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Teaching and Fostering Change in the Classroom, Campus, and Community

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Students do not always realize that after graduating they will be expected to apply what they have learned. Dimov argued that, while creativity is essential to “the birth of opportunity ideas,” what prospective entrepreneurs do with these ideas is what matters (561). For accreditation purposes, most universities survey graduates to assess and evaluate the perceived relevance of the curriculum, but these assessments often occur years after graduation. Assessment of applied learning should occur earlier when it can create an environment that requires students to work on projects with direct relevance to the campus and community and that involves students in the activities that will be expected and required in their profession. I will propose strategies designed to transform students from classroom spectators to campus and community activists and change agents.

In my 2005 *HIP* article, I described how a successful Studies in Entrepreneurship course was modified for the Texas State University Honors College by changing the course project from writing a business plan to effecting and instituting change on campus and in the community. This honors class

typically enrolls students from multiple majors, the majority being non-business majors. Instead of creating a plan for opening a business, since students had not taken classes in accounting, marketing, and finance, the honors project focused on campus and community change projects. Although the earlier essay described how one could replicate my junior-level honors course—Entrepreneurship, Leadership, and Team Building: Identifying and Applying Best Practices—additional strategies developed since then can make replication easier and more successful.

The present essay is designed for non-business professors who are interested in social entrepreneurship, one of the fastest growing areas in entrepreneurship education. In 2008, Brock counted more than 350 professors teaching and researching social entrepreneurship in thirty-five countries. According to the Schwab Foundation for Social Entrepreneurship, the definition of the term includes “applying practical, innovative, and sustainable approaches to benefit society in general, with an emphasis on those who are marginalized and poor.” The Foundation also defines a social entrepreneur as someone who, “similar to a business entrepreneur, builds strong and sustainable organizations, which are either set up as not-for-profits or companies.”

My 2005 essay described the course structure and briefly examined how to identify opportunities for change, how to build a team, and how to involve all participants in effecting change. I included a syllabus, semester timeline, specific outcomes, and student reflections. That essay listed ten projects completed between 2001 and 2004 and described *what* was done whereas this essay describes *how* the course is delivered and includes specific recommendations designed to assist honors professors who wish to work with students on action projects. Since 2005, I have taught the course four times and students have completed twenty-five projects designed to bring change:

- Using biofuel on campus buses
- Increasing dorm recycling
- Increasing alumni association membership among millennials
- Creating ID card access for dorms
- Enhancing the athletic experience for students
- Changing the grading system from a straight A-F system to a plus-minus system
- Establishing an honors minor

- Establishing an honors college
- Improving the university seminar class using student and faculty input
- Assessing and improving the university orientations for freshmen and transfer students
- Establishing a recognized campus UNICEF chapter and hosting two fund-raisers
- Working with a local hospice to plan and run a Halloween party for children of clients and preparing a study assessing the benefits and feasibility of expanding the facility versus partnering with a local hospital
- Working with a campus-based, student-operated sustainability business that collects food scraps from campus cafeterias and composts these scraps with seaweed to create both a liquid tea and bags of compost to sell to local residents
- Using unused meals in the college cafeterias to feed the homeless

This essay provides details designed to replicate a project-based course.

COURSE STRUCTURE

In weeks one and two, students work to identify campus and community change that are needed but not yet occurring. Students also identify changes in programs that are occurring but are not operating well. Students next work to sell change ideas to classmates, select one change to work on, recruit a team, identify a guiding coalition (key individuals in the university and/or community), research the change using secondary and primary research, develop a proposal, make appointments with the coalition members, and sell and persuade these insiders that change is needed and doable. After earning support, students and insiders work to develop plans and strategies required to transform the proposed change(s) into reality.

Course Methodology

In the first week, lecture is the principal methodology, and required reading and discussion are also introduced. In week one, students begin reading *Profiles in Entrepreneurship* (Nelson and Bell), which details twenty-nine stories and selected video clips of change agents, including Herb Kelleher from Southwest Airlines and other business and social entrepreneurs who have founded or contributed to the success of public and private businesses and

organizations employing thousands. Students also evaluate and compare their own leadership qualities and aspirations with those possessed by these successful men and women. Students begin to learn that successful people are typically average in innate ability but, through work and perseverance, become much more. Initially, students are uncomfortable with this challenge since many do not yet consider themselves to be leaders. At this point, we focus on defining leadership as the ability to create a vision and inspire others to make improvements in an organization, a community, and the world (Kinicki and Williams 442–444).

THE GUIDING PRINCIPLE OF SMARTS GOALS

Early in the semester, students are introduced to the concept of team building in stages as well as to the SMARTS goal concept. Team research typically identifies five development stages—Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing, and Adjourning—although I prefer and use these stages: Orientation, Conflict, Emergence (Work), and Reinforcement. However the stages are defined, working to identify common goals occurs at each stage, and SMART[S] goals can distinguish good teams from average teams (Doran; Locke and Latham). In the SMARTS model that I created, I added the final S to indicate the importance of full team participation, or Stretch.

S Refers to **specificity** and working to identify clearly what the activity entails.

M Refers to accurate **metrics** and the need to quantify or at least suggest an indication of progress.

Here is a non-smart student goal: “This year, I am going to work to raise my GPA.”

Here is a SMART goal: “Before June, I will work to raise my cumulative GPA to 3.2 by earning no less than a B+ in every course I take in both the fall and spring semester. I will accomplish this goal by attending at least 95 percent of classes, reading the assigned material the night before class, outlining the chapter readings, taking notes in class, and meeting with the professor if I do not understand the material.

A Refers to **attainable, aggressive, assignable, and agreed upon**. A person is **assigned** to complete each task. All team members work to gain consensus (**agreed upon**). I believe that a commitment is not to be assumed; many private and public organizations create team

charters or contracts so that all team members sign their name signifying their commitment to work together to achieve the goal.

R Refers to **realistic, results-driven, and reinforced**. Effective teams discuss, decide, and act. Further, because people tend to get distracted and often forget the goal or lose track of their initial commitment to the goal, leaders constantly work to recall and reinforce previously agreed-upon goals.

T Refers to **time-bound** specifics about when the results will be achieved. All goals must have specific deadlines or mini-deadlines leading to completion because without deadlines people tend to procrastinate. Research indicates that people procrastinate and then work more only as the deadline approaches. A non-specific deadline such as “before the semester ends” is not as specific as “before noon on Friday, February 14.”

S Refers to a **stretch** because aggressive goals can only be achieved when all or most of the team members are working and contributing.

THE STEPS TOWARD CHANGE

Eighteen years ago, Harvard’s John Kotter proposed Eight Stages for Creating Change, resulting in multiple articles as well as bestselling books in 1996 and 2012. These eight steps were the basis for the course structure.

1. Establish a Sense of Urgency

Typically, urgency relates either a high-priority goal, to a problem that—if not solved—will have a negative impact, or to a cultural or technological shift, like the smart phone, that requires rapid adaptation. Initially, earning a good grade was the principal urgency for students, but their focus changed quickly when a U.S. marine in the class who had served two tours of duty in Afghanistan described how he observed UNICEF workers positively affecting the Afghan people. He noted that, while several other college campuses have UNICEF chapters, our campus had no chapter, and he wanted to change this.

2. Create the Guiding Coalition

Creating a guiding coalition requires two actions: identify and recruit the people in the class who will be able to help do the necessary work, and

then identify and work with an outside team of people on campus or in the community.

Initially, students sell their idea in class, hoping to interest classmates in working on their idea for change. My rule for team composition is that a student must recruit at least one other person for the idea to go forward, the definition of a team being “a group of two or more individuals who share common goals and are dedicated and committed to working together to achieve those goals” (Bell). Being goal-directed at this point is critical as the right goals and the right people can contribute up to 80% of the success of an organization.

Throughout the semester, students are expected to create and achieve individual and team SMARTS goals. Typically only twenty percent of the people produce eighty percent of the results (Gassner). To reduce the likelihood that only two or three students do most of the work, ten percent of the course grade is based on what the students perceive as their team members’ contributions. Using a point system, students distribute five percent at mid-term and the remaining five percent during finals.

Points are described as \$10,000 in bonus money available for each person in the group (a group of six students has \$60,000 to distribute) with the top contributors being assigned the most points and dollars. Students are encouraged to perform these assessments multiple times during the semester, but only the midterm and final assessments count. The assessment part poses a challenge for many students, who sometimes equate working hard on assignments with success and entitlement even if the quality of the work is poor.

In addition to the class teams, students form a separate coalition of people with power and resources, who must be convinced that the change is positive and will make the campus or community better.

3. Develop a Vision, Mission, and Strategy

In addition to identifying campus and community changes that are needed or wanted, students choose a project that is feasible and valuable, conduct secondary research to determine what information, if any, is available, and then conduct primary research such as interviews, surveys, and focus groups. All along, students work to determine the vision/long-term goal and mission/near-term objective as well as the steps and strategies needed to begin the change.

4. Communicate the Change Vision and Mission

Usually in week three, teams begin to work with their second guiding coalition: people on campus or in the community whose support is necessary for change to occur. Those people are called “check signers” as they have positions of power. Before meetings and appointments are scheduled, students read and become familiar with the problem or opportunity, knowing that they will not be persuasive or successful with professionals if they do not appear competent. As a mentor once said, “One doesn’t get a second chance to make a good first impression.” Students also must convince these professionals that the project will lead to tangible results, not just talk. As a faculty member, I often felt the truth of the saying “After all is said and done, there will be a lot more said than done.”

5. Empower Broad-Based Action

To begin the change, team members work to identify key tasks for which they either volunteer or are assigned tasks. The tasks require initiative—doing something without being told—and delegation: pointing the way ahead, asking for volunteers, and assigning members to complete tasks. Effective delegation focuses on five of Kipling’s six helpers: what, why, who, when, and where (Sharp, 2002). Note that “how” is not included since that question is best left to the people doing the work. As I observe students struggle trying to do something they have not yet done, I am tempted to tell them how they should do it. However, for real commitment and ownership to occur, the “how” is best left to their judgment as they learn to face challenges and attempt to apply what they think will work. Further, when they graduate they will be expected to do more than follow instructions; they will be expected to lead and to do.

6. Generate Short-Term Wins

When beginning a change, the motivation, morale, and productivity of the group can be low and typically drop even lower because of the learning curve that accompanies a task that one has never done (Slocum). I tell students, “You will get worse before you get better, but stay the course and press on, and when you make progress, even modest progress, celebrate those gains and build upon them.”

7. Consolidate Gains and Produce More Change

As students move through each of the eight stages, they are expected to communicate with each other and share progress, challenges, and impediments. Once each week, twenty to thirty minutes of class time is devoted to team presentations of progress reports, and everyone is expected to ask questions or make comments. Students are also encouraged to help other teams because everyone can earn an A if projects are excellent. Also, throughout the semester students are expected to review their emails at least three times every day. Often students use a campus-based tool called TRACS or Google Docs to communicate virtually, making edits and suggestions daily. Students are encouraged to be honest with their team members, to admit they are struggling, and to ask for help because what might be a stumbling block for one person can be an opportunity for another person to step up and help. Frequent communication allows others to be informed and encourages dialog and collaboration.

Even among honors students, though, sometimes team members try to get others to do their work. All are supposed to contribute equally, neither allowing others to slack off nor expecting full credit for work others do. Members who withhold efforts or produce substandard work that has to be revised by others are told that they should not expect to receive full assessment points.

8. Anchor the Change into the Culture

For the change to be ongoing and sustained, a coalition beyond the classroom must fully support it and work to explain and reinforce it. For change to be anchored, leaders must diligently reinforce priorities in meetings and employee orientations because new staff members have not been part of the process and are unlikely to be as committed as were those who did the initial work to establish the change. Without the support of all in the organization, especially those in power, the status-quo tends to reassert itself.

PROJECT NOTEBOOKS

Assignment and Grading

As students work on their change projects, they are required to prepare and submit project notebooks. Preparing, organizing, writing, and

documenting forces students to work as a team as they revise and improve individual and collective work.

Project Notebooks are submitted at midterm (week 8 or 9) and again in week 14. The notebook comprises 65% of the class grade: 15% assigned at midterm and 50% at the end of the semester. The midterm evaluation counts only 15% because the learning curve is steep; mistakes are expected, and students need time to correct errors and omissions.

Throughout, I assume the role of the workplace supervisor, manager, investor, and outside guiding-coalition member. I expect clarity, specificity, accuracy, and conciseness, and I expect all material to be explained and supported. At midterm, segments that are under construction are accepted without penalty if the students explain in detail what will be completed and when. The midterm evaluation creates urgency.

Critiquing, evaluating, and grading the notebook centers on identifying weaknesses and serves as a quality-control check with emphasis on making corrections, revisions, and improvements. To provide guidance, I place copies of Benchmark Projects previously produced in class on reserve in the university library. Students are encouraged to review these completed projects and to work to make their projects even better. The revision process leads to improved thinking and writing.

At midterm, I mark projects with green ink but mark the end-of-semester projects with blue ink, providing guidance (for current and future students) as to what I expect related to revisions, improvements, and professionalism. Notebooks are organized with revisions placed after the original submissions, making it easier for me to evaluate changes and improvements without flipping through multiple pages. Each semester, for projects deemed excellent, I ask students for permission to place their project in the library. If students agree, they sign a release and identify one or two current benchmarks that should be removed and replaced with their project. Students accept the challenge to have their creations on display.

As I evaluate the projects, I assume the role of the critical supervisor and often, when the graded Project Notebook is returned, students are discouraged by their assigned grade. At midterm, students are introduced to the sayings: "Writing is thinking twice"; "There is no such thing as good writing, only good re-writing"; and "Easy reading means hard writing." Initially, some students become defensive and take the critiques personally, sometimes seeing their work as precious creations and perceiving my green marks as if I were drawing faces on their kids. I spend time trying to explain that they should

not take criticism personally or else they will not improve or will spend their lives only sharing their work with people who may have low standards.

When providing feedback, I do not provide specific edits and revisions but rather write facilitative comments such as “Please work to better organize this section,” “Please add documentation to support this statement,” and “This part is not yet clear.” Comments are intentionally vague as students need to learn how to address and correct poorly written work by themselves.

Students are told to work on more than individual segments and to help others improve their work because, outside of the classroom, the supervisor does not care who did the work, only that the work was done and done with quality. In my experience, team members work harder when they want to avoid being embarrassed in front of peers and that team member collaboration leads to individual and team improvement.

Project Notebook Content

Notebooks include a description of the team’s project, team member names and specific assignments, a list of external guiding coalitions including names and titles, a secondary and primary research segment, and key tasks performed and accomplished. The midterm notebook includes stages of development, listing work done and work to be done along with team-member tasks and specific dates. The notebook also includes student résumés because career service directors often report that students do not change their high school résumés until they reach their senior year. I evaluate résumés twice, and, as students apply for internships before they graduate, they are introduced to the need for constant updating.

A bibliography and appendix are required, and the appendix includes surveys and key documents used to prepare and support the project.

The last project segment is the team-member performance appraisals similar to those done in the workplace. For the assessments, students evaluate themselves and each other, submitting evaluations at midterm and with the final submission. A one-page tally sheet is required that lists final averages and points or dollars assigned to each team member. During the averaging process, extremely high and low scores are typically dropped and not included in the final tally as these scores would skew the average if, for instance, a student assigned sixty points to him- or herself and zero points to everyone else.

CLASS PRESENTATIONS

Students prepare executive summary reports for the guiding coalitions and invite key individuals from the community and campus to participate in their final oral presentations, where students share results and make recommendations. These twenty-minute briefings usually include agendas, handouts, and copies of PowerPoint presentations. A fifteen-minute question-and-answer session follows.

AFTER ACTION REVIEW

A final quality control check and assessment of learning outcomes occurs one week after students receive their graded notebooks. After students have reviewed their individual and collective work, they collaborate to write and submit a one-page “After Action Review and Debriefing,” in which they present what worked and what they would do again, what didn’t work and what they would change or should have done, and what they would not do at all. Emphasis in this reflection is on what to keep, change, add, drop, and not do again. The last part of the AAR focuses on what they learned about themselves, their team members, and the team process.

CONCLUSION

From my experience, working on team-based action projects enhances and improves student decision making and project management skills. The students’ comments about the course confirmed my experience. Here are just two sample comments from end-of-course evaluations:

- This honors course is unlike any other honors course I’ve taken because it offered much freedom that enabled a personalized learning experience for each student. The fact that students were able to create or adopt projects of their choosing is what made the class the most enjoyable.
- The class captured the essence of what an entrepreneur does, which is turning ideas into reality with the help of others through hard work, dedication, goal setting, and planning. The class also provided an example of what it is like to fail and to correct mistakes in order to make them right, which is also a big part of entrepreneurship. We read stories about some of the most successful entrepreneurs and were then

able to put some of their thoughts and ideas into practice by having to create our projects and see them through to completion. The projects involved consulting, planning, budgeting, personal and organizational selling, and taught the importance of networking as well as professional business communication.

Students also learned that leadership often changes during projects as they experience shared leadership; they refine writing and speaking skills for audiences other than academics. Further, applied learning not only provides benefits to the students but can also have a significant impact on any campus and community. As to a testament to this impact, twelve of the changes the students addressed in their projects were implemented and remain in place, with only the plus-minus grade system and bio-fuel proposals not being initiated or sustained.

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