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CONDUCTING A CLASSROOM TO FACILITATE CAREER GOAL ATTAINMENT

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ABSTRACT

This study deals with facilitating student career goal attainment in the classroom. Its three purposes are to (1) verify an earlier finding suggesting that the experiential and simulation methods are relatively ineffective for helping students with their career goals (2) discover why students feel simulation and experiential courses are not helpful for attaining career goals and (3) discover what distinguishes those courses (regardless of teaching method) that are helpful in students' eyes for attaining career goals from those which are not helpful. To obtain results, 594 undergraduates were surveyed. The results indicate that the experiential teaching method in combination with lectures are seen by students as valuable for facilitating career goal attainment. The results also suggest that when the instructor tells stories and anecdotes showing the relevance of course concepts to the real world, students perceive the course as relatively helpful for pursuing careers.

INTRODUCTION

Many research studies have been undertaken which assess the relative effectiveness of various forms of teaching, including the experiential and simulation approaches. Most of these studies define the effectiveness of a course in terms of cognitive mastery, attitude change, student satisfaction or student involvement. Last year, Stephen Blythe and I did a study (1) which also assessed the relative effectiveness of experiential and simulation teaching approaches, but we defined effectiveness differently from most other studies. We defined effectiveness in terms of student perceptions of specific attitude, ability and knowledge gain and in terms of student perceptions of the value of the course for career goal attainment. In that study, the results showed that experiential and simulation approaches did better than the lecture approach in skill and ability attainment but considerably worse than the lecture in helping students reach their longer term career related goals.¹ More specifically, we found that courses using the simulation method were perceived as no more helpful than courses not using the simulation method for pursuing careers, becoming more valuable in the labor market and becoming more effective managers. Courses predominantly experiential were perceived by students as significantly less helpful than courses slightly experiential and courses not at all experiential for pursuing careers, becoming more valuable in the labor market and becoming more effective managers. In contrast, courses using the lecture approach were perceived by students as significantly more helpful for pursuing careers, becoming more valuable in the labor market and becoming more effective managers than courses not using the lecture method.

The present study follows directly from the above results suggesting the relative ineffectiveness of the experiential and simulation approaches in helping students accomplish their career related aims. This study has three purposes. The first is to replicate the results of the earlier study regarding teaching approach and career goal attainment. The intention is to verify the earlier finding that the experiential and simulation methods are relatively ineffective in students' eyes in helping them with

their career goals.¹ The second is- to discover why students feel simulation and experiential courses are not helpful for attaining career goals. If students feel that experiential learning and simulation methods are counter productive for accomplishing their career goals, those of us who teach with these two methods should know why. The third purpose is to discover what distinguishes courses that are helpful in students' eyes for attaining career goals from those which are not helpful. For this purpose the intention is to find out what actually occurs in classes which are perceived as helpful for career goal attainment regardless of the general teaching approach.

Other than the above mentioned study, there is little in the literature assessing the effectiveness of various teaching styles in helping students attain career related goals. Most of the literature on career goal attainment is prescriptive, suggesting what career aspirants should do in order to clarify and attain their careers. There are articles suggesting what educational institutions should do to better prepare students for careers. However, these articles are aimed at education in general, are non-empirical and are prescriptive. Thus, they offer little practical information to the teacher who wants to make his or her course more relevant to the career aspirant. Still, these articles do represent the career goal related literature and are worth summarizing. First, many of the articles (2, 6, 9, 10, 11) suggest that education should be more practical and educators should join with business executives to create more functional curricula. Second, many articles indicate that the experiential mode of teaching is valuable. For example, Edsen (5) suggests interpersonal training for MBAs; Chapman (3) suggests competency based learning so students can narrow their career choices; a Management Today article (8) suggests that aspiring executives should become personal assistants to present office holders to get a better feel for their future jobs; and Stelter (10) and Veliotis (11) suggest internship programs for high school and college students. Third, many articles propose that exposing students to working people will widen their scope of career opportunities. For example, Nickey (7) suggests adult volunteers in the classroom, Stelter (10) suggests field trips and plant tours, and Davey (4) suggests that students should have the opportunity to meet adults in a wide range of employment.

¹ The career related dependent variables in both studies were the responses to the three questionnaire items: "To what extent do you think this course will help you... (1) Pursue your career goals, (2) Become more valuable in the labor market, and (3) Become a more effective manager. Terms which appear in this paper, like, "career related goals", "career goals" and "career goal attainment" are condensed statements representing the three dependent variables.

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METHOD

Subjects

594 undergraduate students enrolled in management courses at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater participated in the study.

Data Collection

Questionnaires. Data from students were obtained from questionnaires containing eighteen Likert type items and three open-ended items. The Likert items section is a modification of a student evaluation questionnaire developed at MIT. This study

FIGURE 1
CAREER RELATED ITEMS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE

To what extent do you think this course will help you to do each of the following?

	None	Slight Extent	Moderate Extent	Great Extent	Very Great Extent
1. Pursue your career goals	1	2	3	4	5
2. Become more valuable in the labor market	1	2	3	4	5
3. Become a more effective manager	1	2	3	4	5

The three open-ended items were:

1. "What is it about the course that may help you pursue your career goals?"
2. "If you do not think this course will help you pursue your career goals please indicate why."
3. "Has your instructor said anything about how this course may help you with your career? If yes, briefly what did he/she say?"

is concerned with responses to three of those items and these three items appear in Figure 1.

The questionnaire was distributed in nineteen sections of nine courses given by eight Management Department instructors during the last week of the term. The nine courses were: Management, Production, Production Management, Operations Research, Data Processing, Management Seminar, Organizational Behavior, Small Business and Policy.

Instructor Interviews

Courses were classified as primarily lecture vs. supplementary lecture vs. non-lecture; primarily case vs. supplementary case vs. non-case; quantitative problem-solving vs. non-quantitative problem-solving; experiential vs. non-experiential; simulation vs. non-simulation and seminar vs. non-seminar by interviews with the course instructors. Each instructor was asked the extent to which he used each of the six methods in his class. With respect to quantitative problems, the experiential method, simulations and the seminar method, it was clear from the interviews that each instructor either used the method to great extent or nearly not at all. With respect to the lecture mode, it was used as a primary teaching method (used at least a third of the class' time) in thirteen sections, In four sections it was used as a supplementary technique (used about twenty to thirty percent of the time). In two others, it was not used at all. Regarding cases, it was a primary method (used more than sixty percent of the

time) in six sections, a supplementary method (used less than a fifth of the time) in three others and used not at all in ten others. Therefore, the three category distinction for the case and lecture methods and the two category distinction for the other methods. Table 1 shows how each section was classified along each of the six dimensions.

Each class was also categorized as to how the instructor made students aware of the relevance of the course to student careers. This data was obtained from interviews with instructors. The instructor was asked if he/she tried to show the relevance of the course to student careers, and if so, how. In answer to this question, four types of behavior were mentioned by more than one instructor: (1) personal stories and anecdotes indicating how the concepts being studied occurred in the "real world", (2) a lecture (or two) on how course material would be useful on the job, (3) suggestions as to how the skills students were learning, such as programming or verbal presentation skills, were useful in organizations, and (4) statements that course principles were used by top level managers. Some instructors used more than one of these behaviors. Table 2 shows how each section was classified as to whether or not each of the four types of behavior was used.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first purpose of this study was to replicate the results of an earlier study suggesting the relative ineffectiveness of the experiential and simulation approaches in helping students with their career related goals. The results regarding this purpose appear in Table 3. Table 3 shows student answers to the three career related questionnaire items as a function of six dimensions of teaching approach. The results as a function of the lecture and case approaches are analyzed by analysis of variance (F tests) across three degrees of lecture and case method utilization: primary, supplementary and not at all. The results as a function of quantitative, experiential, simulation and seminar approaches are analyzed by t-test comparing results when the method was used with those when the method was not used.

These results show that courses not using the lecture method were perceived by students to be more helpful for pursuing career goals, becoming more valuable in the labor market and becoming effective managers than courses which use the lecture as the primary method and courses using it as a supplementary method. In addition, courses using experiential and seminar methods were perceived as more helpful than those not using those methods; courses using the case approach as a supplementary method were perceived as more helpful than courses using case as a primary method and more helpful than courses not using cases; and courses using quantitative and simulation methods were perceived as equally helpful as courses not using these methods.

Regarding purpose 1, the results of this study appear to contradict the results of the earlier study in two respects. First, the earlier study showed courses using the lecture as a primary method as more helpful than courses using the lecture as a supplementary method. The present study shows the non-lecture sections to be the most helpful. However, further analysis suggests the results of the two studies to be similar. In the present study, the two sections which did not use the lecture at all were Management Seminar

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TABLE 1
CLASSIFICATION OF CLASSES BY TEACHING METHOD

	No. of Sections	Lecture	Case	Quantitative	Experiential	Simulation	Seminar
Policy	1	Sup	Pri	No	No	Yes	No
Policy	1	Pri	Pri	No	No	No	No
Policy	3	Sup	Pri	No	No	No	No
Org. Behavior	1	Pri	Sup	No	No	No	No
Org. Behavior	2	Pri	No	No	Yes	No	No
Management	2	Pri	Sup	No	Yes	No	No
Data Processing	1	Pri	No	No	Yes	No	No
Production	2	Pri	No	Yes	No	No	No
Production Mgmt.	1	Pri	Pri	Yes	No	No	No
Operations Res.	1	Pri	No	Yes	No	No	No
Mgmt. Seminar	2	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
Small Business	1	Pri	No	No	Yes	No	No

Pri = Primary

Sup = Supplementary

Res = Research

TABLE 2
CLASSIFICATION OF CLASSES BY TEACHER BEHAVIOR
USED TO SHOW RELEVANCE TO COURSE TO CAREERS

	No. of Sections	Telling of Real World Examples and Stories Depicting Theory, Concept or Principle	Lecturing on How Material in Course will be Useful On-The-Job	Focusing on Applicability of Course Skills to Real World	Stating that Course Principles are Used by High Level Managers
Policy	1	No	No	No	No
Policy	2	No	No	No	Yes
Policy	2	Yes	No	No	No
Org. Behavior	3	Yes	No	No	No
Management	2	Yes	No	No	No
Data Processing	2	No	Yes	Yes	No
Production	2	No	Yes	No	No
Production Mgmt.	1	No	Yes	Yes	No
Operations Res. ^a	1	No	No	No	No
Mgmt. Seminar	1	No	No	Yes	No
Mgmt. Seminar	1	Yes	No	No	No
Small Business ^a	1	No	No	No	No

Res = Research

^a = used a different behavior to indicate value of course to career pursuits than the four indicated here

sections. Both of these sections were seen as highly valuable for career related goals, partially because the course is designed to focus on students' career interests and partially because both of the instructors have had extensive business experience. Reanalyzing the lecture related results of this study and emitting data from these two seminar sections, the data show courses using the lecture as a primary method to be significantly more valuable than courses using the lecture as a supplementary

method ($t = 2.44$, $p = .015$ for pursuing career goals; $t = 3.93$, $p = .000$ for becoming more valuable in the labor market; and $t = 2.31$, $p = .021$ for becoming a more effective manager). With reanalysis, then, these results are remarkably similar to these of the earlier study. In both the earlier study and the present study, courses using the lecture as a primary method were perceived as significantly more valuable than courses using the lecture as a supplementary method.

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TABLE 3
STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF RELEVANCE
OF THE VALUE OF A COURSE
TO CAREER GOALS AS A FUNCTION
OF TYPE OF TEACHING APPROACH

Questionnaire Item	Lecture F	Case F	Quantitative t	Experiential t	Simulation t	Seminar t
Help pursue career goals	-11.05**	18.14**1	1.53	5.26**	1.96	4.19**
More valuable in labor market	-12.13**	31.67**1	0.57	5.94**	1.51	3.18**
More effective manager	- 8.74**	24.42**1	1.23	5.13**	1.15	3.62**

** $p < .001$

1 Highest scores occurred when cases used to a slight extent.

A minus score (-) indicates that the dependent score is great when the method is not used in the class.

The results of this study appear to contradict the results of the earlier study in a second respect. The earlier study showed that courses experiential in a great degree were less valuable for career related pursuits than courses experiential to a slight degree and courses not at all experiential. In this study, experiential courses were perceived as more valuable than courses not experiential. However, further analysis suggests that the results of the two studies are similar.

In the previous study career related results were compared across three levels of experiential approach utilization (1) to a great extent (courses where the method was used predominantly), (2) to a slight extent (where the method was used about twenty percent of the time and the lecture was used eighty percent), and (3) not at all. In this study career related results were compared across two levels of experiential course utilization (1) used and (2) not used. In this study all the sections which used the experiential approach utilized it in combination with the lecture. Each section used the experiential approach half the time and the lecture half the time.

In the earlier study, students perceived courses using the experiential approach to a slight degree (these 20% experiential and 80% lecture) as more valuable than courses predominantly experiential and courses not at all experiential. In this study, courses using the experiential approach (those 50% experiential and 50% lecture) were perceived as more valuable than courses not using the experiential approach. Omitting the results for courses predominantly experiential, the results of the two studies are similar. Both show that students find courses which use the experiential approach in combination with the lecture as more valuable for their career pursuits than courses which do not use the experiential approach.

The second purpose of this study was to find out why experiential and simulation courses are not helpful for attaining career goals. The results of this study are not helpful in this

regard. These results were obtained entirely from answers to the open-ended question--"If you do not think this course will help you pursue your career goals, please indicate why." The expectation was that those in experiential and simulation classes would answer this question by pointing out what it was about these two methods that made them less valuable for career pursuits. However, no one in any of the classes using these two approaches criticized them.

There were 99 people who answered the above mentioned question. The most frequent answer (N=36) was, "I do not intend to be working in the field which the course covers." The vast majority (N=83) did not mention teaching approach as the reason for feeling the course was ineffective. Of the sixteen that did criticize teaching approach, six criticized the case method as impractical or containing incomplete information, and ten criticized the lecture as too theoretical. No one criticized the experiential or simulation approach or any of the other teaching methods. Thus, this study's results yield no significant information regarding why the experiential and simulation approaches are perceived as unhelpful for career related pursuits. If these two teaching approaches are less valuable than others for career pursuit purposes, it will take future research to discover why.

The third purpose of this study was to ascertain what distinguishes courses perceived as helpful for attaining career goals from those which are not. The results regarding this purpose appear in Table 4, which shows student answers to the three career related questionnaire items as a function of the four teacher behaviors listed in Table 2. The results from Table 4 show first that students perceive courses to be more valuable in helping them (a) pursue their career goals, (b) become more valuable in the labor market, and (c) become more effective managers when the instructor tells stories and anecdotes showing the relevance of course to the real world. Instructors telling such stories

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TABLE 4
STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF VALUE OF COURSE
TO CAREER GOALS AS A FUNCTION OF TEACHER BEHAVIOR
ATTEMPTING TO SHOW RELEVANCE

Questionnaire Item	INSTRUCTOR BEHAVIOR			
	Telling of real world examples depicting theory, etc.	Lecturing on how material will be useful	Focusing on appli- cability of course skills	Stating use by high level managers
	t	t	t	t
Help pursue career goals	4.82**	0.07	2.90*	-6.29**
More valuable in labor market	3.91**	2.70*	5.22**	-9.36**
Become more effective manager	7.95**	1.57	0.28	-8.23**

* p < .01

** p < .001

A minus (-) score means that the dependent score is greater when that behavior is not displayed.

tended to do this throughout the term as the course content and time permitted. Second, they show that students perceive the course to be more valuable to (a) pursue their career goals, and (b) become more valuable in the labor market when the instructor suggests how the skills learned would help them as managers. Third, they show that students perceived the course as more effective to become more valuable in the labor market when the instructor lectured on how the course material would be useful on-the-job. Finally, they show that students find courses as less effective in helping them (a) pursue career goals, (b) become more valuable in the labor market, and (c) become more effective managers when the instructor stated how course principles were used by top-level managers.

As a result of this study, we can draw some tentative conclusions regarding teaching to facilitate career goal attainment. First, students perceive certain teaching approaches as valuable for attaining career goals. They perceive the lecture as valuable and the experiential method as valuable if it is used in combination with the lecture. They also perceive the seminar as an effective approach. However, since this study's sample contained only two seminar sections, conclusions drawn regarding it must be especially tentative. Students also perceive certain teacher behavior as valuable for attaining career goals. One kind of instructor behavior considered valuable was telling stories and anecdotes throughout the term showing the relevance of course concepts to the real world. Another was showing how course skills were helpful to managers. An instructor behavior not considered helpful was to mention that the course would help students only when they reach the top management level.

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