

## BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: SERVICE LEARNING IN BUSINESS SCHOOL MARKETING CLUBS

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### ABSTRACT

Marketing club service learning can play an important role in the business curriculum. Easterling and Rudell (1997) noted that business schools must broaden the educational experience beyond the corporate internship to apply more business-like methods and solutions to social problems. Jacoby (1996) defined service learning as experiential educational in which students engage in activities and address human and community needs. Through structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development. Service learning can provide a number of positive outcomes for business students including: academic development (discipline-based material), real-world understanding, problem-solving strategies, critical thinking, leadership skills, communication abilities, moral development, and social responsibility. Finally, service learning is significant because it demonstrates the reciprocity between the business school and the community (Holtzman, Stewart, & Barr, 2008).

In college of business, as in other academic disciplines, the objective associated with service-learning course vary; however there appears to be fairly consisted emphasis on how participation in such courses contribute to students knowledge and skill development (Herman & Ambrose, 2006). Service learning has gained popularity as a pedagogical tool in many business schools because it can instill social responsibility while it enforces academic learning (Steiner and & Watson, 2006). While the classroom is a more suitable place for academic projects, service learning opportunities in marketing clubs can provide a more efficient and satisfying learning experience for student and clients. The mission statement of colleges' and universities' clubs and organizations should include the service learning aspect from the perspective of social responsibility to citizenship. Students who participate in club service learning provide community service as part of their club obligation, and thereby understand the relationship between

their service and marketing the club mission (Holtzman, Stewart, & Barr, 2008).

Much of the research on service learning has focused on defining the fundamental components of service learning such as community participation and cooperation, academic study and discourse, as well as student reflection, social responsibility, and social awareness from an academic prospective (Lopez & Lee, 2005; Simmons & Clearly, 2005; Sherman & MacDonald, 2009). Another aspect of service learning research focuses on "academic service learning," which includes the traditional academic pedagogy (Simmons & Clearly, 2005). Service learning is well established at many universities and has become a central pedagogy over the years (Sherman & MacDonald, 2009).

Business schools are increasingly being asked to provide students with diverse experiences outside the classroom. Service learning provides students with more real-life experience than is accomplished by internships and routine class projects. Service learning has emerged as a way to encourage social responsibility and to motivate and serve as a driving organizational force within the business school. Limited research has been conducted on the objective of service learning, conduct from the classroom (Steiner & Watson, 2006). Classroom service learning project are less concerned with the social outcome and more concerned on achieving the course objectives. It should encourage and prepare students to be informed, caring, and responsible citizens who are actively involved in tackling social issues (Kraft, 1996).

This study investigates the integration of service learning in the business school marketing clubs, which can provide strong ties between the club, academics, and community. This article defines marketing club service learning, discusses its benefits for business marketing club as well as for students, and details the implementation of community service learning. What are the benefits

and challenges of implementing a service-learning project in the context of marketing club?

### **SERVICE LEARNING**

Service learning can produce an “educational experience” (Dewey, 1938). In the last decade, service-learning has become increasingly popular at all levels of education (Tannenbaum & Brown-Welty, 2006). There is no shortage of opportunities for college students to become involved in community service learning. Service-learning on college campuses has become so pervasive that the National Research Advisory Council has been established to specifically advance the research agenda in service-learning (Howard, Gelmon & Giles, 2000). A number of studies have indicated that service-learning impacts academic achievement. A study conducted by Vogelgesang & Alexander (2000) found that students participating in service-learning, experienced positive outcome in three academic areas: critical thinking, writing skills, and college-grade point average. These findings are consistent with other investigations into the impact of service-learning on academic achievement (Batchelder & Root, 1994; Astin & Sax, 1998; Melchior, 1999; Klute & Billig, 2002; Billig & Eyler, 2003).

An investigation conducted by Anderson, Swick & Yff, (2001) found that service learning programs are founded on six components: (a) service to the community; (b) integration of the service activity and the classroom; (c) student reflection of the service experience and academic outcome academics; (d) student involvement in enhancing and implementing the learning activities; (e) the benefits to all (students, community, and university); and (f) evaluation of the program looking at the learning service experience. The faculty sponsor’s role is that of an authority figure facilitating the six components of the service learning project. Learning becomes more active as club members make choices of how to address problems during each stage of the project (Strand, et al., 2003).

Service learning causes students and faculty to build new relationships with community stakeholders who have diverse interests, emotion and values in the project (Strand, et al., 2003). Service learning can play an important role in the school of business clubs and organizations. Clubs and organizations can broaden the educational experience of business students far beyond the classroom. Service learning is a form of community engagement that has become increasingly rooted in institutions of higher

education (Lemieux & Allen, 2007). Today, many business schools and departments sponsor different clubs and organizations with the purpose of enhancing student involvement in academics. There is a broad spectrum of goals based on incorporating service learning into clubs and organizations. Service learning projects are vehicles for enhancing the clubs’ understanding of marketing and management decisions (Steiner and & Watson, 2006).

### **BENEFITS TO BUSINESS SCHOOL MARKETING CLUBS**

Incorporating service learning into business school clubs and organization can reflect the increasing importance of the club to the university and community. Caudron (1994) suggested that service learning activities by clubs and organizations can enhance social responsibility while building club unity and skills. Many corporations (Hewlett Packard, Ben & Jerry’s and The Body Shop) are incorporating community service strategies to cultivate and enhance team work and develop good citizenship (Tucker, McCarthy, Hoxmeter, & Lenk, 1998). Service learning can be an integral component of any club or organization within the school of business.

The overall experience in service learning can differ greatly from the experience in the classroom (Sherman & MacDonald, 2009). One of the advantages is that students choose to participate in the project and likely to be highly motivated, leading to higher quality work (Waller & Riordan, 1988). While most semester long service learning projects (course) are committed to short-term goals and objectives, most marketing clubs are committed to long-range community projects that last throughout the year. Faculty advisors to marketing clubs should be careful in project selection. They must strategize to gain department and institutional support that develops a collective vision that avoids burn-out and has long-term commitment.

There are numerous other service learning programs on college campuses. Researchers of several studies examining service learning programs in classroom have documented positive outcomes in university and community collaborate programs such as urban high school, alternative high school programs for dropouts. Each of these programs embraced service learning principles, resulting in benefits for the department, university, and community participants.

## METHODOLOGY

A convenience experiment sample of three marketing clubs located in the state of Colorado was selected. This small scale study investigated the various kinds of service learning activities in which the marketing clubs were involved. Our sample was selected by conducting an Internet search and selecting those clubs that indicated that they had a faculty advisor and were active. Our sample consisted of three of the largest state institutions. The authors were interested in marketing club a student who joined the club and participated in service learning activities. The three universities' marketing clubs involved in the experimental project served as the population.

The data was collected from the three institutions during the spring semester of 2010. Students in the marketing club attended classes during the day and had one or two club meetings each month. The club sample consisted of 103 club members (73 males and 30 females) representing the three universities. At all three universities, this represented a small percentage of all marketing majors. All participants were pursuing a degree in marketing except eight (five in sport business and three in marketing education). The majority of the participants were Caucasian, ten were Hispanic, and five were African-American. However, not all students in the marketing club were involved in different activities and all were active members.

The survey consisted of open-and-close ended questions. The survey included 10 items measuring the following: (a) the number of hours involved in service learning during the nine academic months, (b) the number of community service learning activities, (c) the club and individual satisfaction, (d) the number of past community service activities, (e) the benefits to the marketing club, (f) a description of their service learning project, (g) faculty involvement in project, (h) involvement in a course-based service learning project, (i) how funds were obtained for the club, and (j) demographic information. The club advisors were also asked to complete a brief survey about their service learning project. Like the students, they were asked to describe the project, how the project selected, was the project benefit to student development, and the level of student involvement. The marketing club president completed the survey for each university.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study suggest that service learning activities at the club level may be just as or more beneficial to student development. All three marketing clubs viewed the club-based service learning projects positively. All of the service learning activities were designed to help the surrounding community. Part of the marketing clubs goals and mission was to conduct a learning experience that benefited the community. Most club presidents and faculty advisors reported limited resistance to service learning projects because it was the culture on campus and service learning activities were stressed in their academic courses. One of the challenges and barriers confronted by the clubs that participated in service learning activities was the time commitment and the impact on academic studies. Many students enjoyed the service learning activity, however were stretch for time if others students did not follow through on the service learning activity. Some of the students considered the time required in service learning activities to be a problem. Not surprisingly, student's interest in participating in the club service learning project was impacted by uncertainty regarding the time commitment. In order to reduce the number of hours involved in the service learning activity, all three clubs were involved in one year long project. It is important to anticipate and make adjustment for the increase3d demands on club members, including how better align the service-learning project with their academic requirements (Chupp & Joseph, 2010).

The authors of this study identified a number of barriers. First, the nature of the service learning project could affect student participation in the project. Depending on the type of project, students may have difficulty working with young kids or senior citizens. As with many clubs, the service learning component of the marketing club was optional for club members. The club presidents indicated that club members indicated their satisfaction and felt that the service learning activity produced collaboration among club members.

The faculty advisors indicated that service learning activities at the club level reinforced community service and the development of professional skills. They also indicated that these activities could lead to civic understanding and community involvement throughout their professional careers. All of the faculty advisors believed that service learning benefited the club as well as the marketing department. This could serve as a recruiting tool for

future club members and keep club members involved through their academic career. The faculty advisors indicated that many marketing majors did not participate in club activities due to the time commitment, their academic or employment, and finally because the no interest. They also indicated that students that participated in the marketing club benefited socially and professionally, and could draw from this experience later on in life.

All of the respondents felt that the marketing clubs service learning project increased their marketing skills and they were more motivated to participate in these, than in other course work. The lessons learned in marketing club service learning projects have reinforced skills that students have learned in other context (classroom). Students and faculty advisors believed that the more influence the students had on the selection of the service learning project, the more involvement and positive experience. Each school had a different service learning project. One school provided leadership and tutorial instruction for business students at local high schools. The second marketing club provided services for a community based-service for children living in poverty and low income families. The third marketing club worked with a consulting group that provided start-up businesses with free promotional and marketing services. All of the participants believed that service learning was a beneficial and positive experience. Most of the club members indicated that they would participate in a service learning experience again (Lu & Lambright, 2010). Service learning creates community awareness and is a vehicle to install civic values to young and

upcoming business professionals. To make the service learning experience beneficial and unique to students, club member must set forth outcomes and objectives for the clubs and marketing department (Steiner & Watson, 2006). All three of the marketing clubs conducted an end of semester self-report, which measured club members' performance, the success of the project, and the overall outcome of the service learning experience.

There were a number of limitations to this experimental study. The study was conducted at three state institutions within the state of Colorado. Presently, the authors are able to determine the impact the service learning projects had on club members. However, were unable to determine the view of the clients. A majority of the students in each club felt that the service learning projects were beneficial to their personal development and increased their knowledge of community service (Steiner & Watson, 2006).

This experimental study has important implications for future service learning research. More research is needed on the factors that influence the effectiveness of the club and the lessons learned from club members. Service learning at the club level has added potential to take service learning experience beyond the realm of the academic classroom. This could be a powerful academic tool that has been underutilized by business school departments and clubs.

#### **References available on request**