Tech Comm students to share ideas for community projects that have staying power

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Avery Edenfield, an assistant professor of Technical Communication and Rhetoric, talks with students in this 2017 photo. He is the mentor/instructor for an advanced class on creating and managing complex projects. (Donna Barry photo)

They started with talking about the problems of Cache Valley society. Kids bullied online. Addicts in danger of overdose.

That’s often where any discussion ends.

But in one Technical Communication class, the goal has been to find actual answers — more importantly, solutions that will outlast the three-month focus of university students.

On Tuesday, April 23, students of English 5420: Project Management for Technical Communication will exhibit and discuss the tangible results of their efforts to help relieve under-addressed issues within the community.

Projects for Good: A Community Research Exhibition, open to the public, will begin at 6:30 p.m. at the Logan Library, 255 N. Main, Logan.

Instructor Avery Edenfield, an assistant professor of Technical Communication and Rhetoric in the Department of English, said the class requires students take on a complex writing project that involves multiple deadlines, input from many stakeholders or clients, progress reports — and to do it all within a team. “It’s pretty tough,” said Edenfield.

Plus, the project had to have lasting impact. Because most of the 15 students are graduating this spring, Edenfield’s goal was for class members to “create something that lives on after they graduate.”

The four resulting nonprofits are:

- **Logan Opioid Collective**, in partnership with the Utah Naloxone Project. The group prepared and hosted a community training April 15 in Logan that taught attendees how to recognize overdoses and how to respond. The standing-room-only crowd received kits containing Naloxone, a medication that can counter the effects of an overdose. Some 50 kits were distributed.

- **Logan Learning Lagoon**. Targeting Spanish-speaking families, the group designed a short course on learning English featuring the novel approach of “flipping” the lecture and homework. They created playful instructional videos designed to be watched in the evenings with family members, while class time for youngsters is spent in face-to-face practice.

- **Recogneyes**. This project to increase awareness of cyber bullying among college students includes a video designed to appeal to USU students. Edenfield explains that the good behavior we’re taught as youngsters often evaporates in online interactions. The students, he said, wanted a discussion “that is more peer to peer instead of from an institution. They’re people talking to each other.”

- **Cache Valley Self Defense**. In seeking to give people tools to defend themselves against a mugging or, say, a parking lot assault, the group has created a series of YouTube videos. The students teamed with a local martial arts studio to illustrate basic defensive moves.

Edenfield said the first day of class begins with a discussion of social problems the students have encountered in the Logan area. Once the problems are identified and teams formed, the students do a “ton” of research, track down experts, and locate stakeholders in the community who may benefit, as well as teach. The final step is to create a physical program that will live beyond next week’s USU commencement.

The process also involved writing a $300 grant, funded by the Mountain West Center for Regional Studies and used for printing costs.
One of the parameters of the class was that the project be based in Logan with the involvement of Cache Valley residents. “It’s really focused locally,” he said, “so students can see small ways they can make a difference here in their community.”

This is the second year Edenfield has taught the course, and he wants to continue to refine it, particularly in “figuring out how to make these projects live on to the next semester, how to involve more people, how to make the projects have a bigger footprint, and how to bring in more grants.

“We’re going to continue to shape it and make it into, really, an incubator of community ideas.”

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