

SERVICE-LEARNING IN MARKETING EDUCATION: INTEGRATING CLASSROOMS AND COMMUNITIES

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ABSTRACT

California's Governor, Gray Davis, recently called on all public colleges and universities in the state to institute some form of mandatory community service as a graduation requirement. The Governor's call is supported by others who feel that higher education should do more than prepare graduates for a useful career. Advocates feel the university should also prepare graduates to become responsible members of a community. However, not everyone agrees that mandatory service is the appropriate way to encourage young people to give back to the community. Others have noted that incentives and opportunities are more appropriate ways of fostering an ethic of service. One of the opportunities to incorporate more service into the academic curriculum is through the use of service-learning.

Service-learning is a form of experiential learning that utilizes community based service activities as a tool for learning. Service-learning has the dual benefit of broadening the student's knowledge of an academic discipline while at the same time developing a sense that any individual can make a contribution to the community. One of the academic disciplines that can greatly benefit from this type of pedagogy is marketing.

It is well known that the functions of marketing are applicable in social service organizations. Working at one of these organizations nearly always exposes the student to a variety of marketing applications. Service-learning activities can provide marketing students with an opportunity to: (1) Improve communication, presentation, leadership, creative, and computer skills; (2) Get first hand knowledge of career opportunities, challenges, and benefits associated with employment in the social service sector; (3) Allow students to leave their own personal comfort zone to learn about and experience the value of diversity; and (4) Experience situations calling for unstructured problem solving and decision making under uncertainty.

While there are a variety of ways to incorporate service-learning into courses and curriculums, the most common are: (1) An added credit option; (2) An activity or project that constitutes a substantial

portion of a student's course grade; (3) A minor course component which is normally presented as an alternative assignment to a short research paper, team project, or other activity with a focused objective; and (4) A marketing internship.

Outcome assessment tools for service-learning are similar to those applicable in a non service-learning course (e.g. analytical papers, class discussions, or presentations). However, a tool that results in the greatest payoff in service-learning is critical reflection. Only when the student critically reflects upon their experience in terms of course content, their own feelings, and community involvement can the "learning" part of service-learning occur.

Business and marketing faculty tend to be supportive of the concept of service-learning but often feel that it belongs in liberal arts or social science courses. Thus they fail to make the connection between individual course content and service to the community. Even when the value of service-learning is accepted, additional resistance takes the form of alleged time constraints. Ironically, the use of service-learning doesn't exacerbate the problem; it provides a solution. It allows the instructor to develop student behavioral skills and apply course concepts through community based, value added activities. By addressing multiple learning objectives, service-learning activities expands the offering without eliminating content.

Whether it is as a major or minor course component, every course in the marketing curriculum can benefit from the use of service-learning. Consider these benefits: (1) As a form of experiential education, it permits students to apply course content and develop valuable communication and behavioral skills; (2) Service-learning helps answer the challenge to develop graduates who are more socially aware and have a sense of community; (3) Students benefit by gaining a broader view of the value of marketing activity; and (4) Students learn to see the relevance of what they are studying.