THE APPLICATION OF SERVICE LEARNING TO MARKETING AND MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

As business faculty become more aware of service learning's benefits in pedagogy and in community engagement, more service learning may be incorporated into the curriculum. This article presents an overview of service learning, the role of service learning in enhancing "deep learning," and how service learning increases dialogue between the community and college. Two examples are presented of how service learning enhanced the efforts of two non-profit organizations. Marketing students assisted an agency responsible for helping to improve Atlantic City's historic downtown area. Management students helped a local Girl Scout troop develop an after-school program to foster appreciation of Hispanic cultures.

Over the last decade, colleges and universities have renewed their historic commitment to service. The growth of service-learning on college campuses during the 1990s is a strong indicator of the emphasis colleges are now placing on civic engagement, good citizenship, and fostering campus-community partnerships (Schroeder, 2003). On many campuses curriculum-based service, or service-learning as it is most frequently referred to, represents a growth area (Fisher, 1998).

This commitment to service is seen in the mission statements of colleges and universities where it is commonly noted that the purpose of the institution is to educate students intellectually, morally and for good citizenship. As part of fulfilling that aspect of the college's mission, there has been a focus on incorporating community service, often through service learning, in the course work of many programs.

Service learning, a pedagogical technique combining academic learning with community service, offers many benefits to students, faculty, educational institutions, and the community (Klink & Athaide, 2004). A definition of service-learning appeared in a 1996 article by Bringle and Hatcher:

> We view service learning as a credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflects on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of the course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. Unlike extracurricular voluntary service, service learning is a course-based service experience that produces the best outcomes when meaningful service activities are related to course material through reflection activities such as directed writings, small group discussions, and class presentations . . . . (p. 222).

This definition makes a distinction between service learning and volunteerism and traditional practicum or internships. The distinction is important in order to understand service-learning's potential to shape a positive academic-civic partnership. Students who participate in service learning provide direct community service as part of an academic course. In addition the students are expected to learn about and reflect upon the community context in which service is provided, and understand the relationship between their service and the academic coursework.

Service learning is significant because it demonstrates reciprocity between the campus and the community as well as an opportunity to provide students with specific academic learning experiences. This important collaborative relationship between the college and community organizations provides each partner with mutual benefits. The benefits for the community include designing projects which help to address community needs. The benefits for the college include involving students in civic responsibilities and providing students with opportunities in which they can apply concepts studied in the classroom to real-life situations.

Almost all service-learning programs that seek to have a significant institutional as well as community impact also seek to promote faculty involvement and to establish a reliable curricular base (Schroeder, 2003; Zlotkowski, 1999).

In addition, colleges find that these collaborative relationships, developed through service learning, provide avenues for regular feedback with the community and offer opportunities to incorporate community perspectives into course or curriculum revision (Gelmon, 2000; Freeman, 2000). According to Papamarcos (2002), service learning represents the most effective teaching tool available to the contemporary business professor.

The Role of Service Learning in the Business Curriculum

Service learning can play an important role in the business curriculum. In recent years educators have been subject to public pressure to broaden the educational experiences of business students beyond the usual corporate internships and to apply their academic learning to social problems (Easterling & Rudell, 1997). Eyler et al. (2001) provide a comprehensive review of research linking service learning with a number of positive student outcomes: academic development that reflects mastery of discipline-based material, ability to relate discipline-based material to the "real world" problem solving, critical thinking, and cognitive development. Parenthetically, Vogelgesang and Astin (2000) state that the students benefit from the opportunity to connect the classroom learning experience with satisfying community needs. Students also benefit by developing leadership and communication skills, increasing their sensitivity to reducing stereotypes, and committing to service and social responsibility. Lastly, students gain through career development. Because of these student benefits, students enrolled in management and marketing courses would gain by having a service learning component in their course work.

On the basis of interviews with senior managers in a variety of corporations and professional organizations, Porter and McKibbin (1988) discovered that any move by business schools toward broadening the academic experience of their students beyond the technical and functional areas would be enthusiastically endorsed by many employers. Service learning can be merged with traditional course content in business curricula by having students pursue service learning as internship assignments, acting as "consultants" or volunteering and working with staff at an agency.

Specific Application of Service Learning in Business Courses

Faculty at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey (Stockton) incorporated service learning into two different courses. In order to understand the incorporation of service learning within the college's curriculum, it is important to know the background of Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. The college is a 4-year public, liberal arts institution located 14 miles northwest of Atlantic City, New Jersey offering baccalaureate and master's degrees.

The college's academic community is organized around five divisions: Arts and Humanities, General Studies, Natural and Mathematical Sciences, Social and Behavioral Sciences, and Professional Studies. Of the divisions, Professional Studies is the largest with business, computer science, and allied health professions. The business studies program offers tracks in accounting, finance, management, marketing, hospitality management and international business.

Many of Stockton's degree programs offer experiential education through internships, field study, service learning, or independent research projects. These experiential experiences provide students with valuable opportunities to apply what they have learned in the classroom. In service learning students apply what is learned in class to community work, and use what is learned in the volunteer experience to enhance their grasp of course material. Students also attend reflection sessions and write reflective papers discussing the personal impact service learning has had on them. The service learning component is integrated into the course and provides the student with an opportunity to serve the community at a non-profit agency while gaining hands-on experience that enriches learning (*Richard Stockton Catalog*, 2004).

Marketing Project
A Service Learning Experience Aiding Main Street Atlantic City

In the Spring 2005 semester marketing students enrolled in the capstone course completed a preliminary marketing needs assessment for Main Street Atlantic City (MSAC). MSAC is a small division of Main Street New Jersey (a nonprofit organization) that operates under the auspices of the Department of Community Affairs to improve New

Jersey's historical downtown areas through local partnerships and other available resources.

The 28 students enrolled in Strategic Marketing were divided into eight teams each consisting of three or four members. Throughout the term students and their professor met with various members of the MSAC project to acquire the background information necessary to develop the needs assessment.

One team was responsible for developing a SWOT analysis and for identifying the challenges faced by MSAC. Significant challenges identified included the need for the city to provide more police protection and cleaning crews; choosing the right mix of retail stores and restaurants that would not directly compete with a nearby outlet shopping center; creating greater awareness in the Atlantic City community of MSAC's efforts in order to generate more volunteers and donors; eliminating undesirable businesses (e.g., "massage" parlors); educating store owners about the desirability of modifying the visual appearance of their stores; and the overall challenge of making downtown Atlantic City area a desirable place to live, work, and visit.

Another team worked on target market identification. Market segmentation profiles were developed for members of the local community, nearby college students, out-of-towners, and families. The profiles revolved around demographic, geographic, and psychographic characteristics as well as benefits sought and usage patterns.

Marketing objectives and strategies were developed by a third group. Short-term goals included creating buzz of what is to come, recruiting more volunteers, raising funds, creating excitement for the downtown area, developing physical enhancements, and bringing the community and small businesses together. Long-term objectives focused on attracting a variety of retail operations to the area, developing a bridge with other community projects in the area, creating a downtown area that would be inviting for both locals and tourists, and broadening the income and functional base of the downtown area. Strategies developed around the 4 P's of marketing provided additional guidance for members of MSAC.

A fourth team worked on developing a positioning strategy. Their approach involved interviewing customers and store owners in the area. The primary conclusion was that Atlantic City needs to reposition itself. Current perceptions are that the area is not attractive and inviting. Renovations must be undertaken to improve the overall appearance, lights must be added to provide a sense of safety, and the area must be kept clean and look attractive. Clearly, these changes will take some time to implement.

Others worked on outlining a market research plan. The objective of this plan was to create awareness of Main Street Atlantic City and to find out how locals, visitors, and store owners felt about revitalization of that part of Atlantic City. Recommendations were made that phone surveys, pencil and paper surveys, and focus group interviews be conducted. The students developed the questions to be asked for each respondent group along with outlining how and when the research should be conducted.

An interesting suggestion made by the team working on the retailing strategy was that Main Street Atlantic City should be culturally themed. The three sub-cultures identified were Asian, Hispanic, and African-Americans. The recommendation was for each section to have restaurants and specialty shops in various price ranges that would reflect the ethnicity of that particular group.

Main Street Atlantic City is currently using the slogan, "Unlock the Possibilities." The team that was responsible for developing a promotions plan thought that this was a good slogan. Their plan to "Unlock the Possibilities" included hosting a fundraising dinner to help generate funds for future events and to generate publicity about the activities of MSAC. They also recommended that banners or flags be hung from street poles and that stickers be placed in the windows of store shops to generate additional awareness. They also suggested a raffle car giveaway event. Five names would be randomly selected from among the raffle ticket buyers. Each of those five people would then be given a key. One key would unlock the car. This promotion fits in nicely with the slogan used by MSAC.

The eighth team was charged with the task of image development and fund-raising. One concern that became apparent early on was that many merchants and local community members were not aware of the efforts currently underway by MSAC. Greater awareness is critical to the success of this organization in order for them to garner more support. Recommendations included hosting a dinner for potential investors and businesses, a block party to bring merchants and community members together, consistent use of the "Unlock the

Possibilities" theme, and development of a tagline such as "Rebuilding our Past to Create a Better Future."

This service learning project was an overwhelming success. Students felt that they greatly benefited from this real-world experience. MSAC received marketing expertise that otherwise would have been difficult for them to obtain. Since much work remains to be done, this project was carried over to a new group of students enrolled in the marketing capstone course during the fall 2005 semester.

Management Project
Festival of Hispanic Cultures: A Service Learning Project in Urban Elementary Schools

One of the courses offered in the Management Track is Management Skills. Students who are juniors and seniors typically take this course as part of their course requirements. The service learning experience is offered to Management Skills students as one possible option for completing an end-of-term project.

During the Spring 2003 semester, three Stockton students enrolled in Management Skills and four education students majoring in Spanish volunteered to work on a service learning project for the Girl Scouts of the South Jersey Pines. The goal of the partnership between Stockton students and the Girl Scouts was to develop an after school program on the appreciation of Hispanic cultures for two area elementary schools, one located in Atlantic City and the other in Pleasantville (both urban school districts). The after-school program was part of the Girl Scouts' desire to establish Girl Scout troops in urban schools. The purpose of the project was to increase elementary students' awareness of the significance of other cultures in the region and to help develop children's appreciation of diversity by learning more about other cultures.

The service learning office arranged for Management Skills and Spanish Education majors of Stockton students to meet the community partners, representatives from Girl Scouts of the South Jersey Pines, and representatives from the schools. The students were informed about the goals of the project, the time frame available to offer the program, and the budget allocated by the Girl Scouts organization for delivering the program. The community team members and service learning students worked on developing objectives and established evaluation methods.

The Management Skills students researched and developed information that could be included in the diversity component of the program, developed the budget and a strategic timeline for operating the program, and assisted with program implementation. The Spanish majors worked on historical information, traditions, and foods of the various Hispanic cultures. In addition, academic exercises and games were created to increase students' awareness of Hispanic cultures.

The after-school program was developed and the team of service learning students, from the Management Skills class and the Spanish Language class, presented ten sessions on Hispanic Cultural Awareness. A total of 60 students from both the Atlantic City and Pleasantville schools participated in the six-week program. The elementary students learned about the cultures of Colombia and Puerto Rico.

At the last session of the after-school program, a public program was presented by the elementary school students and the service learning students from Stockton. During the public program girls and boys of the elementary schools presented their projects, demonstrated dances, provided cultural foods, and shared stories about understanding different cultures. The success of this program was evident when community members and parents attended and participated in the public program. The parents thanked the service learning students, faculty from Richard Stockton College, and the Girl Scouts of the South Jersey Pines for their concern about the issues surrounding cultural understanding in the communities and for caring about their children. Parents joined in the dances and singing and contributed ethnic foods for the party. Those parents, school leaders and community college instructors, who attended the presentation applauded the after-school program as one way to effectively introduce a stronger understanding of the Hispanic cultures to the community and to children in the community. Likewise, at a meeting held by the United Way of Atlantic County, the College, Girl Scouts, and school districts were lauded for their partnership in providing the after-school programs in the community. The after-school program was mentioned by United Way as a strong example of community partnerships that make a difference in the Atlantic County community.

From this service learning experience the Management Skills students gained experience planning and running meetings, working with community partners, working within a budget, and

being responsible for delivering a program within the time frame allocated within the school year. In addition, the Management Skills students gained experience working on project teams, addressing problems that occurred during the planning and operation of the project, and troubleshooting issues that occurred regarding space logistics and funding restrictions. In some cases, the negotiation skills learned in the Management Skills class proved to be valuable in providing snacks, supplies, and teaching aids on a minimal budget. Above all, in the reflection papers written by the Skills students, it was apparent that the participants gained a greater appreciation for helping the community, participating in a project that had a visible result in the community, and of being able to meaningfully apply the skills they learned in business classes on budgeting, strategic planning, and diversity. The lessons presented in class on social responsibility will have a greater meaning to those students who made a difference in two urban schools in Atlantic County. Through hands-on experience, the Management Skills students were able to apply what they had learned in the classroom.

Given the positive outcomes of this experience, the Girl Scouts of the South Jersey Pines intends to continue development of more cultural awareness programs on African-American, Asian, and Russian cultures when additional grant funding is received.

Summary

Service learning is an effective form of pedagogy because it links academic study and practical application. Through service learning students have an opportunity to develop problem-solving skills and integrate business theories with the practical concerns of people in need and the organizations trying to serve them. Students gain the opportunity to improve self-confidence, to cultivate leadership potential, and to become engaged in an issue of social concern that may be the beginning of lifelong involvement.

The service learning projects between the Richard Stockton College Marketing students and Main Street Atlantic City, and Management and Spanish majors and the Girl Scouts of the South Jersey Pines, are examples of campus/community partnerships that made a difference in the community and made a difference in the lives of the college students. The features of these partnerships highlight the values of sharing and reciprocity, building collaborative work relationships between individuals,

building relationships with partnering organizations and sustaining the partnerships.

As business faculty become more aware of service learning's benefits, it is hoped that more service learning experiences will be incorporated into the course work of business programs.

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