**A collection of creative end-of-semester projects**

**Abstract**: During this session, I will present the most engaging and memorable end-of-semester projects from my 13 years of teaching experience. These projects were assigned in my Organizational Behavior, Introduction to Human Resources, Organization Development, and Management Skills classes. I will not only provide the conference participants the opportunity to hear about my projects, but I also intend to encourage colleagues to share their own most memorable assignments.

**Key Words**: end-of-semester projects, creative classroom, student engagement

**Activity/Exercise General Details**:

With this 90-minute activity session, I aim at demonstrating engaging end-of-semester projects that conference participants could use in their own classrooms. The proposed assignments are applicable for face-to-face and online classrooms and are suitable for both, undergraduate and graduate courses. I believe that the projects presented in this session could successfully be used in Organizational Behavior, Introduction to Human Resources, Organizational Theory, and Organization Development classes.

**Introduction**:

While reflecting upon my experience as a student, I realized that my most memorable and beneficial semester projects were those that required application of learned material with a dash of creativity. Indeed, the literature on creative problem-solving supports the notion that creative problem-solving is a powerful tool that could foster student’s engagement and motivation to learn.

In creative-problem solving, subjects collaborate to solve a problem, or accomplish a task, based in reality without a known and fixed solution (Caswell, 2006). Thus, this methodology forces students to experience the team dynamics, while addressing problems that are real, yet vague in regards to outcome specificity. Ultimately, creative problem-solving allows students to apply the material; it also, however, encourages them to use and sharpen their communication, collaboration, and critical thinking skills.

Engaging students in creative problem-solving involves activities in three triads (Caswell, 2006). In the Fundamental Triad (Caswell, 2006), students 1) familiarize themselves with the task or problem at hand, 2) clarify the issue and the process of resolution, and 3) examine the effectiveness solution. In the Harmonizing Structure Triad (Caswell, 2006), students communicate, visualize, and collaborate on understanding the problem and brainstorming on possible solutions. During the final triad, the Theoretical Environment (Caswell, 2006), participants narrate, participate, and inquire in the development of the solution to the problem.

Ultimately, Caswell’s (2006) problem-solving framework allows students to be actively involved in their knowledge creation. This actual hands-on engagement leads to positive outcomes such as academic achievement, persistence, satisfaction, and social engagement (Astin, 1984, 1993; Berger & Milem, 1999; Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Goodsell, Maher, & Tinto, 1992; Kuh, 1995; Kuh & Vesper, 1997; Pace, 1995; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005).

**Learning Objectives**:

Incorporating creative end-of-semester projects in my classes was guided by a few objectives. Specifically,

Objective 1: To develop students’ understanding about the management discipline, using creativity and hands-on application. More specifically, students learn about topics, models, and theories through self-guided research, brainstorming, discoveries, applications, and presentations. This objective also aids students in applying critical thinking to business situations and recommending managerial responses.

Objective 2: To encourage students to communicate more effectively with and in front of others. Creative problem-solving forces students to communicate with one another, provide and receive feedback, and actively listen to ideas and suggestions.

Objective 3: To allow students to become effective team members through collaboration. As an integral part of the creative problem-solving methodology, students are forced to contribute, help, and create positive experience with others on the team as well as realize approaches to working with or managing persons different from themselves.

I also had three goals in mind for the conference session:

Goal A: To provide participants with ideas how to use creative projects in the classroom to accomplish the above goals.

Goal B: To receive feedback as to how the class experience and application could be improved along with addressing questions that participants might have, such as challenges, revelations, and learning moments.

Goal C: To facilitate idea sharing among conference participants.

**Session Overview**:

After a brief introduction, the bulk of this session will involve engaging participants in a discussion and demonstration of some of the projects I use in my classroom. The session will close with a dialogue regarding participants’ thoughts, reactions, and questions. Conference participants will be encouraged to share their own experiences as well. This dialogue is important for many reasons. Specifically, participants will have the opportunity to leaf through the resources they can use in the classroom and digest the benefits and challenges of using the presented projects in their own classroom. Furthermore, this dialogue could inspire, and perhaps, create new ideas for creative classroom projects.

**Session Description**:

My presentation will be in the following format:

Introduction (purpose of session and set up) 5 minutes

*Presentation*

Presentation of projects used in the classroom (Appendix A) (Goal A) 25 minutes

Student project outcomes examples (Goal A) 20 minutes

*Dialogue:*

Conference participants share their impressions (Goal B) 10 minutes

Conference participants suggest improvements/alternative use (Goal B) 10 minutes

Conference participants share their own experiences (Goal C) 20 minutes

**Unique Contribution**:

This presentation is unique and novel and have not been presented or considered for publication elsewhere.

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Appendix A: Creative projects used in the classroom

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| **Class** | **Project/Task Description** |
| Organizational Behavior (undergraduate) | Each team prepares a video skit. This video skit should be a visual reminder of the material covered in the entire semester. In the skits, students make sure to incorporate as many OB concepts as possible (10 at minimum). The video should ALSO address/incorporate the following questions:  1) What have we learned as a team?  Here, students address what were the team’s strengths, the occasions when the team struggled, and their overall team dynamics.  2) What were the each team member’s AHA moments?  Here, each team member should say what were their most eye opening, surprising, or impactful moments and why. |
| Organizational Behavior (graduate) | In teams of 2 or 3 people, students design their perfect organization. During the presentation, students must say why they believe this is a perfect organization. |
| Introduction to Human Resources | An applied project for a local organization. Students construct an employee handbook containing a variety of HRM policies for a local organization. Students present their artifact in class including a discussion on the lessons they have leaned through this experience. Representatives of the local organization serve as judges for the presentations and the artifacts. |
| Organization Development  (project inspired by Professor Gretchen Spreitzer at University of Michigan – Ann Arbor) | Have each team member do something outside of his or her comfort zone (e.g., give a speech, negotiate something, speak up in class several times, engage in a conflict, get a massage – the point is that it should be something that is truly uncomfortable for the team member). Each student reports back to the team: 1) what was learned by taking this action and 2) what insights does this experience have about resistance to change? Finally, the team synthesizes team members’ experiences to create ideas or models about overcoming resistance to change.  The project requires a visual presentation of the journey each student undertook (video or pictures) as well as a final presentation. |
| Management Skills  (project #2 was inspired by Mr. Timothy Davis at University of Michigan-Dearborn) | 1. Mixing it up project. This assignment will require students to prepare a dish with a given list of ingredients (pre-approved with consideration of dietary restrictions) and limited budget ($6 per student). Students must make a presentation on the dish and describe their journey including a discussion on problems encountered and lessons learned. 2. Rube Goldberg Machine. The principles of building a Rube Goldberg machine are an exercise in management. As such, the class will build a machine that will zip a zipper. There will be 5 teams and each team will be responsible for a component in the machine. These 5 components will be sequential, meaning teams will need to coordinate with other teams to ensure a seamless transition from one component to the next. The instructor will assign to each team one of the five components of the machine. The instructor will provide the starting operation and the final operation (zipper component), but teams will need to connect those two operations through the five components they research, design, build, and test. Each team must also make a portfolio and brief presentation of the building process and the lessons learned. |

*Note: These projects are considered creative for they require students to accomplish a real task, without a known and fixed solution (Caswell, 2006). These projects require:*

1. *Understanding the problem, doing research, brainstorming, producing a solution, and assessing the effectiveness (Fundamental Triad; Caswell, 2006).*
2. *Communicating, visualizing, and collaborating among team members on tackling and finishing the task (Harmonizing Structure Triad; Caswell, 2006).*
3. *Discussing, presenting, and elaborating on lessons learned (Theoretical Environment; Caswell, 2006).*