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The Academic Service-Learning Experiences of Students in a Compensation and Benefits Course

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THE ACADEMIC SERVICE-LEARNING EXPERIENCES OF STUDENTS IN A COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS COURSE

Management educators today face the continuing challenge of designing courses so that optimal transfer of learning occurs between the classroom and workplace. Researchers (e.g., Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999) have agreed that many adult learners do not effectively remember and transfer learning when taught by traditional teaching and learning pedagogies (e.g., lecture). It appears, however, that these methods continue to be most prevalent in management education today. During the past few decades other methods of engaging students in learning have emerged. A promising pedagogy that appears to provide students with the opportunity to transfer their course content knowledge and skills (learning) from the classroom into the workplace is academic service-learning. However, little has been reported on its use in the human resource management academic area. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of students who had recently and successfully completed an academic service-learning project for an undergraduate compensation and benefits course. Four specific themes or categories emerged from ten in-depth student interviews. These included perceptions related to pedagogical differences, student learning, personal benefits, and challenges and problems. Findings support the premise that, although service-learning was somewhat frustrating, challenging, and overwhelming for many college seniors, all felt that they learned and benefited more from this project or assignment than from any other they had experienced.

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COMPENSATION AND BENEFITS COURSE

Management educators today face the continuing challenge of designing courses so that optimal transfer of learning occurs between the classroom and workplace. Even though there is vast support (e.g., Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999) that most adult learners do not effectively remember and transfer learning when taught by many traditional teaching and learning pedagogies (e.g., lecture), it appears that these methods continue to be most prevalent in management education today. Some (e.g., Edwards, Money, & Heald) claim that "exclusive reliance on traditional classroom pedagogies cannot address the problems educators face and that the preparation of college students must include more practical and experience-based learning" (2001: 445).

During the past few decades other methods of engaging students in learning have emerged. For example, both case study and classroom problem-based learning pedagogies have proven to be effective in providing experiences for students to link course content to situations that may occur in a workplace environment. Although students can devise solutions to problems and challenges, the complete transfer of learning does not occur (Davis & Michel, 2000). Students may have ideas for solution but, most often, do not have the opportunity to actually implement solutions into a real workplace. As most employers will attest, there is often a gap between an employee's ability to *understand* and his or her capability to *perform* (knowing versus doing). Some educators may argue that this learning transfer is designed to occur during a structured internship near the end of an academic program. However, adult learning theory (e.g., Knowles et al., 1998; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999) clearly articulates that this transfer is most

effective when learning experiences are designed so that active practice can occur along with or soon after course concepts are taught.

An emerging and promising pedagogy that appears to provide students with the opportunity to transfer their course content knowledge and skills (learning) from the classroom into the workplace is academic service-learning. According to McCarthy and Tucker, service-learning is "changing the way that professors view the connection between classroom pedagogy and learning" (1999: 554). Bush-Bacelis found that "the best advantage for students is that, in spite of initial resistance, they are able to connect the readings, class discussions, and other assignments with the real world, full of real people, with real problems that students try to help solve" (1998: 27).

In addition to the benefit of solidifying course content learning, researchers have found the service-learning is also an effective pedagogy for a variety of other reasons. First, it provides the opportunity for students to become civically engaged in their communities (Godfrey, 1999; Rama, Ravenscroft, Walcott, & Zlotkowski, 2000). Second, it provides an effective way for students to learn business related skills and competencies such as problem-solving (Zlotkowski, 1996), interpersonal and communication (Rehling, 2000), group/team interaction (Michaelsen, Kenderdine, Hobbs, & Fruen, 2000), analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (McGoldrick, Battle, & Gallagher, 2000), learning how to learn (Munter, 2002), and leadership (Gujarathi & Sarmiento, 2002). In fact, McCarthy and Tucker found that "incorporating service-learning into the classroom mirrors the best practices found in organizations and thus prepares students for a productive and rewarding professional career" (1999: 558).

Although past service-learning research has investigated topics such as 1) benefits to students, community partners, instructors, and schools, 2) perceptions and views of students,

faculty, and community partners toward service-learning and, 3) student learning outcomes— little is known about the specific application of service-learning to human resource management courses. In fact, only a few pieces of literature (e.g., Clark, 2000) have addressed implications to human resources, and nothing was located with regards to academic service-learning research of utilization in a graduate or undergraduate compensation and benefits course. Hence, this research asks the question, "What are the perceptions and experiences of undergraduate students who have recently completed a compensation and benefits course with an academic service-learning project?" This report focuses on student responses specifically related to the following perceptions: 1) pedagogical differences, 2) learning, 3) personal benefits, and 4) challenges and problems.

To explore these research questions in depth, I will first define academic service-learning and discuss its relevance and importance to management education. Next, I will present a brief review of the service-learning literature specific to past findings on the four categories of perceptions I explore in the current research project. Third, I will present some theoretical and philosophical frameworks that provide a foundation for this research. Following the frameworks, the results of an exploratory study of the service-learning perceptions of students who had just completed a course in compensation and benefits will be presented. Finally, the implications and suggestions for further use of service-learning in human resource courses will be discussed.

DEFINITION

Academic service-learning is a multi-dimensional teaching and learning pedagogy (a form of experiential learning) that is integrated within a credit-bearing course in the form of an organized, thoughtful, and meaningful project. Students are paired with agencies or organizations that have specific needs related to the content of a particular course. Students then perform the

needed community service while utilizing course content and reflecting on their understanding

for an enhanced learning experience. The American Association of Higher Education (AAHE)

defined service-learning more broadly as the "intellectual and civic engagement of students by

linking the work students do in the classroom to real-world problems and world needs" (2003).

Marullo and Edwards (2000) explained that service-learning is effective in engaging the students

in the learning process. They stated, "The scholarship of engagement requires all four types of

scholarly activity to be done well. By its nature, it is holistic, integrated, interdisciplinary, and

collaborative among diverse participants" (2000: 896).

It appears that effective business course academic service-learning projects should…

- Be integrated into a particular college course.

- Be a substantial part of the course requirements.

- Include service that relates to the content of the course.

- Address and fulfill community partner needs.

- Be organized, thoughtful, and meaningful.

- Include opportunities for reflection throughout the course.

- Involve, empower, and challenge students.

- Allow students opportunities to interact with organizational and/or community members.

- Require the students to act and speak professionally.

- Provide clear service and learning goals.

- Attempt to develop the student's sense of community responsibility.

- Be designed so that students have a realistic chance for success.

Generally speaking, Petkus wrote that "the basic spirit of service-learning lies in mutual benefits not just for the organization served and the students but also for course instructors, the education institution, and the community at large (Jacoby, 1996)" (2000: 64).

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is, indeed, service-learning literature that discusses many benefits, findings, problems, issues, and examples of student projects from various colleges, departments, and courses. In this review, the discussion is limited to a brief summary of the service-learning literature related to the need, pedagogical differences and challenges, and student benefits and learning.

Need for Service-Learning

Porter and McKibbins (1988) found that business executives were very concerned that college business students were too narrowly educated. Zlotkowski and others have expressed concern that there continues to be a gap between the needs of the "external society and an academy's own internal priorities" (1996: 56). Dallimore argued that "higher education has not adequately responded to the need to prepare students for this complex environment" (2002: 86). It has become clear that businesses need students who have acquired skills (e.g., critical thinking, leadership, decision-making, and teamwork) that cannot be effectively learned by listening to a lecture or reading a textbook. Ensuring that graduating students have developed this depth continues to be a challenge for business school administrators and faculty members. Academic service-learning is clearly a viable option for those facing this educational challenge.

Academic service-learning is clearly a viable option for those facing this educational challenge. In his well-known book titled *Scholarship Reconsidered*, Boyer (1990) challenged members of the faculty to become reflective practitioners "who move back and forth between

theory and practice to bring into the university classroom the daily problems of real people in real neighborhoods" (Hinck & Brandell, 2000: 26). His vision included a network of connections between the community and the college. Accordingly to Boyer (1990), service "is not just something students do in their spare time; it connects back to the core curriculum and the search for shared values."

Pedagogical Differences, Challenges, and Problems

Many academics have discussed the differences in depth and breadth of learning among academic service-learning and other pedagogies. Kenworthy-U-Ren purported, "I am convinced that my students both learn and retain more through service-learning consulting projects than they would from any other pedagogical approach" (2000: 56). Brown explained that in a typical classroom experience, even with a comprehensive case study, it is difficult to integrate the social and technical lessons in ways that students can develop the higher-level cognitive skills they will need in the workplace. She found that service-learning provides an educational experience that is "content-rich, develops higher-level cognitive skills, and appears to provide lasting value to students" (2000: 54).

Godfrey clarified a difference between pedagogies when he stated that "fundamentally, service-learning pedagogies stand apart from much of traditional business education in that these pedagogies do not seek, nor claim, value neutrality" (1999: 365). In addition, he explained that service-learning differs from mainstream experiential education (ranging from case studies to internships) in three respects: 1) all involved parties should benefit (reciprocity), 2) reflection should be a major component, and 3) service-learning inherently attempts to elicit and develop responsible citizenship skills.

When compared to other teaching methods, most agree that service-learning is more challenging for instructors and students than other pedagogies. Typically, a service-learning project does take more time for professors to design and facilitate than other assignments. In addition, Clark, Croddy, Hays, and Philips explained that "the civic participation classroom is student, not teacher, centered" and teachers who are "uncomfortable with such an institutional strategy may not even want to venture into such untried territory" (1997: 168). In addition, there are setbacks and frustrations when students work with organizations. When compared to case studies and other assignments, service-learning can be messy and unpredictable. Instructors who like classroom/course control and dislike ambiguity may not appreciate or enjoy facilitating service-learning projects. Students can find service-learning frustrating (especially initially) as they face ambiguity and uncertainty in their assignments (Bush-Bacelis, 1998). In addition, students are sometimes discouraged by other challenges such as when community contacts do not immediately return phone calls (even after students leave messages) or when resources (human or material) are not available on schedule.

Student Learning and Benefits

Kenworthy-U-Ren found that students benefited from service-learning experiences in three ways: "1) They actually apply classroom concepts and skills, a further step toward retaining the knowledge and skills required to perform well in the future; 2) they produce a tangible product that can be used by an organization, an affirmation of their successful application of what they have learned in the course; and 3) they work with and learn from a community organization, in this way learning about community issues while contributing positively to community groups around them" (2000: 56). Researchers and academics have also found that, through academic service-learning, students can learn many skills and concepts:

technical/course content concepts (Tucker & McCarthy, 2001); effective communication skills (Kenworthy-U-Ren, 2000); relationship of course content to organization strategy (Rehling, 2000); problem-solving (Zlotkowski, 1996), time management, and networking skills (Tucker, McCarthy, Hoxmeier, & Lenk, 1998); consequences of their own decisions (Waddock, 2000); cultural awareness and diversity (Robinson, 1999/2000; Vernon & Foster, 2000), teamwork and interaction skills (Tucker et al., 1998), conflict resolution and leadership skills (Thomas & Landau, 2002), and more. Overall, Godfrey found that service-learning was a very beneficial educational pedagogy because the most powerful learning can occur "through the humanization of the problem" (1999: 372).

In addition to the learning advantages of service-learning, researchers and academics have found other benefits students received while participating in effective projects. These include increased, broadened, and/or improved self-efficacy (Tucker & McCarthy, 2001), social responsibility (Kolenko, Porter, Wheatley, & Colby, 1996), career exploration (Robinson, 1999/2000), motivation to do well and learn (Munter, 2000), confidence (Konwerski & Nashman, 2002), desires to continue volunteerism (Bush-Bacelis, 1998), exploration of personal attitudes and values (McGoldrick et al., 2000), personal satisfaction and fulfillment (Rehling, 2000), understanding and view of the business world (Kenworthy-U-Ren, 1999), and professional and real-world work experiences (Gronski & Pigg, 2000; Gujarathi & McQuade, 2002). It is important to remember, however, that these results were found with projects for courses often unrelated to business management and human resources.

PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The foundations of academic service-learning appear to stem from the writings and work of the philosopher, John Dewey. Dewey believed that education should be based upon the

"philosophy of experience" (1938: 29) and should emphasize the "freedom of the learner" (1938: 22). He taught that all principles by themselves are abstract and that "they become concrete only in the consequences which result from their application" (1938: 20). Dewey was a strong proponent of providing both experience and reflection opportunities for students. He argued that the reflective process was what defines true learning, and that reflection should be active, persistent, and carefully considered (Fleckenstein, 1997). Dewey wrote that for projects to be truly educative they must 1) generate interest, 2) be intrinsically worthwhile, 3) present problems that "awaken new curiosity and create a demand for information" (1938: 1350), and 4) cover a time span long enough for personal development to occur (Fleckenstein, 1997). Dewey, in his book *Democracy and Education* (1916), warned of a "standing danger that the material of formal instruction will be merely the subject matter of the schools, isolated from the subject matter of life experience." His fears have become reality in many of our business schools and courses today.

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle likely provides the most powerful practical and theoretical framework for the academic service-learning pedagogy. According to Petkus it "draws on an all-star set of interdisciplinary influences: John Dewey from educational philosophy, Jean Piaget from developmental psychology, and Kurt Lewin from social psychology" (2000: 64). Kolb purported that "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (1983: 38). He argued that the most effective learning occurs in four different ways: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. He then formulated these types of abilities into a learning cycle that included specific learning roles (reflector, theorist, pragmatist, and activist). According to Petkus (2000) and others, a well-designed service-learning experience will include

all four abilities and roles resulting in the most effective and long-term type of learning a student

can experience. Godfrey explained that

> Service-learning pedagogies find legitimacy in Kolb's model because they assume that
>
> significant and important learning takes place by the integrated combination of abstract
>
> conceptualization (the learning component) and concrete experience (the service
>
> component), coupled with reflection on the entire experience. (1999: 365)

Finally, Malcolm Knowles, known as the father of adult education, provided a theoretical

framework based on the term *andragogy* which is the art and science of helping adults learn

(Knowles et al., 1998). This framework is based on five assumptions about the adult learner that

can assist in explaining the differences in learning between adults and children and focuses on

the adult learner's life situation. These assumptions include the following:

1. As a person matures his or her self-concept moves from that of a dependent personality

   toward one of a self-directing human being.

2. An adult accumulates a growing reservoir of experience, which is a rich resource for

   learning.

3. The readiness of an adult to learn is closely related to the developmental tasks of his or

   her social role.

4. There is a change in time perspective as people mature—from future application of

   knowledge to immediacy of application. Thus an adult is more problem centered than

   subject centered in learning.

5. Adults are motivated to learn by internal factors rather than external ones.

These assumptions support the use of academic service-learning pedagogy with adult learners.

According to Knowles, adults learn best when they can direct their own learning, use their past

experiences to assist them, see direct application of the concepts learned (problem-centered), and are motivated and care about internal factors (such as doing well and helping others). According to Kramlinger and Huberty, instructors should "establish a climate of equality and mutual respect, determine the expectations of the learners, involve them in planning the objectives and lessons, and acknowledge the value of their experiences" (1990: 44).

These three philosophies and/or theories (Dewey's philosophy of education, Kolb's experiential learning cycle, and Knowles assumptions of adult learners) were foundational in providing the framework for the study now described.

METHOD

Background and Sample

This compensation and benefits course was not only a new course offered in [NAME OF COLLEGE] School of Business, but it was also the first time I had taught the course or ever used the academic service-learning pedagogy. Because of its multi-dimensional *newness,* I decided prior to the start of the semester to conduct a research study on the experiences and perceptions of these students. Even though I was optimistic about this pedagogy, I wanted to investigate its advantages and disadvantages (a type of cost-benefit analysis) to provide the data to consider in future utilization decisions related to the design of this and other new human resource courses in the school. My long-term goal was to identify and implement the teaching strategies that would provide my students with the most beneficial learning experiences.

The class was offered during spring semester of 2003. It was an elective course for students interested in human resources. Initially, 16 students registered for the course although one dropped before the first class. Students were instructed that the academic service-learning project would take them between 20 to 30 hours (throughout the semester) and it would account

for nearly one-third of student's final grade. After the first class, three students dropped, all claiming that they did not have time to work in organizations outside the classroom. During the first month of the semester, the twelve remaining students were asked to self-select into groups of three based on class and work schedules and to choose one of a number of non-profit organizations interested in having students perform course-related service projects. I had previously met with organizational contacts and briefly described the projects.

The service-learning project included job analyses and evaluations for the non-profit organizations. Included in the overall project was an initial proposal, final report, reflective journal, oral report to the class, and presentation to the site contact. In the proposal, students were asked to a) describe the positions they would be evaluating, b) list information sources needed, c) list tasks they must do to complete the project, d) set deadlines for these tasks, and e) provide any other information that may seem pertinent. The final report was to include all pertinent information gathered throughout the project which included (but was not limited to) a) the project proposal, b) a detailed job evaluations of two or more positions, c) a list of salary survey websites with descriptions, d) a compensation and benefit comparison with similar non-profit and for-profit positions, e) for analyzed positions, recommended compensation and benefits package (with supporting evidence) for both full-time and part-time workers; and f) any other supporting information and paperwork produced that may be helpful for the organization.

Design and Instrument

This study was designed as a qualitative interview project that used the phenomenological research approach (Wolcott, 2001). Hermeneutic phenomenology is a human science which studies individuals (Van Manen, 2001). Van Manen explained that "phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our

everyday experiences" (2001: 9). It asks the question "What is this kind of experience like?"

This type of research can be used with any topic that presents itself to consciousness, whether it

is "real or imagined, empirically measurable or subjectively felt" (2001: 9). According to Van

Manen

> The essence of a phenomenon is a universal which can be described through a study of
>
> the structure that governs the instances or particular manifestations of the essence of that
>
> phenomenon. In other words, phenomenology is the systematic attempt to uncover and
>
> describe the structure, the internal meaning structure, of lived experience. (2001: 10)

This approach appeared to be very applicable to understanding the experiences of the students in

a new learning situation and environment.

After in-depth reading and review of this research methodology, interview questions were

designed. Sixteen open-ended probing questions were designed to extract all types of

information about the students' experiences and perceptions of their projects. Some questions

were similar attempting to encourage the students to search deeper for additional answers and

rich descriptions. Questions were reviewed prior to the interviews by three experienced

qualitative researchers. In addition, three students (experienced in service-learning) were asked

to review the questions and provide feedback. Slight adjustments to the instrument were made to

the questions based on their feedback.

Data Collection

The primary interviews were scheduled approximately two to three weeks after the end of

the semester. I wanted to ensure that the student's grades had been given and that they had a few

weeks to gain some perspective about their experiences. The interviews lasted approximately 50

to 80 minutes each. At the beginning of each interview the student was asked to read a detailed

consent form, which included a clause asking permission to use their reflection journals, team critiques, and information in their final reports, if needed. This information was also reviewed verbally to ensure students understood the form and our requests. Most of the interviews were held in a conference room at the business school and most were facilitated by me and a research assistant who did not know any of the students and had little knowledge of the experience or the service-learning pedagogy. I had read a few service-learning articles before the class began but made an intentional decision (this is a technique that is sometimes used in phenomenological research) to perform the in-depth literature review after the interviews. The research assistant was helpful in providing an outside view of the responses during and after the interviews and to probe students for additional information.

Analyses

A number of steps were utilized to analyze the interviews. First, all interviews were transcribed in full by the research assistant. Second, after we had read and reread each transcript some slight adjustments were made; primarily these included cutting and pasting responses to appropriate questions when they were addressed in other parts of the interview. Next, the interviews were reread to identify key ideas and phrases about their experiences. Approximately 40-70 key phrases or ideas emerged from each interview. Fourth, all interview phrases or statements were grouped by topic. Fourteen primary themes or categories emerged from the interviews. Fifth, all key ideas were grouped by theme so that results could be analyzed. Finally, four of the ten students were asked to review the themes and results in a second interview. They were asked to provide additional perspective and insight into their experience. Because of the large amount of data collected, only four of these themes will be discussed in this paper.

RESULTS

Demographics

We interviewed ten of the twelve undergraduate students to explore their perceptions about service-learning. Of the two remaining students, one was not able to complete the project and the other moved out-of-state immediately after the semester concluded and we were unable to conduct the interview. Of the ten participants, five were women and five were men. Ages of the participants included 6 who were 21 to 25, 2 who were 26 to 30, and 2 who were over 30 years of age. Four students were currently married, three were separated or divorced, and three were single and had never been married. Three of the ten students had children living at home. Six of the students were human resource track students while the other four were taking the course as an elective for another emphases (e.g., finance, marketing, small business) within business management degree. Nine of the students were seniors and one was a junior. Eight of these students considered themselves non-traditional students and all ten had full-time or part-time employment at the time of the projects. Importantly, this was the first service-learning experience for any of the students.

Pedagogical Differences

Students were asked their perceptions of the differences between their academic service-learning project and projects assigned in their other courses. One student commented, "The things I memorize just for tests are all a blur…the principles I have applied are clear" while another said, "I feel I am retaining the course materials better in this class. I can remember it and talk about it easily to others." A student in her early twenties explained, "When you are working for an organization you feel part of the organization…you can't do that with other types of class projects." One student found, "In other classes I just regurgitated what was in the book and after the test I didn't remember much… In this class I didn't feel like it was like that. I was actually

learning something I can take with me after I graduate and enter the real world." Another student

said, "This project kind of forced me to learn more" while another student remarked, "I thought

it was unlike other projects in school – sometimes they don't really apply but I knew this one

would…" When probed for details about the differences between pedagogies, a young man

explained, "The closest I've ever come to anything like this in my classes is probably a case

study but it didn't even come close." Finally, one student summarized well when she stated,

"You can actually see how it really works – actually do the things –it really enhanced the

learning experience." Seventy key phrases were carefully analyzed from the student interviews

and summarized (see Table 1).

[Table 1 about here]

Perceived Learning

As explained previously, student learning is one of the most important components of

effective academic service-learning. Students were asked a number of questions about what they

learned from the service-learning projects and 105 key phrases from the 10 interviews were

compiled and analyzed. The results were separated into two categories of comments: those

related to direct learning (specific course content), and those related to indirect learning (as

Dewey would call it – collateral learning). Final summaries of the results can be found in Table

2.

[Table 2 about here]

Many students made interesting statements about their learning experiences. One student

explained, "I could easily see the direct application of the course material." In a reflective journal

a student wrote, "I could actually see how following a good pay and compensation/benefits

structure would enhance and improve the business' performance and employees' morale and

loyalty." Another explained, "It was a shock to see how happy the employees were even though they didn't get paid well. I guess pay isn't always the most important contributor to employee happiness"; while a classmate stated, "I learned that people can make very little and still enjoy their jobs and feel valued." Students seemed to find the reflective segments in class helpful, as one explained, "During the reflective segments in class, I enjoyed learning from my classmates about their experiences, challenges, failures, and successes." One male student found, "It was exciting to see things come together into a final product – we could see that is was something we could present to the organization and they wouldn't throw it away!" Finally, two students summarized their learning experience in the following ways: "I was learning – it actually surprised me – I ended up learning more than I actually thought I would" and, "I can't believe I learned as much as I did."

Perceptions of Personal Benefits

In addition to the perceived learning and skills the students acquired, we asked the students about some of the other benefits they felt they received from participating in the academic service-learning project. According to one student, "I felt more confident as we went along and it became easier in a way..." Another explained, "I think there was so much stress because it was so new – we haven't been challenged in the past –it was a good challenge and I am appreciative of it." Another stated, "The best thing out of this whole experience was to actually accomplish something meaningful – this is important to me." A student who planned to get a job in the human resource field explained, "The best part is actually now – I would honestly feel comfortable going into an organization and doing tasks similar to the ones we just finished." One student exclaimed that "When we started putting the information together, that's when I started gaining confidence that things made sense and that our stuff was really good!" One

student summarized the value of his experience in this way: "I think service learning is very valuable and if someone doesn't see the value of it then they are not really concerned about engraining the knowledge – just a grade." Sixty-seven key interview phrases regarding personal benefits were extracted from the interviews and are summarized in Table 3.

[Table 3 about here]

Challenges and Problems

Students shared stories and discussed the various challenges and problems they encountered with their service-learning projects. In fact, we located 121 related phrases from our phenomenological interviews. A summary of the phrases and themes can be found in Table 4. The largest number (n=66) of phrases focused on the challenges of working and dealing with service-learning as a team project. Coordinating the team members and their schedules appeared to be the largest challenge for all students. One student explained, "The biggest challenge was just trying to get the three of us together – schedules made everything hard." Another exclaimed, "I work better by myself and can sleep a lot better I think – I take responsibility for failures and don't have to worry about other's grades!" One team had difficulty with their community partner: "I didn't like not feeling welcomed or appreciated in any way, shape, or form and not receiving the help from them we needed." Although this frustration continued throughout the entire project, all members of this team did perceive benefits from the experience primarily because they were still able to learn the technical skills of the course. The final common frustration was that the students had many uncertainties throughout the project and particularly during the initial visits. Particularly, students had trouble with the ambiguity of the project and wanted to be told (step-by-step) how and when to do each task. During the final interviews,

however, a number of students actually admitted that they learned and were challenged more

because they had to figure out some things for themselves.

[Table 4 about here]

Conclusion

All the interviewees felt that the benefits gained from the experience outweighed the

challenges and problems they faced. Seven students made comments similar to this one: "I

would participate in another service-learning class because I know it will be something

beneficial and something to add to my resume." Another explained, "For me it has been

extremely valuable because these experiences are going to stay in me now forever." When asked

if he would take another course with a service-learning component, one student said, "That

would depend on how much I wanted to learn – if I didn't care about the content I would not do

a service-learning project. If I really wanted to learn and cared about the course material – I

would take another service-learning course." Finally, a student interested in pursuing a human

resources career stated, "This semester was very stressful but it pushed me and was good because

of that."

Implications for Teaching and Learning

This study focused on several important factors to consider in determining whether

academic service-learning could be beneficial in human resource and management courses and,

if so, factors faculty may consider when implementing such course projects. Findings do support

the premise that, although service-learning can be frustrating, difficult, challenging, and

overwhelming (at times), all interviewed colleges students felt that they learned and benefited

more from this project or assignment than from any other they had even experienced in a college

course. However, before discussing the implications of these findings a few limitations must be addressed.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study that should be considered as implications for practice or discussed. First, this class was small and therefore I was able to keep abreast of concerns, issues, problems, and challenges and found myself continuously encouraging, motivating, and supporting these students. I believe this helped ensure a strong learning experience for these students but it may be more difficult in larger classes. Second, even though we held the interviews after the semester was over and a research assistant helped in data collection and analysis, it is important to note that I was the instructor of the course which may have inherently influenced some of the student responses. Third, this was an exploratory study with a small sample so caution should be used in attempting to generalize any of these findings. Finally, this study focused on student's perceptions and experiences and did not utilize a control group. Actual and perceived learning and benefits could be somewhat different.

Need and Pedagogical Differences

The literature (e.g., Boyer, 1990; Porter & McKibbins, 1998; Zlotkowski, 1996) clearly provides support for the need and use of academic service-learning and other experiential pedagogies in management college courses. The philosophical and theoretical foundations previously explored (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984; Knowles et al., 1998) also support the need for service-learning. In addition, student perceptions (pedagogical differences, learning, and benefits) in this study (even though specific to a compensation and benefits course) appear to be aligned with past literature and the foundational frameworks of this study. Students clearly understood and articulated the differences/benefits between their service-learning project and

other course assignments. They understood the importance of practical experience in helping them to learn course concepts and other business-related knowledge and skills. They appeared to understand the reasons behind this pedagogy and the differences between it and other projects and assignments they had experienced.

So, what are the implications for practice? Professors of human resources and management should seriously consider implementation of service-learning projects in some of their courses. This study specifically supports the use of a like project in a compensation and benefits course. This project clearly broke down the wall between classroom understanding and workplace experience. Faculty members concerned about students being able to apply the material taught in the course, as well as students being able to find applicable employment after graduation, should be inclined to further explore of the possibility of applying academic service-learning to their curriculum.

Learning and Benefits

The results of this study support past literature focused on the learning and benefits of service-learning to students. First, results suggest that student felt they effectively learned the course concepts and skills while participating in their service-learning projects. Second, all students expressed learning (indirect) related to other important concepts and/or skills (e.g., critical thinking, teamwork, communication). Third, even though experience included frustration, students stated a variety of benefits (see Table 3) resulting from the service-learning experience. Overall, all students felt they learned and benefited more from the service-learning experience than any other college project or assignment they had experienced.

This research has wide implications for human resources and management professors who are concerned about ensuring learning experiences that not only teach course content but

also facilitate learning related to important competencies needed for future business professional success. It is often difficult to design courses with a collection of components that encompass both course concepts and all of the competencies that students need to be successful professionals (e.g., written communication, teamwork, critical thinking, technology, presentation, interpersonal, decision-making, diversity, citizenship). For me, this multi-dimensional project provided the medium to do just that. It is important to note that a teacher does give up some *control* when he or she chooses to assign this type of project. I could not control or direct exact student experiences with each of these competencies, but I knew (from the general design) that they would have experiences with each of the specified course concepts and competencies. The learning then varied with each student.

Challenges and Problems

Often the literature does not address the challenges and problems with service-learning. I knew that my students were struggling with many elements of the project so I thought it appropriate to document their statements regarding their challenges and outright frustrations. As Table 4 illustrates, they had much to say. As an instructor, it is important to understand the potential struggles students may confront and address them honestly and openly with them. Students need to clearly understand that they can learn through these perceived hardships. In my class, the reflective group sessions were invaluable in addressing challenges and discussing links to course content and collateral learning. The results of the final interviews do reflect student understanding of why they were assigned the projects and why it was not intended to be easy. It is always interesting to me that some of the most learning-enriched and rewarding experiences occur as a result of some difficulty and struggle.

Theory to Practice

The success of these projects is dependent upon careful course analysis and design. As Petkus (2000) described, I also found it useful to use Kolb's (1984) experiential model as a basis for the practical design of the project. Effective service-learning must consider each of the four stages. First, students participate in the concrete experience stage when they go to the sites and participate in their service. Second, students reflect on their experiences through journal writing, reflective essays, and in-class reflective discussions with other students. Third, students integrate the theories and concepts from lectures, readings, and discussions with their practical experience (abstract conceptualization). Instructors must be active in continuously helping the students find the links and connections between the two. Finally, the active experimentation stage can occur when instructors help the students (further in their projects) actively take the theories and concepts and directly apply them in the further experiences the students are having. These stages provided focus for me in the design of this compensation and benefits course as well as another course we are teaching with a service-learning component (employment law and policy).

Conclusion

Research on the use of academic service-learning in human resource courses must become a priority for faculty members interested in improving teaching and learning experiences for their students. If further qualitative and quantitative research support these findings, it is imperative that faculty members consider the use of service-learning in at least some courses throughout the human resource and management curriculum. Although it is important to continue measuring perceptions and experiences, further research on student changes in attitudes and differences/improvements of actual student learning is recommended. Further, exploratory interviews with human resource faculty members who have used academic service-learning

could also lead to valuable data regarding specific guidelines, recommendations, and ideas for

faculty members considering its use.

This was a life-changing experience for some of my students. In fact, one of these

students came to my office the other day and reported that, because of her service-learning

experiences during the spring of 2003, she was able to obtain a paid and valuable internship

during the summer and fall of 2003. She will be graduating in a few months and just accepted a

job offer as the human resource manager for the organization in which she is interning. She

attributed the beginning of this success to the difficult but meaningful and practical service-

learning experience she completed as a compensation and benefits student in my class. In

addition, during the last few weeks of spring 2003, a graduating senior interviewed and obtained

the position as the manager of the human resource department at a small northwestern university.

He reported that he discussed the details of his service-learning experience during his final

interview and he felt it was pivotal in helped him obtain this employment. Isn't this what it's all

about? According to one service-learning pioneer (head of Boston College's program), students

are not just *informed* but are *transformed* through many service-learning experiences.

To continually adjust to the changing needs of businesses, management and human

resource faculty members must be willing to change and improve their courses. This would

include the consideration of different pedagogies and teaching methods. According to Barber

(1994) "Without schools that take responsibility for what goes on beyond as well as in the

classroom, and work to remove the walls that separate the two worlds, students will continue to

bracket off all that they learn from life and keep their lives at arms' length from what they learn"

(p. 92). This is no longer acceptable. Schools of business must work more diligently to find "an

appropriate balance between an internal and an external focus" (Porter & McKibbin, 1988: 85).

We must strongly consider pedagogies that support and enhance the scholarship of engagement inside and outside of our classroom walls. At least in my human resource courses— I have found no substitute for the effectiveness of this multi-dimensional teaching and learning pedagogy— academic service-learning.

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TABLE 1

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF PEDAGOGICAL DIFFERENCES

Pedagogical differences among pedagogies

Compared to other teaching approaches, assignments, or projects I have previously experienced, academic service learning…

- caters better to people with my own learning skills.
- challenged me because I couldn't get away with sitting back and letting others do the work.
- challenged me because we were not told how to do the project – we were just told what to do.
- focused on application of course material.
- gave me an opportunity to practice acting like and being a professional.
- gave me confidence.
- gave me the experiences of communicating and interacting with more professional people.
- gave me more confidence in my knowledge about compensation and benefits.
- gave me motivation to do my best on a project instead of just trying to make the teacher happy.
- gave me the opportunity to work with people in other settings.
- got me truly involved in the community.
- group work was often more difficult.
- helped ensure long-term retention of knowledge and skills.
- helped me feel part of an organization.
- helped me make sense of the concepts learned in class so I can use them after graduation.
- helped me really understand HR better.
- helped me retain the information I studied in the book and in lectures.
- helped me truly learn.
- helped me understand the application of the material more than any other.
- is more work for everybody – teachers, students, and everybody.
- is the most applicable way to really learn.
- made it possible to learn and apply in the same week.
- made me go back to my book and lecture notes to review the material I needed to use.
- pushed me to do better – when more is required I do better and learn more.
- provided me with practical experience that I can put on my resume.
- was a more hands-on approach.
- was a more practical approach.
- was a project I could put my heart into.
- was a project that I could feel good about doing – community service.
- was a truly unique and different experience for me.
- was harder work than other projects.
- was meaningful.
- was more overwhelming and stressful.
- was reality while everything else is just book learning and research.
- was stressful because it was a new experience and took us out of our comfort zone.

TABLE 2

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNING

Course content learning (direct)	*Collateral learning (indirect)*
Abilities and knowledge it takes to work in HR	Appreciation for current possessions
Application of skills in course	Business complexity
Available benefits in profits vs. non-profits	Business challenges with employees
Benefit options	Community support services for families
Big picture of HR and compensation	Creativity
Challenges of effectively rewarding	Current state of the county – families in need
Challenges of keeping employees performing	Customization skills
Compensation decisions and choices	Employee motivations (intrinsic vs. extrinsic)
Compensation leadership challenges	Financial challenges for families
Compensation structures	Financial challenges for organizations
Differences in legal issues	General human resource information
Government resources and research for HR	Interaction skills
Human resource-related skills	Interpersonal communication skills
Job analyses skills and techniques	Interviewing and questioning techniques and skills
Job description writing skills	Non-profit information and challenges
Job evaluation skills and techniques	Organizational skills
Importance of compensation and benefits	Overall business operations
Importance of information for non HR people	People skills
Integration of pieces	Presentation skills
Intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation	Problem-solving skills
Magnitude and importance of HR	Professional skills (how to act)
Merit pay details and challenges	Quality product delivery abilities and skills
Non-profit vs. profit salaries	Respect for non-profit employees
Observation skills	Sensitivity and empathy for those in need
Pay-for-performance challenges	Starting and completing a large project
Personality traits to be effective in HR	Teamwork challenges and patience
Research skills	Teamwork skills and value
Resources available for evaluation	Value of community service and citizenship
Role of HR in organizations	Value of education in general
Seniority pay may not be best	Written communication skills
Skills needed to work in HR	
Task inventory creation skills	
Technical skills related to course	
Textbook concepts and principles	
Value of the knowledge and skills acquired	

TABLE 3

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF PERSONAL BENEFITS

Personal benefits from academic service-learning

Because of the academic service-learning project, I have…
- a hiring edge for new jobs.
- been motivated to do my best.
- broadened my experiences.
- developed friendships.
- enjoyed myself.
- felt a sense of fulfillment and accomplishment.
- felt good about myself and my abilities gained.
- felt like my work was valued.
- felt motivated to continue volunteer work after the semester was over.
- figured out that I can talk intelligently to professionals.
- gained confidence.
- gained experience working in a real non-profit organization.
- had an experience that I can put on my resume and talk about in interviews.
- influenced an organization in the community.
- interacted with workplace professionals.
- learned concepts useful in my current job and other parts of my life
- produced a quality project.
- received an opportunity that other students don't get.
- received the satisfaction of helping someone else.
- reasons for promotions at my current job.
- seen employment opportunities out of college.
- worked hard and it felt good.

TABLE 4. STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS

Academic service-learning challenges and problems

Some of the problems and challenges I confronted during my service-learning project included…
- a lot of stress.
- a site coordinator who didn't really want us to come.
- a site coordinator who did not understand what we were doing.
- a site coordinator who wouldn't return my calls.
- being out of my comfort zone – not used to challenging work.
- contacting and scheduling the first appointment.
- coordinating time to go to the worksite.
- dealing with different personalities in my group.
- difficulty in getting everything done and pulling things together.
- ensuring that the final product was good enough for my standards.
- ensuring that the final product was good enough for my instructor and the site.
- feeling like it was too much work for one class.
- feeling like the research was too difficult.
- feeling overwhelmed.
- finding time to meet outside of class.
- frustration.
- getting all of the information we needed to do the project.
- getting everything to come together at the end.
- group members who were not always dependable and who would not listen.
- having standards higher than my other team members.
- health issues (myself and my children).
- interference from pressures at home and work.
- nervousness because we were the first group representing our school (respect from them).
- nervousness because this was a new type of project – no one had done this type of project.
- not being able to be lazy like I am in other classes.
- not being told exactly (step by step) what we should do.
- not feeling certain how to answer all of the site coordinator's questions during the first visit.
- not feeling needed or valued at the organization.
- not having enough time to do my very best.
- not knowing exactly what the end product would look like.
- scheduling in general.
- site employees who seemed too busy to deal with us.
- team members with different priorities and didn't give an equal amount of effort.
- the ambiguity present in this type of project.
- the desire to have more time so that I could do even better.
- the difficultly of the project.
- the site not understanding the value of the project for them.
- time required for the project.
- uncertainty (my abilities, our effectiveness, project specifics, whether the site would use our final product).
- wanting exact directions.