



# The Computerworld Honors Program

Honoring those who use Information Technology to benefit society

## Final Copy of Case Study

**YEAR:**  
*2012*

**STATUS:**  
*Laureate*

**Organization name:**  
Pace University

**Organization URL:**  
[www.pace.edu](http://www.pace.edu)

**Project Name:**  
Intergenerational Computing

**What social/humanitarian issue was the project designed to address? What specific metrics did you use to measure the project's success?**

The social/humanitarian issues the project was designed to address included the increasing international aging population and improving in college students attitude, awareness, and advocacy for older adults. Across the U.S., there will be profound implications in the coming years as the current baby boomers turn 60 years old. The growing older adult population is of great concern, especially to N.Y., where in the year 2000, persons aged 60 and older represented 18% of the total population and are expected to comprise 22% of the population by 2020. At the same time, the technology boom is creating a world that relies on computers for everything from purchasing groceries to driving a car. The problem is that older adults, the fastest growing population, often are not comfortable or included in advancing technology. For example, though the Internet appears on the surface to be well suited for the elderly because they have leisure time available and are moderately less physically active, many older adults feel computers are technically intimidating and demanding, and are thus reluctant to learn how to use them. Moreover, hearing, vision, or motor skill disabilities could make computer usage discouraging, aiding in the "digital divide." The digital divide, the gap between new technology and the ability to use (and sometimes, afford) it, is greatest among older adults. The very group that would benefit by spending their leisure time e-mailing friends and family, shopping, and connecting with others in online communities often is unable to do so. Pre- and post-research instruments are administered to the older adults, as well as the undergraduate students. Results show a statistically significant positive change in attitude and advocacy of the undergraduates toward older adults, moreover improved cognitive functioning and quality of life in older adults.

**Please describe the technologies used and how those technologies were deployed in an innovative way. Also, please include any technical or other challenges that were overcome for the successful implementation of the project.**

In this project, specially trained undergraduate students enrolled in an Intergenerational Computing service-learning class instructed older adults in geriatric facilities. Geriatric facilities, especially in these difficult economic times, have few staff to work with older adults for technology instruction or related activities. This model is based on mutually beneficial partnerships with geriatric facilities, government agencies, and higher education institutions. The students learned the consequences of the process of aging as it pertains to utilizing technology. The students also are trained for sensitivity towards older adults, as well as accessibility options in the Microsoft and Apple operating systems. Moreover, students learn about assistive technology adaptations and devices. After several weeks of readings and intense training, students proceed to an orientation at the community partner. Community partners include senior centers, nursing homes, assistive living, and independent senior living residences. During the orientation, elderly residents who are interested in taking the computer course introduce themselves to the college students, and vice versa. A quick, charismatic random pairing transpires between the older adults and college students. Paired students and older adults commence at least 7 weeks of individualized lessons tailored around a core of base skills in addition to particularized desires of the senior citizens. In the facilities where technology was not available for the resident population, students solicited donations of computer equipment, refurbished the computers and installed computer labs.

**Please list the specific humanitarian benefits the project has yielded so far.**

Students have installed over 10 computer labs and equipment in underserved, economically challenged resident rooms, and have helped hundreds of senior citizens connect with their families around the world. One unexpected result of this intergenerational endeavor was the special bonds that developed between the elderly and undergraduate students through these meaningful interactions. The benefits were far reaching, and the project was a much valued intergenerational as well as life changing experience for some. To the undergraduate students, it became clear that senior citizens are capable of learning at any age, were thirsty for acquiring new skills, and greatly respected their young teachers.

**Please provide the best example of how the project has benefited a specific individual, enterprise or organization. Feel free to include personal quotes from individuals who have directly benefited from the work.**

Continuing care facilities, such as United Hebrew in New Rochelle, N.Y., has gained several computer labs that would not be in existence due to lack of funding for the residents if Pace University students did not get the equipment donated and install them. Students pair up with older adults to tutor them in current computing technology. The elderly participants have said: 1) "I am very grateful for having the opportunity to participate in such a quality program. Creative writing stretched my comfort zone the most. The program also helped my friend socialize, since English was not his first language. Thank you all." 2) "I enjoyed using old, pre-retirement skills again, and learning and using new skills. I have renewed confidence. I am not the stereotyped old lady. In fact, with my new burst of confidence I may be even better than I always assumed I was." 3) "Lack of computer skills in the past made a significant difference in my life and I felt it might make a significant difference in my future, but it was a skill it seemed impossible for me to master. But now I feel I can make significant progress and even derive much pleasure from using the computer." 4) "I am reaching out to know people I never thought I'd be interested in knowing. My mood is more confident, more reaching out to know more diverse people, and feel like I can handle complex situations better." 5) "It has helped me lessen the grieving time each day, to

communicate with others, and get out of the house more often. I looked forward to coming twice a week (even though I don't usually get up this early)." 6) "The group keeps me alive, invigorated."