Thinking Beyond the Classroom in Management Education: Implementing Academic Service-Learning for a Comprehensive Learning Experience

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Abstract

The business environment has gradually become more dynamic and complex throughout the past decades. Today, businesses struggle with complicated issues that were not discussed and/or did not exist 25 to 30 years ago. Yet, according to Dallimore (2002), “higher education has not adequately responded to the need to prepare students from this complex environment” (p. 86). Educators have found that experiential teaching methods, including academic service-learning, address these current challenges in higher education. The purpose of this paper is to assist management educators and practitioners in understanding the service-learning pedagogy and its worth and applicability to management education. We will do this by defining academic service-learning, reviewing related theory and literature, sharing ideas and examples of projects that can be implemented in various business classes, discuss educator challenges, and providing a list of resources that may be helpful in implementing this pedagogy.
Thinking beyond the Classroom in Management Education: Implementing Academic Service-Learning for a Comprehensive Learning Experience

The business environment has gradually become more dynamic and complex throughout the past decades. Today, businesses struggle with complicated issues that were not discussed and/or did not exist 25 to 30 years ago. The changing demographics of the American workforce, including the rising average age of workers and increased diversity, has added to this complexity. In addition, technology, economic issues, government regulations, outsourcing, and various other issues require more flexibility and adaptability than were expected of employees in previous eras. According to Dallimore (2002), however, “Higher education has not adequately responded to the need to prepare students from this complex environment” (p. 86). Business professors have found it challenging to incorporate assignments and activities, within the classroom walls, that assist students in developing certain competencies and skills (e.g., critical thinking, writing, presentation, interpersonal communication, decision-making, strategic planning, citizenship, teamwork, facilitation, leadership, self-confidence, cultural awareness, technology) essential for this success in today’s workplace. In fact, with traditional classroom learning methods (e.g., lecture, bookwork, and tests) it is hard for students to get a realistic preview of what a career in a particular field will actually entail.

Gujarathi and Sarmiento (2002) and others have found that experiential teaching methods, including academic service-learning, address these current challenges in higher education. They contend, “The most appealing feature of [service-learning] is that, instead of passively listening to an instructor, students get actively involved in community service assignments. In the process, they obtain a context within which to place the course content, which increases the depth of their understanding” (p. 67). By using service-learning in the
classroom students get a more realistic preview of actual job functions in a chosen field while they are still in school. Service-learners are also, according to Brown (2000), more prepared to handle uncertainties that arise in a professional environment. He contended that in-class simulations, although experiential in nature, do not provide contact with a real client and the uncertainties that accompany this dimension of project work found in service-learning. McGoldrick, Battle and Gallagher (2000) agreed, “students need to be able to link their education with real life experiences which cannot be simulated within the classroom” (p. 45).

To help illustrate this point, consider this example. Imagine that, after watching a program on television, a student decides he would like to become a gymnast. Forget the fact that he has never had any related athletic experience, including the trampoline. To learn gymnastic skills he enrolls in a series of classes where the sport is taught using the lecture, bookwork, and test formulas. He examines diagrams, reads about how it is done, and does well on the written exams. He may even watch performances. No matter how thorough the lectures are, when he finishes the classes and is on his own to begin doing gymnastics for the first time, he is likely to flounder. He may even discover that he doesn’t actually like participating in gymnastics once he has graduated. The same is true, at some level, for many college graduates. It is difficult for students to get a realistic idea of what a profession involves if only traditional teaching pedagogies are implemented in the classroom. It may also be difficult to make the connections between figures and facts and the “real-world” application. To some degree, academic service-learning alleviates this disconnect.

The purpose of this paper is to assist management educators and practitioners in understanding the service-learning pedagogy and its worth and applicability to management education. We will do this by defining academic service-learning, reviewing related theory and
literature, sharing ideas and examples of projects that can be implemented in various business classes, discuss educator challenges, and providing a list of resources that may be helpful in implementing this pedagogy.

**Definition and Description**

The service-learning pedagogy allows students, with instructor guidance, to practice *doing* some of the activities (concepts and skills) learned about in the classroom. Importantly, these are the same kinds of activities that graduates are likely to end up doing once they enter the workforce. For example, according to Bush-Bacelis (1998), business communications students might be assigned to rewrite parts of an instruction manual for workers in a non-profit organization. While the basic principles of what service-learning is are consistent, there is no single, accepted definition. Easterling (1997) suggested it is a teaching method that integrates community service with academic study. “Service-learning has the potential to enhance students’ learning by increasing their involvement and empowering them as future business leaders. Students also gain practical experience that may help them determine career choices and give them a competitive advantage in the job market through enhancing their resumes” (p. 54).

According to Arnold and Kiosoglous (2003), this practice links *doing* and *thinking*. They maintain that service-learners get the most out of the experience when they actively engage themselves and critically reflect on their encounter rather than taking it for granted. They further propose experience should be designed to be personally relevant or meaningful to the learner. Another useful explanation of the practice comes from Godfrey (2000) who stated that “Ideally, service-learning courses seamlessly integrate students’ community service experiences with the academic knowledge being considered…” He wrote that they key is that service-learning does not “merely append community service onto the curriculum, but instead integrates community
service-within the curriculum” (p. 23). In other words, not all service constitutes service-learning. It must be directly related to the curriculum—something that students can expect to do if they choose to graduate in the chosen field.

The practice of service-learning (or academic service-learning) has evolved over the years since it’s inception in the early 1900’s. Unfortunately, many misconceptions based on old standards of practice remain. The following table helps root-out the myths about what is, and is not, considered part of the pedagogy.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

The third myth about service-learning in the table above merits more discussion. One of the initial questions often asked about service-learning is about how it is different from, or better than, an internship. That the pedagogy is akin to an internship has been rebutted by various service-learning experts, including Godfrey (1999), who explains the difference between the two forms of experiential learning:

Service-learning pedagogies differ from mainstream experiential education (ranging from case studies to internships) in three key respects. First, service-learning pedagogies work on the principle of reciprocity both the server and the served must profit from the experience. Second, service-learning pedagogies rely heavily on reflection as a mechanism to help students integrate their experiences and their learning. (p. 367)

Third, service-learning pedagogies attempt to develop and elicit responsible citizenship skills. Godfrey (2000) also asserted that “even in skills application, service-learning tends to go beyond other kinds of field study classes, because it allows students to apply skills in new domains” (p. 29).
Therefore, academic service-learning differs from an internship in that both parties must benefit from the experience. Service-learners are never paid for their participation, but they benefit through the practical learning experience. The organizations receiving the service, as mentioned earlier, are most often non-profit. These organizations would not have the financial recourses to complete the projects otherwise. The second way that service-learning differs from the internship is the active reflection component, which McCarthy and Tucker (2002) stated serves as a “connection of the service experience to learning…Where skill acquisition is an integral part of education, service learning provides a real-life context in which students practice what they learn” (p. 630) and Munter (2002) concluded “help[s] to further intensify the learning experience for all participants” (p. 153).

**Theoretical Framework**

Although there are numerous theoretical frameworks that are foundational to the academic service-learning pedagogy, an adult learning framework will be utilized as a foundation for this paper. 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, Holton, & Swanson, 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 an 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 (1990), 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” (p. 44). Academic service-learning provides adult students the opportunity to learn as adults prefer to learn, as Knowles has explained, and in a way that is most effective.

**Student Benefits**

To provide the most learning benefit to management service-learning students, Brown (2000) provided a short explanation of what service-learning should be:

Students are faced with the challenge of structuring and prioritizing a very loosely defined problem and carrying it forward to completion on a short-time horizon, all carefully choreographed in cooperation with each other, volunteer workers, material donors, technical experts, and the client. Some students enter the course with little knowledge of project management tools, and others may have relatively strong expertise.
The mixture proves to be one of the great strengths of the course because the experiential teaching vehicle allows each person to learn at his or her level of need. Additionally, cooperation among those with varying levels of knowledge creates a fertile environment for mentoring. (p. 54)

Initially, students may shirk at the challenge—unfamiliar with the new, active method of learning in which much participation is required of them. The student benefits of service-learning, however, seem to outweigh the challenges students face. For example, effectively designed service-learning projects appear to assist students in the understanding, application, and retention of course concepts and skills (e.g., Kenworthy-U’Ren, 2000; Rama Ravenscroft, S. P., Walcott, S. K., & Zlotkowski, E., 2000). Godfrey (1999) explained that “service-learning pedagogies, when done well, combine rigorous classroom instruction with field experiences in such a way that students gain skills in business management and in moral imagination” (p. 364).

Researchers and academicians have also found that service-learning is also effective in providing learning opportunities for students to develop the additional competencies that graduates should embody (Porter & McKibbon, 1988). Examples include skills related to citizenship (Godfrey, 1999), leadership and conflict resolution (Thomas & Landua, 2002), teamwork, interaction, time management, and networking (Tucker, McCarthy, Hoxmeier, & Lenk, 1998), cultural awareness and diversity (Vernon & Foster, 2000), and written and verbal communication (Tucker et al., 1998).

Service-learners also had increased motivation to perform well (which appeared to result in higher levels of learning), according to Madsen (2004) and her qualitative study of human resource management students. All of the students interviewed concluded that they were more motivated to do better on this assignment than others in which they had been assigned. One
student reflected in his journal, “I have no problem doing a second rate job on school assignments and trying to pass them off as “A” work but, for a real company, I felt more of an obligation to perform my best.” Another stated in her interview, “We worked really hard. We wanted it to be a professional looking thing… If it was just for us, that’s one thing, but because it was for a real organization we wanted it to be our best work. It had our names on it and our names are important to us. We didn’t want to let people down” (p. 000). The learner’s efforts were not just for a grade alone. Kenworthy (2000) also asserted that “the responsibilities inherent in such real-world accountability to people and organizations in genuine need of one’s services clearly separate service-learning from other forms of experiential education even from traditional internships, where student contributions can often be more accurately described as “useful” rather than “needed.” Genuine need creates a “personal emotional intensity” for students one that is not often found in traditional classroom situations (p. 58).

These are just a few of the many documented student benefits possible through the use of well-designed service-learning in academic courses. Although it will not be discussed in this paper, it is also important to note that there are also numerous benefits that can be gained by the faculty members, institutions, and community partners and members.

Service Learning in Practice—

Ideas for Implementation in Management Courses

Some service-learning enthusiasts have suggested that the practice can be implemented in almost any course, but coming up with ideas of what can be done or how to get started in specific courses may sometimes be a challenge for professors. Faculty may also worry about newness of the pedagogy or the extra time in preparing for a course using the method. The following table provides a variety of management courses and possible projects which could be implemented in
As mentioned in the previous section, many of these projects are performed for non-profit organizations that wouldn’t have the resources to perform the functions without student help. One example of this, for an accounting class, is to have students provide accounting services to low-income community members. Creating a tax-service for members of the community could do this. At Utah Valley State College accounting students help prepare the taxes for other students and members of the community. This serves the students by giving them experience in a real, fluid environment and, though it isn’t one, single non-profit organization, the community clearly benefits.

Another project, from the same college, was completed not for a non-profit organization but for the state government. Human resource students revised the employee manual, which is traditionally disseminated at new hire orientation. The students reviewed current laws, and checked the manual for compliance. This was a semester-long project and done as a group of two students. Other students in the class selected among a list of non-profit organizations that had enthusiastically agreed to participate. This project taught practical application of human resource law, and got students thinking about the legal implications of failure to follow regulations.

ACT students in a government class in Las Vegas, according to Clark, Hays and Philips (1997) “learned how government worked by organizing a successful campaign to construct a stop light at a busy intersection near their school. Local government, after all, is the only layer of government that is truly accessible to students. It should no be overlooked.” (p. 168). This
project, like the tax preparation venture, served the community without working with any specific non-profit organization. The important thing is that it was course relevant.

Finally, Kenworthy (1996) wrote about a Business Communication course for which “students in a graduate managerial communications course created outreach materials for an agency on their economic development opportunities for the homeless. This packet was later used as a model for economic development programs throughout the greater Boston area” (p. 129-30). Again, the project was course relevant giving students the opportunity to prepare materials similar to those they may be expected to produce professionally.

**Faculty Challenges**

Although academic service-learning is a powerful and effective pedagogy, scholars and educators have identified a number of challenges that faculty face in design and implementation of related projects. Zlotkowski (1996) explained that instructors fear introducing topics in which the they have no “educational background or technical expertise, uncertainty as to how one can effectively monitor and evaluate community-based assignments, a sense of the difficulty or even the irrelevance of working with non-profits, and a strict commitment to the priority of traditional research” (p. 12).

Indeed, Konwerski and Nashman, (2002) describe a “role change” which they claim takes place, “particularly for faculty” in a service-learning environment. In this pedagogy, they write, “faculty have been forced to learn from the student, being open to the information. Teachers have been moving to review how they teach, as they both encounter being teachers of life and learners of life. They no longer are solely responsible to transmit information, but more likely can use a constructivist approach… and become activated learners” (p. 170).
This role change can be difficult for faculty and students alike. Robinson (1999, 2000) warns, “Service learning programs usually don’t succeed without first experiencing some degree of failure or discouragement” (p. 11). Robinson lists and explains several of the challenges associated with the practice in regards to teaching, they include the following: first, funding. Such a project may require additional resources, which may be obtained through grants or a number of other means, but might require time, effort, and perseverance. Second, academic rigor: Robinson explained:

A service learning course need not be frivolous or less rigorous than any existing course, and service learners’ academic products need not be evaluated differently from those of other students. The key is to retain the same course competencies and learning objectives, but provide options for students to meet those objectives. Rather than spending 15 hours in the library researching and then writing about a topic, service learners can spend 15 hours in the community and then relate their experiences in writing, while reflecting on what they have seen and learned about their topic. (p. 11)

Robinson’s list of challenges also includes adversarial relationships, student time, quality vs. quantity, and changing program models.

Root and Thorme (2001) acknowledged that incorporating active learning “can be torturous for instructors accustomed to lecture classes,” (p. 330) and that moving to a service-learning pedagogy can be difficult for professors. However, she is quick to purport that “students are more engaged, they are willing to examine nuances and difficulties that seem unimportant in a traditional textbook/lecture presentation and as a result we believe they learn the material more thoroughly and more lastingly” (p. 330).

Recommendations and Conclusion
Based on the literature as well as our personal research and experience, we recommend that management educators seriously consider the use of academic service-learning to enhance their curriculum and courses. Table 3 has been included to provide other resources for faculty interested in obtaining additional information. It is clear that educators should expect student difficulties before and during the projects. Continuous efforts in helping the students reflect on their experiences and their link to course content will assist students in an enhanced learning experience. Challenging projects may be daunting but students appear to learn the most when they go outside their comfort zone and struggle in some ways. As an educator, however, it is important to provide continued support so that students can move forward and learn the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

As Dewey (1938) explained, “Every experience is a moving force. Its value can be judged only on the grounds of what it moved toward and into… It is then the business of the educator to see in what direction an experience is heading” (p. 38). If the educator carefully designs a meaningful academic service-learning project with direction and focus, business student should be able to substantially benefit from the opportunities provided from interaction within the classroom, with the community, and through real-world experiences. According to Dewey (1938), “It is through what we do in and with the world that we read it’s meaning and measure its value” (p. 17). By thinking beyond the classroom walls in management education, student learning (content and impact) can be strengthened, deepened, and broadened. For many students academic service-learning can make a true difference in the value of higher education.
References


service-learning in management (pp. 21-41). Washington, DC: American Association for Higher Education.


Kramlinger & Huberty (1990), Training and Development. I have this at work.


Table 1

Academic Service-Learning—Fact versus Fiction?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What Academic Service Learning is:</th>
<th>What it is not:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating the economic projections to help a hospital decide how many new full or part-time nurses to hire and train</td>
<td>Picking up trash along the side of a freeway for an economics class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating web pages using the programming language learned in the course for an animal shelter</td>
<td>Selling candy bars as a fundraiser for a local needy organization to earn a grade (or part of a grade) in a programming course</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A class project often completed with a small group of peers which involves active, serious reflection through out. It is usually done in a non-profit environment.</td>
<td>An internship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2
Academic Service-Learning Project Ideas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Name</th>
<th>Project Ideas for Course</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Accounting        | • Redesign billing procedures  
                    • Teach accounting skills to school-aged children  
                    • Provide accounting services to low-income community members                                                                                  |
| Business          | • Write or revise instruction, training, or operational manuals  
                    • Design brochures  
                    • Design websites  
                    • Write volunteer recruitment letters  
                    • Write funding solicitation letters for various audiences  
                    • Design and draft follow-up letters to donors and volunteers  
                    • Write thank you letters  
                    • Create a database files for mailing newsletters  
                    • Create informational brochures on various issues/topics  
                    • Analyze positions and write job descriptions  
                    • Write public service announcements  
                    • Write short articles for newspapers  
                    • Create outreach materials for agencies                                                                                                 |
| Business Policy   | • Help a local food bank systematize its policies for food collection and distribution  
                    • Analyze current business strategies and provide recommendations for improvements  
                    • Help an organization write a business plan or strategic planning document.                                                                 |
| Finance           | • Design and present workshops on establishing credit and managing personal finances  
                    • Help individuals or local agencies with budget planning materials and training  
                    • Teach elementary or secondary students about personal finance principles and applications                                                      |
| Human Resources   | • Revise a performance evaluation form and give general suggestions about performance appraisals that the employing organization could use to improve this process for other jobs  
                    • Make suggestions for improving communication between the new managing directors and current employees  
                    • Create a realistic job preview video to be shown to job candidates  
                    • Develop a training program (including demonstration video and illustrated handbook) for new employees  
                    • Improve the interview process to select employees  
                    • Create job descriptions for volunteer positions in a nonprofit organizations  
                    • Survey local businesses about awareness of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and their policies and practices to accommodate disable applicants and |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marketing</td>
<td>• Develop and disseminating agency programs and messages&lt;br&gt;• Promote special events&lt;br&gt;• Conduct related marketing research&lt;br&gt;• Develop a marketing plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operations Management</td>
<td>• Develop effective distribution systems for clients&lt;br&gt;• Analyze an operation or system and recommend improvements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization Development</td>
<td>• Analyze a problem within an agency and design an appropriate solution&lt;br&gt;• Organize a successful change campaign to construct a stop light at a busy intersection&lt;br&gt;• Resign a job so it is more effective and efficient&lt;br&gt;• Analyze an ineffective process and recommend improvements&lt;br&gt;• Develop an evaluation system to provide feedback to the agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization and Management Theory</td>
<td>• Conduct organizational analyses and survey feedback programs&lt;br&gt;• Facilitate organizational planning sessions&lt;br&gt;• Develop business plans for projects to benefit low-income communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td>• Examine the prospects for local or state government of improving school funding with adding a stat lottery</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 3

**Academic Service-Learning Resources**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service-Learning Course Books</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Campus Compact (0000). <em>After the Votes are Counted: A Post-Election Guide to Maintaining Student Civic Engagement</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Campus Compact. <em>Assessing Service-Learning and Civic Engagement: Principles and Techniques</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Campus Compact. <em>Civic Engagement across the Curriculum: A Resource Book for Service-Learning Faculty</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Campus Compact. <em>The Engaged Department Toolkit</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Campus Compact. <em>Fundamentals of Service-Learning Course Construction</em>.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service-Learning Resources on the Web</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. American Association of Community Colleges—Service-Learning; <a href="http://www.aacc.nche.edu/initiatives/SERVICE/SERVICE.HTM">www.aacc.nche.edu/initiatives/SERVICE/SERVICE.HTM</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The Big Dummy’s Guide to Service-Learning; <a href="http://www.fiu.edu/-time4chg/Library/bigdummy.html">www.fiu.edu/-time4chg/Library/bigdummy.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Campus Compact National Center for Community Colleges; <a href="http://www.mc.maricopa.edu/academic/compact/">www.mc.maricopa.edu/academic/compact/</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8. The Journal of Public Service & Outreach; www.uga.edu/-jpso/
9. Learn and Serve America Training and Technical Assistance Exchange; www.lsaexchange.org
10. Learn, Service, & Surf; www.edb.utexas.edu/servicelearning/index.html
11. Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning; www.umich.edu/-ocsl/MJCSL/
12. The National Service-Learning Clearinghouse; www.nicsl.coled.umn.edu
15. NCTE’s Service-Learning in Composition Website; www.ncte.org/service/
16. Service-Learning Internet Community; www.slic.calstate.edu

* Adapted from Campus Compact (2000). Introduction to service-learning toolkit. Providence: Campus Compact