“The Case Study Challenge” is an original, semester-long assignment that partners CI students with The California State University Channel Islands Foundation – a 501(c)(3) organization whose charitable purpose is “placing students at the center of the educational experience…[by providing an]…undergraduate and graduate education that facilitates learning across disciplines through integrative approaches, emphasizes experiential and service-learning, and graduate studies with multicultural and international perspectives.” (par. 1)

Project Overview:

“The Case Study Challenge” offers students 21 field-based activities - each with differing point totals based on their difficulty - that students must choose from in order to earn 150 points in total by semester’s end. By doing so, students actively apply many of the concepts discussed during class, while simultaneously utilizing those concepts to give back to a nonprofit organization in our local community.

Project Activities:

For this semester-long assignment, students must choose any combination of options from the Case Study Menu below, in effort to attempt 150 points in total by semester’s end.

Ps Possible: Menu Option: Ps Received:
25 1. Thank 10 CI donors via handwritten thank you notes
25 2. Thank 5 CI donors via personal phone calls
25 3. Collect the current contact information for 15 CI alumni
25 4. Attend a CI Foundation board meeting
25 5. Attend a CI Foundation fundraising event
25 6. Detail 3 unique ideas for thanking CI donors
25 7. Detail 3 unique ideas for recruiting CI donors
25 8. Create a social media post for University Advancement
25 9. Write a personal thank you to thank CI donors

Ps Possible: Menu Option: Ps Received:
50 10. Volunteer at a CI Foundation fundraising event
50 11. Assess a CI Foundation fundraising event
50 12. Create a video to thank CI donors
50 13. Create a video to recruit CI donors
50 14. Interview a CI donor
50 15. Interview a CI Foundation board member
50 16. Job-shadow a University Advancement employee
50 17. Take part in a focus group self assessment
50 18. Help carry out a “Thank-You” event on campus
50 19. Secure a CI scholarship donation

Ps Possible: Menu Option: Ps Received:
75 20. Complete a mini-pilot study of current CI students
75 21. Carry out an original CI Foundation fundraising initiative

Service-Learning Outcomes:

To date, “The Case Study Challenge” has resulted in over 1,000 volunteer hours, approximately 250 personal phone calls, and nearly 1,000 handwritten thank you notes. This service-learning project has also raised more than $13,000 in donations toward the Dennis Gregory Mechatronics Scholarship - a scholarship founded by CI’s very own Kim Lamb Gregory in memory of her late husband.

Best Practices:

Instead of mere rote memorization and regurgitation of course material, “The Case Study Challenge” requires students to actively apply that material to a real-world context. Reading about board governance or fund development is one thing; attending a board meeting in-person or volunteering at an actual fundraising event is something else entirely. The Case Study Challenge also require students to connect their lived experiences to course concepts via personal reflection. Kuh (2008) describes a key element of service-learning as “the opportunity students have to both apply what they are learning in real-world settings and reflect in a classroom setting on their service experiences…[They] model the idea that giving something back to the community is an important college outcome, and that working with community partners is good preparation for citizenship, work, and life” (par. 10). Consistent with this argument, I have found that student reflections increase in nuance, sophistication, and even compassion throughout the semester. This progression reveals a greater appreciation for the work done by the The California State University Channel Islands Foundation, as well as for other nonprofit leaders in Ventura County and beyond.