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Integrating Service-Learning and Classroom Instruction to Enhance Learning: An Innovative Hospitality Education

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to investigate how the integration of service-learning and classroom instruction in a meetings and events management class influences student learning and interest in community service. The sample selection for this study was a convenience sample of the students enrolled in a Meetings and Events management course at a comprehensive Midwest university in the United States of America. The result of this study indicated that students' involvement in service-learning enhanced students' learning perception of event planning competence and interest in community service.

Integrating Service-Learning and Classroom Instruction to Enhance Learning: An Innovative Hospitality Education

Introduction

Interest integrating service learning into classroom instruction has gained popularity since president Bill Clinton signed into law the National and Community Service Act of 1993. A splendid example of such service-learning projects is associated with Rutgers University, where a Civic Education and Community Service Program was instituted in 1989 (Barber and Battistoni, 1993). The concept of service-learning is gaining popularity on university campuses around the world (Maran, Soro, Biancetti, & Zanotto, 2009). In fact, numerous higher educational institutions have allocated resources dedicated to the oversight of service-learning programs in their departments (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009). Service-learning should not be misunderstood as voluntary service. Service-learning is different from voluntary service in that academic credit is assigned to service-learning, it has identifiable objectives and it is evaluated (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). Another fundamental difference from volunteerism is the reflection component which provides the students with an important step in the continuous learning process. A self-reflection in form of a report provides additional learning and reinforcement of a learn-by-doing process.

According to James and Pamela Toole, the term volunteerism refers to people who freely carry out some service or good work without pay, as cited in (Furco, 1996). The inherent unselfish nature of volunteerism is designed to benefit the service recipient. Service-learning is different from other approaches to experiential learning by its deliberate intention to equally benefit the provider and the recipient of the service (Furco, 1996). This study intends to

investigate how the integration of service-learning and classroom instruction in a Meetings and Event Management class influences student learning and interest in community service.

Literature Review

As the traditional college student population is gradually becoming more complex, fresh strategies are needed to meet the learning styles of the diverse group of students. More nontraditional students are going to college, and are in need of more varied style and models of learning (Cantor, 1997). Many advantages are linked to hands-on learning. Hands-on learning approaches see the role of the learner in helping to create knowledge, see both the teacher and the learner as teammate in the educational process, give students stake in the outcome, and find an active role for each individual (Walker, 1996). Hands-on learning fosters platforms for data analysis skills among other learning skills (Walker, 1996). Students are able to utilize theories that are previously learned or discussed in the classroom and further put into practice the skills attained for future progress (Cantor, 1997). Today, however, the term "service-learning" has been used to characterize different forms of hands-on (experiential education) endeavors, from field studies and internship programs to volunteer and community service projects (Furco, 1996).

According to Gray, Ondaatje, Fricker, & Geschwind (2000), service learning addresses several academic and social issues: (a) From early education through higher education, service learning promotes active learning that increases motivation to learn, engagement in the learning process, retention and graduation rates, and achievement. (b) Understanding of the course content and critical-thinking skills are improved through the integration of theory and practice. (c) The activity of service in the community helps to prepare students for participation in a democratic society by increasing their understanding of civic affairs and experiencing the expectation that all individuals should participate in community service. (d) Curriculum directed

service bridges the gap in public funding for social and environmental services by providing assistance at no cost. (e) In addition, studies have suggested that through service learning students are more able to clarify career goals and develop the necessary skills for the workplace ranging from specific skills needed for the job to general interpersonal, communication, and team-building skills.

According to Bringle & Hatcher (2009), the benefits of this style of learning surpass what internships, fieldwork, or even clinical can give students. Service-learning provides students the unique opportunity to learn through serving, while also learning *how* to serve. This form of learning gets the students involved in academia and civil issues, while enabling the community to get to know the student as well (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009). Students engaged in service-learning tend to be better problem-solvers and have more interest in their education. This allows for students to gain personal skills and qualities that will help them in the future (Maran et al., 2009).

According to a study of the academic effects of service learning on the grades of a class of 477 students, part of the class participated in service learning and the other part did not. Overall, the students engaged in service learning earned grades that were 4.8% higher than those that did not participate in service learning (Astin & Sax (1998). Even though many benefits are associated with service-learning, many instructors are still reluctant to include service learning in their curriculum (Strage, 2004). One of the major reasons is due to the uncertainty about the depth and breadth of academic advantages service-learning provides a course within which it is embedded (Hill, 2003). Hence, the purpose of this study was to investigate how the integration of service learning and classroom instruction in a Meetings and Events Management course

could influence student learning and interest in community service. The objectives of this study include the following:

1. To investigate students' perception of how integrating service-learning and classroom instruction enhance their learning experience.
2. To identify the difference between the influences of lecture only class and the integrating service-learning and classroom instruction on learning experiences of students who have been involved in service-learning.
3. To examine students' perception of how service-learning influences their possibility to support community service and interest in social and personal responsibility.

Methodology

Population and Sample

The target population for this study was students in the Hospitality Management program at a comprehensive Midwest university in the United States of America. The sample selection for this study was a convenience sample ($N = 71$) of the students enrolled in a Meetings and Events Management course at the University of Arkansas. The students were involved in planning a community special.

Instrument and Measures

The instrument used in this study is a seven-point Likert-type scale with the following response choices: 1 = strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= slightly disagree, 4 = neither agree nor disagree, 5= slightly agree, 6= agree, 7 = strongly agree. The questionnaire is made up of thirty (30) questions adapted from a review of literature. A pilot study was used to establish the

reliability of the instrument. Cronbach's alpha is the common measure of reliability and the usual criterion is a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.70 (Harris & Ogbonna, 2001). A Cronbach's alpha of 0.80 was found for the instrument indicating that the instrument is reliable with a high degree of internal consistency. The instrument is made up of four parts. Part I was used to measure the importance of service learning to students' learning experiences (this measurement is reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.93). Part II was used to measure the importance of lecture to students' learning experiences (this measurement is reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.95). Part III was used to measure the students' likelihood to participate in community service and interest in social and personal responsibility, and part IV was used to collect some demographic data.

At the beginning and end of the course, Pre- and post-event data were collected from the students regarding their perception of the influence of service-learning and class instruction on their learning experience and value for community service. At the end of the course each student also provided a reflection of the course and how it enhances individual students learning experience.

Procedures

The class meets twice as group in 120-minute sessions. The 120-minute sessions is employed for different activities pertaining to special event planning. The time is used for class instruction on special event planning to small group discussion on specific role of individual group members. The students were divided into different committees with various responsibilities ranging from soliciting sponsors, vendors, and attendees to the overall planning, logistics and implementation of the event. The students organized themselves into groups to

coordinate various aspects of the event such as administration, publicity, and site operation. They interacted with community service organizations such as the visitors' bureau, mayor's office, parks and recreation, police department, and local news media to generate support for the event. The students were also involved in the promotion of the event on camera for television viewers and on radios for music lovers. The local news media often required the students to get up in the early morning hours and dress for their audience of thousands for the promotion of the event.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17.0 for Windows, a product of SPSS, Inc. Frequency was used to screen the data for any irregularities. Descriptive statistics (e.g., percentage, mean) were used to analyze the students' likelihood to participate in community service and increase social and personal responsibility. A paired sample t-test was used to analyze the difference between the effects of lecture and service learning on learning experiences of students who have been involved in planning community events via service-learning experience. Descriptive statistics and a paired sample t-test were used to explore students' perception of how service learning affects their learning experience.

Result

The first objective of this study was to investigate students' perception of how integrating service-learning and classroom instruction enhance their learning experience. Table 1 shows the mean scores associated with the effect of integrating service-learning and classroom instruction on participants learning experiences. All the items in this measure have a mean (*M*) score between 5.47 – 6.15. Hence, the average mean (*M*) scores is approximately 6.0^a indicating that

the participants in this study agreed that the integrating service-learning and classroom instruction enhanced their learning experience in Meetings and Events management class.

Table 1. Mean scores of learning experiences from service learning

Rank	Learning Experiences	M	SD
1	Incorporating service learning/hands-on experience into event planning course will enable me to understand the concepts covered in the course	6.10	0.87
2	Incorporating service learning/hands-on experience into event planning course will improve my learning experience in the course	5.48	1.40
3	Incorporating service learning/hands-on experience into event planning course will enhance my ability to plan a real life event	5.47	1.50
4	Incorporating service learning/hands-on experience into event planning course will enhance my ability to plan successful events in the future	5.85	1.33
5	Incorporating service learning/hands-on experience into event planning course will enhance my learning from the course	5.52	1.36
6	Incorporating service learning/hands-on experience into event planning course will enable me to perform my possible best in the course	6.15	0.83
7	Incorporating service learning/hands-on experience into event planning course will enhance my ability to apply concepts from this course to new situations	5.50	1.30
8	Incorporating service learning/hands-on experience into event planning course will enhance my interest in the subject matter	5.93	1.23

a: 1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Slightly disagree 4 = Neither agree or disagree
5 = Slightly agree 6 = Agree 7 = Strongly agree

The second objective was to identify the difference between the influences of lecture only class and integrating service-learning and classroom instruction on learning experiences of students who have been involved in service-learning. The result of the paired sample t-test indicated a significant difference between the influences of lecture (M=3.62, SD=1.62) and the

integration of service learning and classroom instruction ($M=5.75$, $SD=1.02$) on the participants' learning experience ($P < 0.001$). The result indicated that the participants believed that the integration of service learning and classroom instruction will enhance their learning experiences more than lecture (see Table 2).

Table 2. The difference between the effects of lecture and service learning

Paired Sample Statistics									
Pair	Mean	N	Standard Deviation	Std. Error Mean					
Lecture	3.62	40	1.62	0.26					
Service Learning/ Hands-on	5.75	40	1.02	0.16					
Paired Sample Correlations									
Pair	N	Correlation	Sig.						
Lecture & Service Learning Plus Classroom Instruction	40	-0.300	0.060						
Paired Sample Test									
Pair	Paired Differences						t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
				Lower	Upper				
Lecture-Service Learning/Hands-on	2.13	2.15	0.34	1.45	2.82	6.26	39	0.000	

The third objective was to examine students' perception of how service-learning influences their possibility to support community service and interest in social and personal responsibility. All the items in this measure have a mean (M) score between 4.82 – 5.46 (see Table 3). Hence, the score is approximately 5.0^a indicating that the participants slightly agreed

that participating in service-learning influences their likelihood to participate in community service and interest in social and personal responsibility.

Table 3. Mean scores of the possibility to participate in community service, social justice, charity, and increase personal responsibility

Rank	Learning Experiences	M ^a	SD
1	Engaging in service learning enhanced my intention to serve my community	5.10	1.41
2	Engaging in service learning enhanced my intention to give charity to help those in need	5.15	1.66
3	Engaging in service learning enhanced my orientation towards others and away from myself	5.15	1.44
4	Engaging in service learning enhanced my intention to work on behalf of social justice	4.82	1.70
5	Engaging in service learning enhanced my appreciation and support for community service	5.46	1.27
6	Engaging in service learning enhanced my sense of personal responsibility	5.33	1.44

a: 1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Slightly disagree 4 = Neither agree or disagree
5 = Slightly agree 6 = Agree 7 = Strongly agree

Discussion and Conclusions

The result of this study indicated that the participants felt a strong optimism toward service learning/hands-on in mastering the content of the Meetings and Event Management course. The students organized themselves into committees to coordinate various aspects of the event such as administration, publicity, and site operation. Lecture alone would not have permitted the interaction with community service organizations such as the visitors' bureau, mayor's office, parks and recreation, police department, or local news media. Coordination with all of these concerns was necessary for the success of the event. The face-to-face

communication gave students insight into typical challenges and hurdles of event implementation that textbooks and lecture alone do not cover. Promoting the event on camera for television viewers got students up in the early morning hours and dressed for their audience of thousands. In addition to communication with individual citizens of the Northwest Arkansas community, the class divided into various teams to work closely with various organizations such as the Fayetteville Parks and Recreation Department, Fayetteville Police Department, Mayor's office and several media groups. These opportunities to put theory into practice would not have existed without the service learning component of the Meetings and Events Management course.

The results of this study indicate that students feel that the integration of service-learning and classroom instruction significantly enhanced their learning experience than lecture alone could do. The study also shows that students found the time and effort required to plan a successful event is better understood by actually getting out there and doing it. It was generally acknowledged that lecture alone would not have provided this valuable opportunity. By freely giving their time and commitment to community special event, students increased their feelings of civic responsibility and desire to participate in similar events in the future. This service learning activity provided the opportunity for students to gain real-world experience associated with academic learning while serving their community. The partnership of academic content and community service fostered a sense of connection between the students and their community.

Knowing that finding sponsors, vendors and attendees was a huge intimidating part of a special event, but after the students were encouraged to participate in this process, the fear was turned into confidence. Due to service-learning and hands-on classroom education, students were able to see the importance of hands-on learning experience in event planning, which sparked their interest in becoming involved with future events. End-of-semester student

reflections detailed successful aspects of the event and opportunities to be addressed by future classes planning this event. The overall theme of the reflections was the value added by the hands-on experience to the course content. By actually participating in the planning and implementing of the event, students were able to see how much work goes into making a community event happen. Service learning requires students to take a more active role in their learning, as opposed to a passive role of note taking and textbook reading. The interactions students had with other community organizations and individuals helped to promote confidence, a sense of accomplishment and a better understanding of Meeting and Event Management skills.

Implications

This study indicated that service-learning enabled students to better understand the concepts covered in this course as well as enhanced their ability to plan a real life event. This was supported by the pre and posttest results which implied that students strongly agreed that they would not gain sufficient experience or understanding with lecture alone. Additional implications for students include improved academic achievement resulting from an increased level of interest in the course and higher level of learning. This leads to a more positive academic experience, overall, which affects a student's sense of self-worth and value. This motivation from the service- learning activities made the students feel more confident to plan a successful event in the future and to apply knowledge gained in this course to new situations.

Students who have participated in service-learning activities have more positive feelings about their learning experience and feel an increased sense of community involvement and civic responsibility. Also, students who have gained real-life, hands on experience feel better prepared to accept the challenges and responsibilities of planning such events in the future. Institutions of

higher education will produce more qualified and competent graduates, which in turn helps to build positive reputations for colleges and universities that incorporate service learning into their academics.

It also increases their value of higher education. The opportunity to interact with community partners gives students confidence dealing with business leaders and other members of the community. By developing specialized skills in event planning through hands-on experience, they will have a marketable resume when entering the professional work force.

Limitations

This is a case study that was limited to a Midwestern school in the United States of America. A larger, random sample of students studying event planning in several geographical areas would provide a result that could be representative and generalizable of a larger population.

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