That Time I Sent my Students to Prison: A Roundtable Discussion of Service-Learning

Experience

Abstract:

This round table discussion centers on the benefits of service-learning as a tool for improved and enhanced learning outcomes for students and the community. Using successful experiences from MBA students teaching soft skills in a women's prison, we provide exemplar insight for how the topics learned in business education can carry a much deeper meaning for the students and the community. Beyond the traditional student experience, we will also focus on engaging in service-learning for international students in understanding culture and garnering a sense of belongingness. After examples, we will open the discussion to brainstorm best practices to accomplish excellent outcomes for the student and the greater community we serve.

Keywords: Service Learning, Belongingness, Community, International Students

Introduction

"Be the change you want to see in this world."

Service-learning as a "form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs, together with structured opportunities designed to promote student learning and development" (Dumas, 2002, p. 249) provides students with a unique opportunity to contribute to their community in a meaningful way. Indeed, the benefits of service-learning are well documented by the multitude of meta-analysis studies surrounding service learning in the educational literature (e.g., Bandyopadhyay et al., 2021; Conway et al., 2009; Novak et al., 2007; Yorio & Ye, 2012). Service-learning creates a sense of belonging to the community and promotes citizenship behavior among students. This benefit is even more prominent to minority and international students who may not experience a sense of belonging to their community. Despite the apparent values that service-learning offers to students, practitioners, and the community (e.g., Nikolova & Andersen, 2017), management educators still may hesitate to commit their time and efforts for this purpose due to the existing challenges. Management educators may benefit from a support system wherein they share their experience with service-learning and receive support from their peers.

Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications

Pedagogy literature advocates for service learning to encourage business and management education to engage in corporate social responsibility (e.g., Alcaraz et al., 2010). The literature teems with empirical support for the high-value perception of service-learning by students (e.g., Andrews, 2007; Govekar et al.., 2007; Madsen & Turnbull, 2006; Yorio & Ye, 2012) because learning outcomes often surpass that of the traditional classroom (Madsen & Turnbull, 2006). Moreover, Service-learning ideally best fits into business courses when the key

learning aim is to garner skilled interaction with the topical material (Andrews, 2007; Dipadova-Stocks, 2005).

Service-learning can help minorities (especially international students) get more involved in the community and increase their self-esteem, self-efficacy, and sense of belongingness. Students tend to spend more time with people from similar backgrounds. This tendency could potentially limit students' (especially international and minority) involvement in the community. Using service-learning, instructors can encourage international and minority students to have an active role in their community help them feel part of the community.

Given the importance of service-learning in the growth of students, and the community in general, more educators need to become engaged in such activities. A continuous discussion surrounding the challenges and approaches to incorporating service learning in the curriculum is necessary. At the end of the workshop, attendees will be able to:

- Recognize challenges associated with integrating service-learning in a course

- Develop an appreciation of the importance of service-learning for international and minority students

- Establish continuous dialogues surrounding best practices in service-learning delivery.

- Discuss ways to engage students in community projects that help them develop a sense of belonging.

- Appreciate why and how service-learning can help students develop a sense of belonging.

Session Description

We propose the following schedule:

1. Introduction (10 minutes): We will explain the session's objectives and discuss our motivation for putting this proposal together by sharing our personal experiences with offering service-learning to students.

2. Presenting an example of a service-learning project (10 minutes): One of the presenters will share a personal experience designing a service-learning project. In partnership with a nonprofit organization, the presenter involved a group of MBA students in a 10-week career-readiness program working closely with incarcerated women in their journey to prepare their resume and cover letter, learn various soft skills (conflict resolution, negotiation, communication, etc.), and get ready for the future workforce post-release. Once the women graduated from the program, MBA students had the opportunity to visit the Women's Federal prisons to present certifications of completion and meet their mentees. Students described this experience as life-changing and very rewarding.

3. Brainstorming and sharing ideas: we expect that several conversations will be generated surrounding this topic. We will assign attendees to groups of 5-6 people and give them 20 minutes to share their experience with service learning at their institution and discuss best practices.

4. Debrief (20 minutes): We will invite attendees to their thoughts as a group. Then, we will conclude with the challenges that instructors may confront in their journey to design service-learning activities and brainstorm best practices.

Time Requested

60 minutes

Resources Needed

Internet, Computer

Application to Conference Theme

International and minority students may not have an equal opportunity to blend in the community. Therefore, their network may be limited to those they share similar backgrounds. Thus, engaging international and minority students in service-learning can significantly enhance their college experience and boost the sense of belongingness to their community. Moreover, through service-learning activities such as the one explained earlier, students have the opportunity to put many of the skills they acquired through their college education into practice. For example, during the aforementioned service-learning project, MBA students prepared the incarcerated woman for a successful future career. In doing so, they developed a sense of confidence in their ability to put their business knowledge into practice.

When placing students in an environment of service to the community connected to their education, we expose them to elements of diversity that can not easily be addressed in the classroom. Students often learn firsthand how diversity, equity, and inclusion issues actually present in the real world (Desmond & Graham, 2011; Lee & Espino, 2010). Even though our students may not observe optimal applications of DEI practices in their service-learning experience, we can guide them to 'be the change they want to see in the world' while being aware of how their voice matters in the workforce.

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