

Experiential Learning Enters the Eighties, Volume 7, 1980

SPONSORED EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AN OPPORTUNITY

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ABSTRACT

The existence of a sponsored experiential learning activity is explained in detail. Free enterprise education is the goal of the sponsors. The sponsoring organizations are listed to allow other participants in the activity in the future. A second source which gives direct cash awards to faculty persons who are active in free enterprise education is also explained.

AN OVERVIEW

An outstanding opportunity exists for educators and students in the fields of business, economics, and marketing to participate in a sponsored, competitive, experiential learning project.

The organizational structure is provided by National Leadership Institute, a non-profit organization. The NLI sponsors several projects each year to promote leadership training for students and a better understanding of the free enterprise system among American citizens of all ages. The specific project to be discussed in this paper is known as S.I.F.E., which stands for Students in Free Enterprise.

Students in Free Enterprise is a competitive program for students from 15 to 20 colleges in a given geographic area. These students begin their work following an orientation session in the Fall and in the ensuing months develop creative and innovative programs for communicating the superiority of the American free enterprise on the college campus, in the community, and in local school systems. More specifically stated, the purpose of S.T.F.E. is "To encourage and help young people anticipating business careers to commit themselves to a movement of their own creation:

1. That speaks up for our American Free Enterprise System which, even with its imperfections, has brought us to the highest standard of living history has known, and
2. That helps preserve for themselves the opportunity to bring to the system new life and new leadership for its continued improvement and progress.'

As each school year comes to a close, a judging session is held where the months of effort of these college students are judged to determine which college or university has developed the most creative, innovative, and effective programs to meet the purpose of "Students in Free Enterprise." Projects developed by students cover a wide range of highly creative and innovative educational efforts.

Later in July, a national competition is held among the regional winners. Being part of this competition is a very unique educational experience.

The Fall orientation, the Spring regional judging, and the Summer national competition are sponsored by National Leadership Institute with the cooperation of sponsoring business firms. Dow Chemical is the prime sponsor in Michigan. The sponsors provide travel money, lodging in

first-class motels or hotels as appropriate, and meal allowances for these events, as well as prize money. This past year students from Lawrence Institute of Technology won \$1,000 for second place in our regional competition and were provided \$2,240 for expenses for four students and one faculty sponsor to attend the national judging in Houston, Texas.

The faculty member who works with the students in this S.I.F.E. project can document his involvement and present his efforts to the Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge. This foundation, which is entirely separate from the NLI, offers faculty members a chance to compete for several \$5,000 awards each year for their efforts in teaching and promoting a better understanding of America's private enterprise economic system. Although a faculty member can attempt to win one of these awards without participating as a S.I.F.E. sponsor, several past Freedoms Foundation winners submitted their work with S.I.F.E. as their entry.

The awards, rewards, and travel opportunities offered by these sponsored activities provide significant motivation for both students and faculty to participate in these experiential activities.

THE S.I.F.E. L.I.T. PROGRAM, 1978-79.

I believe the best way to provide you with more detailed information on the S.I.F.E. program is to relate in some detail the program that my students at Lawrence Institute of Technology developed last year.

The core of the program, and the competition, is student-run projects. Each project is an experiential exercise. But let me start at the beginning.

Step 1 - August

The faculty sponsor should contact NLI and the Freedoms Foundation for complete details of their respective programs for the next school year.

Step 2 - September

The faculty sponsor should use the materials provided by NLI to organize a group of interested students. The NLI encourages the faculty sponsors to allow college credit, if possible, for the S.I.F.E. project. At L.I.T. a student can enroll in our Senior Studies Project class and receive from 3-9 quarter hours credit for participating in S.I.F.E.

Step 3 - September and October

Students elect officers for the year for the S.I.F.E. club and attend the Fall orientation session. This is typically held on one of the participating college campuses. Our students petitioned our student government for club status on campus. This gives them official recognition as an organization on campus and helps them to recruit non-seniors. This helps provide year-to-year continuity.

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Step 4 - October and November

Students create an advisory council made up of prominent business persons in the community who are interested in promoting free enterprise. The purpose of the business advisory council is twofold: (1) to help determine the nature of the projects by discussing needs within the community for free enterprise education, and (2) to possibly provide funding for the student projects. Our advisory council consisted of about fourteen persons. Four of these people became quite active with the students. Approximately half of the fourteen persons made personal or company contributions to projects that were of interest to them.

Step 5 - November to March

Students develop and implement their projects. My students won second place in our regional competition with eight projects. Three of these were exceptional and very likely were the reasons we won. The other five were necessary to provide a balanced entry. Although 20 students were in the officially recognized campus club only 8 were active in these projects. Five of these eight did most of the work. The goals and accomplishments of each project must be documented.

Let me briefly outline our three best projects to give you an indication of the creativity and scope of the students involvement and commitment.

Project 1 - Economics in Braille

Our S.I.F.E. club president decided to have some materials which were made available to us at the Fall orientation session translated into Braille and placed in each library in the State of Michigan with a Braille collection. Our documentation consisted of the finished Braille booklets and the number of libraries that would carry copies.

Project 2 - Economics in Spanish

Two of our S.I.F.E. members were from Venezuela and therefore fluent in Spanish. They decided to translate a publication entitled, "The American Economic System. . . and your part in it", into Spanish. The English version of this publication is in its fifth printing. It is distributed by the Advertising Council of America and U.S. Department of Commerce in Cooperation with the U.S. Department of Labor.

When the Ad Council saw the results of the students efforts they asked the students if they would translate a second publication. The title of the second publication is, "You Are The American Economic System". This publication should be available early in 1980. We expect that literally hundreds of thousands of these publications will be distributed by the Ad Council and the government agencies mentioned earlier.

Our documentation consisted of the finished publication in Spanish and letters from the Ad Council supporting the expected printing and publication.

Project 3 - Free Enterprise Competition in Detroit Schools

Several S.I.F.E. members organized a competition similar to their own in four Detroit public high schools. The students raised \$200 for prizes and awards. Competition among all twenty-two Detroit High schools was approved for the 1979-80 school year. Our documentation consisted of pictures of the high school students, their projects, and the awards presentation.

Step 6 - April

The regional competitions are held in April. Students design and build a display booth to house their documentation and display their projects. Actually the documentation is planned when the project is designed and the booth should be started in January. The documentation also includes a maximum of twenty pages of descriptive text of the group projects. Since one of the 1979 national winners had 61 projects the documentation write-up is quite a project by itself.

Size dimensions for the booth are provided and strictly enforced. The booth must also be designed anticipating the airplane trip to Texas for the national judging.

Step 7 - May to July

The winners throw a party back home and prepare for the national competition. The display booth is altered as a result of the ideas gained at the regional competition. The project documentation write-up can be revised to better highlight the judging criteria. Reservations are secured and tickets are bought for the national judging.

We stayed at the Houston Hyatt-Regency for the national competition. Even though we did not win, the trip was a tremendous learning experience. The caliber of competition reflects on the many benefits and advantages of experiential learning. Although the atmosphere is one of competition many contacts and friendships are made during these 4 or 5 days. The students also benefited from one of the sponsors Coors. Many students had the opportunity to give a one minute speech on their experience in S.I.F.E. at the closing luncheon before a group of over 500 contestants and guests.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

If you are questioning the "real purpose" or motivations of any of the sponsors, or the "backers" of KLI, you are not alone. I discarded materials from each of these groups for two years in a row. Last year I decided to pursue the S.I.F.E. program. You choose to participate or not to participate. The students develop projects of their own choice. No one tries to mold your students into their projects. In fact, creativity and originality are rewarded by the judging criteria. Specifically, the students benefit from accepting the responsibility for creating and accomplishing the Regional or National competitions, they receive the acclamation of their peers and the sponsors. As the S.I.F.E. program gains acceptance for itself among the business community the participating students will gain by having this experience listed on their resume.

Students benefit from the contacts they develop in creating The Business Advisory Council. These business people are interested in these students or they would not take their own time to participate.

Students benefit, too, from the knowledge they gain about the free enterprise system. It is difficult to promote free enterprise without taking the time to evaluate your own ideas about such topics as profits, government regulations, or investments.

Finally, students benefit from the timed, 10 minute presentation that is part of the regional and national

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judging. Our regional presenter left for graduate school in June. The group then had to select and groom his replacement for the national judging.

There were no losers at this competition. Those who did not officially win a top dollar prize of \$2,500, or one of the special awards, for documentation, or originality for instance, still had the experience and memories of the competition. They each also knew they had been actively involved in promoting our free enterprise system.

The S.I.F.E. experience heightens the faculty sponsors awareness of the general need for economic education and the capabilities of students to plan and execute very creative and innovative projects. The length and degree of personal contact with the students can also be very rewarding. New contacts are made with faculty and business persons in your area during the Fall orientation, the regional judging and with the advisory council. Further, contacts occur at the national corn-pet it ion.

The faculty sponsor is also brought into contact with new teaching materials and methods which can be used in other classes during the school year. Winning at the regional and national competitions naturally adds to ones position on campus among students, peers, and the administration.

You can be nominated for the Freedoms Foundation awards by your chairman or dean, or even nominate yourself, regardless of where you teach. The S.I.F.E. program is operating in several, but not all, regions of the United States. Appendix I provides a list of the national competitors in July, 1979. You can review this list to see if S.I.F.E. is operational in your area (roughly 250 mile radius of a competing school) If S.I.F.E. is not now operating in your area you can contact NLI to determine if they are planning to expand their program to your area. The appendix also lists faculty sponsors and indicates two Freedoms Foundation award winners.

Appendix II is a partial list of sponsoring companies. In addition to these sponsoring companies Rotary Clubs in many cities participate in the program by providing judging personnel and by participating in the leadership training activities that are part of the Fall orientation sessions.

Appendix III provides the addresses and telephone numbers of NLI and the Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge. Further information is available from each sponsor.

You have time enough to enter next years competition. My best wishes to you when we meet at the national competition.

APPENDIX I

NATIONAL COMPETITORS IN S.I.F.E. JULY, 1979 WITH FACULTY SPONSORS

Alfred University; Alfred, New York. Professor Savo D. Jevremovic
Eastern College; St. Davids, Pennsylvania. Professor S. A. Belden
East Texas State University; Commerce, Texas. Professor R. D. Lewis
Findlay College; Findlay, Ohio. Professor Shiv K. Gupta
Freed-Hardeman College; Henderson, Tennessee. Professor Keith Smith

¹ Freedoms Foundation Winners, not necessarily complete list

Lawrence Institute of Technology; Southfield, Michigan
Professor Ernie Maier
Missouri Southern State College; Joplin, Missouri. Professor Terry Marion
Monterey Peninsula College; Monterey, California.
Professor R. W. Fremier
Murray State University; Murray, Kentucky, Professor Gary Brockway
Pan American University; Edinburg, Texas. Professor Charles W. Lackey
Pasco-Hernando Community College; Dade City, Florida.
Professor Joan Tiller
Pasco-Hernando Community College; Port Richey, Florida.
Professor Frank Nichels
Robert Morris College; Coraopolis, Pennsylvania. Professor John Bassett
State Fair Community College; Sadalia, Missouri. Professor J. W. Downing
S.U.N.Y. at Plattsburg; Plattsburgh, New York. Professor Vince Luchsinger
University of Akron; Akron, Ohio. Professor Felix Manager
University of Houston; Houston, Texas. Professor Catherine Delaney
²University of Southwestern Louisiana; Lafayette, Louisiana. Professor E. Everett Caradine Jr.
Western Michigan University; Kalamazoo, Michigan
Professor Henry Bean

APPENDIX II

S.I.F.E. REGIONAL SPONSORS, PARTIAL LISTING

Champion Spark Plug Company
Dart Industries
Dow Chemical
Eaton Corporation
Florida Farm Bureau Corporation
George Schultz Foundation
H. J. Heinz Company
Nabisco Inc.
The Monsanto Fund
Ralston Purina Company
Reader's Digest
Southwestern Life Insurance Company
Standard Oil of Ohio
United States Steel

APPENDIX III

KEY PROGRAM SPONSORS

National Leadership Institute
Robert T. (Sonny) Davis, Director
J. Mark Holmes, Associate Director
500 W. 13th Street
Austin, Texas 78701
512-477-9487

Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge
Valley Forge, Pennsylvania 19481
215-933-8825

² Freedoms Foundation Winners, not necessarily complete list