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Integrating Service-learning in the Business Curriculum

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INTRODUCTION

The test of real learning is the successful application of what has been learned. Service-learning is a pedagogy of engagement that gives us an opportunity to facilitate this level of learning among our students. More importantly, it ensures the application of students' knowledge inasmuch as they critically explore and challenge the foundations of their personal thinking. It empowers them to build on their learning experiences in such a way that they develop both social and intellectual capital. They can become socially conscious citizens as well as leaders in their professions and their communities.

Service-learning is a teaching method that combines meaningful service to the business, professional, or civic community with curriculum-based learning. Through the use of service-learning methods, students enrich and broaden their academic skills by applying what they learn in the classroom to the real world.

The bottom line is that service-learning seeks to balance academic rigor with practical relevance, set in a context of community engagement, which furnishes students with a broader and richer educational experience. As a best practice framework, service-learning integrations must include:

- Reality
- Community engagement
- Academic rigor
- Reflection
- Responsibility
- Professional knowledge
- Extensive planning and implementation

In other words, best practice service-learning environments meet real business, professional, or civic community needs; engage the students with community partners through collaboration and service delivery; facilitate the achievement of curricular objectives; and give students opportunities to engage in reflection throughout the experience. This environment also develops student responsibilities, from project initiation through to implementation; equips students with knowledge and skills needed for service; and requires strategic and tactical planning and coordination with multiple stakeholders.

MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

Management education has been criticized by a number of management thinkers for being too narrow in focus. Accordingly, their critique of business education shows that (a) the business curriculum focuses on functional and discrete rather than cross-functional and holistic knowledge; (b) the course work emphasizes practical problem-solving "tool kits" rather than deep theoretical knowledge; (c) the underlying paradigm of business education views humanity and human interactions in purely transactional terms; and (d) the grounding morality of business education asserts the supremacy of shareholder wealth.

From their collective experience with service-learning, Godfrey, Illes and Berry (2005) believe that service-learning pedagogy is a needed counterpoint to the narrow focus of business education. They point out that the importance of the four Rs (4 Rs) of service-learning — reality, reflection, reciprocity, and responsibility — each yield a broader educational experience for students. These 4 Rs serve as a structural gage for all service-learning integrations and are in keeping with the best practice framework mentioned above.

INTEGRATING SERVICE-LEARNING IN THE WEHCBA

Roosevelt University's mission is to be a national leader in educating socially conscious citizens for active and dedicated lives as leaders in their professions and their communities. This mission compels us to seek new and innovative ways to ensure that College of Business Administration students benefit from business, professional and civic community partnerships, and are prepared for responsible citizenship in our global society.

Our objective of this integration project was to kick off the development of service-learning pedagogy and activities in the WEHCBA as a distinctively competitive learning advantage for our students and our business community. This will continue through curriculum integrations and ultimately the development of a center for service-learning in the WEHCBA. This will support our goals for distinctive competitiveness, value for money, and building greater levels of ethical awareness, leadership development, economic progress and civic engagement for our business students.

Such a broad endeavor must begin with the basics. These primarily involve (a) building relations with the business community and finding potential civic engagement opportunities, (b) gaining a clear understanding of social justice concepts, and (c) having dialogues among the business faculty about the value of service-learning, the appropriateness of curriculum objectives, and desirable student outcomes. In the beginning stages, integration service-learning in the business curriculum may result in service-learning modules, and then progress to service-learning projects and on to a service-learning center with opportunities for teaching, research, and mutual learning for our faculty, students, and community stakeholders.

Our first service-learning integration began in spring 2008 with the HRM 493: Seminar in Human Resource Management course. The model used to integrate service-learning in this course is a continuous improvement model, starting with working with faculty, and continuing on to mutually developing a framework for a selected course, implementing the framework, measuring the results, and modifying the framework for future implementation.

Partnering in the Learning Environment

The partners for the WEHCBA service-learning integration in the HRM 493 course were Carolyn Wiley, Department of Management, Roosevelt University; Marjorie Paddock, Vice President and Director of Diversity, Harris Bank; Airies Davis, Assistant Vice President of Corporate Recruiting, Merrill Lynch Capital; and Valerie Parker, Vice President of Human Resources, Bay Valley Foods. Each business partner completed a podcast interview, which provided answers to the five key questions listed below. Each partner also visited the class, held information workshops, and served on a panel of evaluators for the final student presentations. For the interviews, the partners answered the five questions below:

- What is the key issue or challenge that needs sorting?
- Describe the background information regarding the challenge or problem.
- What's contributing to the challenge or problem?
- How would your organization like to resolve the challenge or problem?
- What's being done now to resolve the challenge or problem?

COURSE STRUCTURE

The HRM 493: Seminar in Human Resource Management (HRM) is the capstone course for Master's students concentrating in human resource management. The service-learning course structure involved three key themes (e.g., the war for talent or recruitment management, performance management, and diversity management). The themes were derived from the identified business needs of three major corporations located in Illinois.

The HRM 493 course was structured to address its regular course objectives using a service-learning structure. Three themes were used to solicit and sustain a real world learning environment, in collaboration with community partners. Everything the students did in the class focused on service-learning. The activities included learning about social justice concepts; understanding themselves; challenging their own thinking; sharing knowledge; being respectful of team members, community partners and others in the learning environment; being stretched to think beyond the typical business solutions in order to build and deliver holistic, sustainable, and innovative solutions to meet the identified needs of three companies.

We worked with vice presidents of these companies and teamed with them to provide practical, yet innovative solutions for them. Each group of two or three students focused on one theme in order to develop expertise in that area and to ultimately meet the needs of the businesses with which they were engaged. The students volunteered for the theme of their choice and determined which classmates they would team with as a theme group.

The course was designed so that each theme group would engage with a community business partner to create solutions pertaining to their theme only, and each class member would individually support the success of the other two theme groups by directly listening to their needs and sharing useful knowledge.

Every course activity, event, and exercise focused on facilitating learning, fostering communication, developing professionalism, establishing external networks, building social and intellectual capital, and supporting the 4 Rs of service-learning. The course structure was comprised of class attendance, class participation, session discussion leadership (SDL), and a competency building consulting (CBC) project. Class attendance and class participation were evaluated on an individual basis. Session discussion leadership (SDL) and competency building consulting (CBC) activities were carried out in the theme groups.

In each of these activities, the 4 Rs were applied and built into the process to ensure that students were truly engaged and learning at the deepest levels. As Russ Edgerton said in his 2001 *Education White Paper*, "Learning 'about' things does not enable students to acquire the abilities and understanding they will need for the 21st century. We need new pedagogies of engagement that will turn out the kinds of resourceful, engaged workers and citizens that America now requires."

In this integration, expectations were set high; collaboration was a given; and building social and intellectual capital was a key outcome. The HRM 493 service-learning course structure had the 4 Rs as the basic foundation and each of the course activities were designed to produce related outcomes that were aligned with the course objectives and service-learning pedagogy.

According to student, faculty, and community partners' feedback, the integration was successful. The goal of this integration was to initiate service-learning as part of a selected course in the WEHCBA, starting with one management course in spring 2008. The implementation of service-learning methods in this course would provide a model framework for developing service-learning in the other WEHCBA disciplines. The deliverables for the course involved:

- Application of the 4 Rs
- Student engagement in learning and with community partners
- Build relations for current and future partnership opportunities

The final goal is to build a global center for management effectiveness, inclusive of ongoing service-learning opportunities, development of cross-disciplinary activities, and creation of research and teaching opportunities for faculty and students.

My Reflections

Service-learning pedagogy supports holistic learning. It requires that learners explore their deep biases, prejudices, traditions, and ways of thinking and practicing to arrive at a broader awareness of how these impact their decisions and ultimately society and the environment. It also requires that the faculty (a) resist superficiality; (b) persist in building an environment that facilitates learning and development via reality, reflection, reciprocity, and responsibility; and (c) cast a wide net of engagement opportunities.

Initially, it's hard to know whether the service-learning engagement opportunities or the learning environment created by the faculty (and in some cases by students and faculty) will yield what is necessary to reach the goal of the course. In large part, the success of the engagement is built on whether students take responsibility for the service-learning and maintain the practice of reflection at multiple levels and consistently throughout the course.

Due to the regularity of the engagement with students and business partners, it is imperative that the faculty and the outside organization or partners are committed to service-learning. Service-learning is not for the faint hearted. Furthermore, because of the dynamics of service-learning, the most beneficial engagements are with people who can make a difference in their organizations. For example, people who are at the right levels in their organizations and with the right mix of experiences in their careers can be the most useful.

Service-learning requires significant reflection. Business students can learn a tremendous amount about themselves if they are willing to reflect. The bottom line is that service-learning requires some level of understanding of social justice concepts, an understanding of oneself, and clarity about the key models and frameworks for a given discipline.

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Teaching for the World of Teams: Team-Based Learning as Best Practice

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Several years ago, I attended a workshop on team-based learning highlighting the work of Larry Michaelsen from the University of Oklahoma. Up until that time, I thought what I was doing with groups in my teaching was the same as or similar to team work. I realized very quickly that it was not and that team-based learning was a distinctive form of best-practice teaching with remarkable results. Much of my work at Roosevelt University includes spending time in the public schools, so I have the opportunity to see decisions being made and to watch change take place in these learning communities. In training teachers, specifically Reading Specialists, I have watched the incremental shift to team work within schools. This team work approach is quite different from teachers working alone with the children in their classrooms. This movement has evolved into a culture where the majority of work for the school is completed in teams. These "literacy teams" create a curriculum whereby students

become successful readers and writers for life. Inherent in this change is to raise test scores in literacy. Watching this gradual change take place, of course, has caused a major change in the preparation of reading specialists to ready them for the world of teams.

Teams are working everywhere, not just in schools or as sports teams, but also as people coming together to solve problems, to create new ideas, and to bring forth results for their organizations. Historically in schools, like in other organizations, leadership has gradually included team work to create the vision and mission of the institution. This type of work requires preparation in order to have successful outcomes. Working on a team is not a natural ability that most individuals have. Rather, it requires dispositions that must be modeled, learned, and acquired over time. Often times, teams are formed and the product or outcome is less than what was anticipated and hoped for. Realizing that being on a team requires knowledge in how teams develop and work together is critical.

WHAT IS TEAM-BASED LEARNING?

Simply defined, team-based learning allows you to teach through managing and conducting multiple small teams simultaneously in the same classroom. Michaelsen et al. (2004) discusses the power of teams for powerful learning by distinguishing team-based learning from other forms of teaching. His premise is that teams are distinct from, and more powerful than groups; that the elements of the team-based learning strategy are self-supporting and produce high levels of group cohesiveness. Further, he contends that shifting from traditional teaching to team-based learning requires the following:

- The objectives of the course shift from knowing key concepts to using key concepts and solving problems.
- The role of the teacher changes from dispenser of information and content to designer and manager of the teams.
- The role of the students changes from passive recipients of information to being responsible for the initial acquisition of the content and working with others to learn how to use the content.

GETTING STARTED WITH TEAM-BASED LEARNING

Over the past several years, I have implemented team-based learning strategies into my own teaching. What I have observed is that in critical thinking exercises and applications of problems to a scenario, team members discuss material, hear diverse opinions and contribute while talking the material through. All students are engaged and actively participate in this process. This process evolved out of the notion that when a student graduated from Roosevelt University, it didn't automatically ready them for the role of working in and on teams in their work. I knew that this leap required a knowledge base that needed to begin during their courses

of study. After much trial and error, I realized that students had to know upfront that the program of study was taking on a new aspect of team-based learning. This meant that my courses needed to be redesigned to include all the essential language in the pedagogy of team-based learning. Specifics included stating that students would be required to work on teams and team work would include both in and outside of class time. Teams would have a constant membership for the duration of the semester. Further, assignments would be given and completed as a team. Grades would be earned as individual team members and as a collective team. The shift was difficult for students who were in the program when this change took place. Moving out of a comfort zone into a new teaching and learning arena was a risk for me and for the graduate students. But it is a risk that I'm glad I took. Now, almost three years later, students accept these notions and ideas as part of the path to earning a degree. Moreover, they understand the value of learning about team work and how it transfers back into their daily world of work.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF TEAM-BASED LEARNING

Michaelsen et al. (2004) has developed a set of four guiding principles that need to be considered when considering a change to team-based learning strategies. I have added some things to consider that have worked for me as well.

- Groups must be properly formed and well managed. I take geographic information into consideration and encourage groups to form by where they live in proximity to the University.
- Students must be made accountable for preparing and completing group assignments along with their interactions on the team. I give self-assessment forms to students so they can monitor their team contributions at all levels.
- Team assignments must promote both learning and team development. I develop real-life problems and issues that reading specialists face daily as a key to assignment building.
- Students must receive frequent and immediate feedback. I give both individual and team written feedback on a weekly basis when the teams are in the process of completing assignments.

CONCLUSION

Team-based learning is an interesting way to teach, and motivates and enlightens your students while preparing them for the world of teams. This strategy is exciting and students are engaged in high levels of cognition, problem-solving and communication. It is a strategy that works across all disciplines as well. Our graduate program in language and literacy at Roosevelt University is now described as a program that includes the team-based learning model in which students learn skills while engaged in teams in their