

**INTEGRATION OF ACADEMIC AND SERVICE LEARNING:  
STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS ABOUT ITS EFFECTS AND OUTCOMES**

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper discusses effects on students of an undergraduate business management class, Principles of Quality Management, that was designed, taught, and officially recognized as a university service learning class. Paired t-tests comparing pre- and post-course responses on Likert-scale items measuring beliefs and values showed significant ( $p < .05$ ) changes on 15 of the 23 items. Examination of these results reveal that students reported perceptions of positive cognitive, social, and academic changes and growth in all but two of the 23 items.

**INTRODUCTION**

The integration of academic instruction and service to the community is a philosophy growing more popular on higher education campuses throughout the nation. Certainly structuring "field" work so that it intertwines with the business community is not a new idea. Nevertheless, designing courses to ensure incorporation of a component of pro bono student work within non-profit organizations, while simultaneously emphasizing notions such as corporate and personal social responsibility, is regarded as relatively innovative in many traditional business schools. The main objective of service learning courses is for learners along with instructors to utilize "academic" knowledge and expertise in ways that directly benefit the citizenry.

**METHODS**

Data associated with outcomes of the integration

of service and academic learning format and class emphasis were collected in several ways. After hearing the course requirements and a brief course description, students completed a questionnaire about social, political, and career beliefs and values; on the last day of class the students completed another questionnaire that was rephrased to appropriately reflect the passage of time but that contained the same items. Student identification numbers allowed for pre- and post-course comparisons of responses to the Likert-scale items on the questionnaires. Demographic data, measures related to student effort, pre- and post- course "student created" cognitive maps of "service" and "quality", Keirseley Temperament Test Results and information gained from open-ended questions were also gathered. Course evaluations, course grades, class attendance and participation measures were recorded as well.

Participants in this study were 22 University of Utah upper-division undergraduate business students enrolled in "Principles of Quality Management" in the winter quarter 1997. The primary goals of the course were to increase understanding of the philosophy of quality management, its principles, and its skills and to enhance the understanding that these skills and systems can be successfully applied to not-for-profit organizations in the community.

This course was offered in a lecture/computer laboratory/service learning project format. Although an alternative for students was available as an option to fulfill the course requirement of a service learning project, all

## Developments in Business Simulation and Experiential Learning, Volume 25, 1998

students voluntarily chose to participate in a service learning project. The class met twice weekly as a group in 120 minute sessions. Additionally, students met outside the classroom as work teams to plan, conduct, and finalize the service learning projects.

On the first day of the course each student chose one service learning project for which s/he would assume responsibility along with other class members who had chosen the same project. The service learning project opportunities included consulting and advising management at a school for homeless children, a medical clinic for the homeless, the food service department of the student union at the University, and Customer Relations at the University Hospital. Every week a portion of the class meeting times was spent in discussions and problem solving sessions targeted at progress on and difficulties with the projects as well as learning situations evolving as the project advanced. The course instructor visited each organization over the course of the quarter and remained in contact with each client organization to facilitate successful project results.

### RESULTS

Paired t-tests comparing pre- and post-course responses on the 23 Likert-scale items measuring beliefs and values showed significant ( $p < .05$ ) differences between means on 15 of the 23 items as shown in Table 1 (available upon request). The results in Table 1 have been placed into categories that suggest the impact and effects on students of participation in course learning activities and requirements, particularly the experiential component of the course, the service learning project. Examination of study results reveal that students reported perceptions of positive cognitive, social, and academic changes and growth in all but two of the 23 items and those two were not significant at  $p < .05$ . Nevertheless, of those two items, no change was found in

student beliefs about whether individuals' misfortunes are due to circumstances beyond their control; the second item, belief that an individual can change or help society, indicated students' perceptions of personal efficacy had become slightly weaker.

### DISCUSSION

In terms of cognitive academic learning, the course was geared to develop understanding of how business managers create values and expectations, set directions, develop and maintain an effective leadership system, and evaluate and improve the effectiveness of business organizations. The course also encouraged students to see how businesses can integrate public responsibilities and corporate citizenship into business planning and performance. The student course evaluations were higher than the department evaluations for the same level classes. Furthermore, a content analysis of the open-ended written course evaluation comments communicated high regard for the course in terms of relevant, meaningful learning. These findings together with the results of the t-tests reported earlier indicate that the dual goals of the course were achieved.

The class work and assignments were designed to increase the understanding of the role that leadership and personal involvement play in setting strategic directions that require addressing the issue of corporate social responsibility. Comments taken from the course evaluations strongly indicated that students placed a very high value on the academic learning gained from the service learning component of the course. One student wrote, "The service learning project was the major strength of this course. It gave me the opportunity to work in a 'real world' situation. I like this because it gives me a realistic perspective on issues which were addressed in

the project.” When queried about the course contributions, another student wrote, “The project was the strength. I’ve really gained much more than just book reading. I went back and read what was relevant for our project.”

The notion that business has an obligation to keep in mind the welfare of its employees (Rockefeller, 1923) and to share its wealth with society is not a new one. Indeed the whole idea of businesses’ having a social responsibility to the community in general can be found in other cultures as well as earlier times (Kaku, 1997). So what are the implications of these views for business schools and the content and pedagogy of their instructional efforts?

We have already stated that the students were very positive about the course outcomes. Yet a closer glimpse of the answers to these questions can be gained from viewing the analytical results of students’ perceptions briefly stated earlier in this paper. Students reported that they believe that potential employers consider a sense of civic responsibility to be an important employee trait and that the students having earned credit in a service learning course makes them more desirable as applicants in the job market. Moreover, they reported believing that the instructional institution, not just the students and the client organizations, derives benefits from service learning class projects.

We would like to conclude the discussion by asking the next logical question. If there are so many positive implications for integration of academic and service learning, why are the majority of classes in business schools still not structured to incorporate a service learning experience? From where we stand at this moment it appears that the answer to this question is, of course, complex and somewhat political. Still, the answers to that question need to be addressed by all those professionals involved with business school curriculum.

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