took a step in engaging the retired community in a particularly vibrant way.

This started with Tom Rice. I think Eddie Murphy and Jackie Reynolds really put together a “helluva” first program. Everyone I have talked to is looking forward to April 2.”

From an attendee:

“Please sign me up for April clinic. The first clinic was an outstanding success; well-attended, well-organized, excellent teachers and very cordial and welcoming staff. This obviously fulfills a great need. My only suggestion is that the individual session be increased to 1/2 hour rather than 20 minutes, which really seems a bit too limiting. Thanks again for the opportunity to participate in this valuable program, kudos to the excellent staff! Bette Billet”

In summary, I realize that this may be an unusual submittal for the Sautter Award… Not a line of code was written! But it certainly qualifies as innovative, collaborative and sharable. And the public service and outreach to a most valued sector of our UC community was undeniable. To those of us who are in the trenches of IT every day, it’s hard to imagine looking at the back of a cell phone in the hope of finding a way to access the “secret message place” but for those people who are looking, technology is a scary place and the documentation that comes in the box is no better. Helping the “digital immigrants” become even a little more comfortable with the tools of the 21st Century actually taught those of us who helped (especially the UCLA students) even more about technology than we taught our elders. And to see a 19-year-old student laughing with a 90-year-old retiree or cooing over the pictures of the retiree’s great-grandchild that he or she could now upload was transforming.