

CLIENT-BASED PROJECTS: DIFFERENCES IN GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUTE PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES TO APPLIED STUDENT LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Client-based projects have long been used as a pedagogical tool in the university environment. Such projects allow students to go beyond the concepts discussed in the classroom and to engage in problem-solving activities related to discipline content areas. These client-based projects take a number of forms: they may be individualistic or group-based, they may be developed by the professor or involve working for real organizations, or they may be specific in nature or integrate all of the relevant course materials.

This paper addresses the use of such client-based projects in two marketing courses – an undergraduate capstone planning course and an MBA marketing management course at one university. Both courses involve groups of students developing marketing plans for community businesses, organizations or government entities and both courses' projects are integrative in nature. The underpinning of each of the two courses' marketing planning projects is the iterative approach to student learning where students are expected to revise and resubmit their work until they have met the professors' expectations as set forth in the course.

Ultimately, the student marketing planning projects in both courses have contributed to positive student learning experiences and closer relationships between the university and the communities involved, thus fulfilling the mission of the university and respective college in two critical areas – student learning and regional engagement. This paper examines the differences in the approaches to developing student marketing plans in graduate and undergraduate courses and explains the professors' rationale in choosing different pedagogical methods depending on the level of student being taught. Real world projects, also known as client-based projects (CBPs), provide a fertile learning

environment in which students apply their marketing knowledge to an actual client organization. This experiential or hands-on learning enables students to hone specific skills like problem-solving, critical and analytical thinking, oral and written communication, and teamwork.

Literature suggests that two keys to successful applied projects in the college classroom are multiple iterations of students' work and persistent feedback from the professor (de los Santos & Jensen, 1985; Haas & Wotruba, 1990; Razzouk, Seitz, & Rizkallah, 2003). The iterative process, whereby students revise and resubmit their work, often necessitates multiple versions of a single section. This iterative process requires a considerable time commitment from faculty who read and prepare feedback as well as from students who are required to improve upon their written work, i.e., organization of material, content appropriateness and sufficiency, and their written words. This time commitment to feedback is often perceived as overwhelming for many instructors, thus making them apprehensive about venturing into client-based learning projects.

The varied literature shows us that the benefits to professors of real-world or client-based projects are great and varied, they include: (1) facilitating active learning (Gremier et al., 2000; Razzouk, Seitz, & Rizkallah 2003); (2) fostering students' skill enhancement (Barr & McNeilly, 2002; Kennedy, Lawton, & Walker, 2001); and (3) fostering greater student ownership in a class project (Eastering & Rudell, 1997). Client-based projects when managed well serve students and clients and provide a jumping off point for future embedded regional engagement collaborations.

References Available on Request