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Maureen L. Mackenzie Ph.D.

Molloy College, maureenmackenzieruppel@gmail.com

Dawn DiStefano MBA

Molloy College, ddistefano@molloy.edu

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BUSINESS EDUCATION: REAL-WORLD CAPSTONE

Dawn DiStefano, MBA

Maureen L. Mackenzie, Ph.D.

Molloy College

Division of Business

Rockville Centre, NY 11571

Abstract

This paper emerges from a pedagogical philosophy that a business student should experience real-world problem solving that allows him or her to demonstrate evidence of learning and its application to the world of business. This paper builds the case that business education must lead the student toward a professional outcome where he or she can apply the knowledge and skills gained during the college journey so that he or she is prepared for all that is expected of the student as a business professional. The outcome of this paper is one college's journey to develop a capstone consulting experience that is transformative for the student and serves society. An important component of this capstone experience is the opportunity for the students to study a problem and to make a set of solution-driven recommendations that will lead to social good.

Key words: Business Education, service learning, pedagogy, capstone.

A SHIFT IN EDUCATION

There are many who believe formal education cannot replace professional experience. We suggest that education can accelerate experience when it is constructed with a strong goal in mind. Access to college emerged after WWII with the GI Bill. Bound and Turner (2002) indicate the substantial gains in the attainment of academic degrees among WWII veterans. Collegiate attainment became more accessible for veterans that were from families of upper socioeconomic status ranging from 15 to 20 percent among men born between 1921 and 1933. (Stanley, 2003). Access to education allowed a broader population to gain the credentials that would allow them to rise in positions of leadership that, perhaps in the past, were limited to more affluent families

who could afford college.

The rise of community colleges further made higher education accessible and affordable. Karabel (1972) explored 'educational inflation' among Americans. The emphasis is on the transformation of the economy and American philosophy of equal opportunity. The number of individuals who now had a college education was larger than ever before. Although college was more accessible, the retention of students from first generation and low-income backgrounds was still challenging (Thayer, 2000). Student support services at the community college level helped shape the education of the typical high school graduate to secure a worthwhile job where alumni could support their families upon attainment of their collegiate degree.

The proportions of women, non-traditional and part-time college students has also significantly increased since 1960 (Baker and Velez, 1996). Although the American culture still predominantly survived on single-family incomes.

As the need for college increased, managers who had not earned the first undergraduate degree criticized the value of an education as limited to "book learning." You would hear senior managers state that you can't learn "what I know after 20 years" in a classroom. The need for dedicated and balanced individuals that attain their business education should develop an 'engaging' managing style where it encourages practicing managers to learn from their own experience, insight, and analysis thereby building on the art of management through management education (Mintzberg, 2004).

Boyer (1985) demonstrates the significant periods of American higher education development since WWII:

- Students tripling from 2.5 million (1955) to 8.8 million (1974)
- Those ranging from 18 – 24 years of age nearly doubled via degree enrollment from 17.8 percent (1955) to 33.5 percent (1974)
- Minority students depicted an eightfold increase estimating from 95,000 (1955) to 814,000 (1974)
- Young women enrolled in higher education rose from one-third to one-half of all persons attending colleges/universities

- Higher education facilities doubled (1955 – 1974)
- Community colleges became highly competitive where 400 community colleges enrolled 325,000 students (1955) whereas 973 community colleges enrolled 3.4 million students (1974)
- Faculty increased from 266,000 (1955) to 633,000 (1974)
- Research estimations at universities were approximately \$312 million (1955) whereas it increased to approximately \$3 billion
- The federal government financed 55 percent of university –based research (1955) with an increase in financing totaling 64 percent (1974)

It is imperative that we identify with the implications that are reshaping higher education from: changing students, transforming faculty, shifting curricula, varying research connections, altering technologies, and changing governing structures.

BUSINESS EDUCATION – WHAT IS THE GOAL?

What is the goal of business education? Sustainable economic growth. Influencing future leaders that will focus not solely on profit taking, but on job-creation with profit being a healthy by-product.

Command and control management style that emerged from a society that had a draft. Most young men had served in the armed forces, so were accustomed the leadership and followership relationship.

In time, the culture of business changed. Organizations flattened, the new generation was not required to serve in the armed services. The entrepreneurial spirit emerged.

Business education broadened into the disciplines. Rather than the generic business degree, concentrations in Finance, Marketing, Accounting, and Management emerged. The need for expertise in these disciplines supported the elevation of the advanced degree, otherwise named the MBA – Master of Business Administration.

The development of corporate classrooms speaks to innovative strategies and implications

through this type of educational expansion. It is posited that corporations and universities should form educational yet networking connections, but remain independent (Eurlch, 1985).

Creating service-learning opportunities for students provides greater breadth of business education through association of applied educational experiences. It promotes civic engagement while balancing academic rigor with a richer academic experience. Rather than focusing on the former transactional goals of business education with emphasis on problem solving ‘tool-kits’, service learning incorporates the following four Rs: reality, reflection, reciprocity, and responsibility which is aiding to the transformation of today’s business education philosophy (Godfrey et al, 2005).

PEDAGOGICAL PHILOSOPHY

The educational journey for a Molloy College student provides not only preparation for a professional path, but also for participation as an educated citizen of the world. A democracy must have citizens who understand the collective which serves the society. The professional major within a graduate or undergraduate program should accelerate the student’s experience through education. The result is a level of expertise in the student’s chosen profession. The curriculum is about depth. The outcome is an individual who is professionally self-sufficient, yet has a yearning for continuous learning.

Through transformative education, Molloy College promotes a lifelong search for truth and the development of ethical leadership (Molloy College Mission Statement). In 2012 the college-wide theme was “Civic Engagement.” As a result, the capstone course was redesigned to significantly integrate the college theme with the student learning objectives. A capstone, by its nature, is that last stone put in place; it shows the world that the building is complete. The capstone course is therefore intended to provide the students with an opportunity to demonstrate the skills, knowledge, and disposition that have been gained because of the business education.

MICHAEL BLOOMBERG and “THE MAYOR’S CHALLENGE

The Bloomberg Philanthropies’ Mayors Challenge is an initiative created by Mayor Michael Bloomberg to aid today’s U.S. city leaders to develop innovative ideas to confront and mitigate today’s toughest problems with community expertise (Mayors Challenge, 2017).

Champion cities are chosen to test and refine their ideas, creating coast-to-coast civic solutions. They collaborate with innovation experts and urban practitioners from the Bloomberg Philanthropies’ global network. They then refine their ideas and then submit a detailed application for further review.

Winners of the Mayors Challenge will then be awarded significant monetary prizes (ranging from \$1-5 million totaling up to \$9 million) in order to bring their ideas to fruition. Applications are evaluated accordingly: by vision, implementation, impact, and transferability. Ideas need to be bold and innovative, but ultimately should aid toward improving citizens lives within their communities. Cities must demonstrate their ability to gather support from both stakeholders and local citizens while putting the ‘stretch principle’ in place in order to expand their beneficial ideas to other cities. These cities have be able to adapt the vision to benefit their own constituents.

DEVELOPING A CAPSTONE EXPERIENCE

Initially clients were identified that mirrored the process established by Mayor Michael Bloomberg in 2012 when the “Mayor’s Challenge” was created. Mayors of Long Island villages offered the students the opportunity to work on a problem that ‘fit’ into the Mayor’s Challenge design of: Vision, Implementation, Impact, and Replicability. These early projects replicated the “Mayor’s Challenge” by inviting small cities on Long Island, which are the “Incorporated Villages,” to become clients for the Capstone students. An incorporated village has a mayor, a board of trustees, and runs as an independent municipality within the structure of the larger local government.

THE MOLLOY COLLEGE CAPSTONE – FIVE YEARS LATER

After a number of semesters, the need to expand the client-base allowed government agencies and ultimately not-for-profit organizations to become clients. Below we list the clients for each of the semesters starting in the fall semester of 2012 through to Spring 2017. These past five years have allowed the Molloy Division of Business to create a capstone experience that meets the overall learning objectives of both the undergraduate and graduate business programs. The clients were:

2012 Fall

- Undergraduate
 - Mayor Biondi and Village Clerk, Virgilia Gross - The Incorporated Village of Mastic Beach, New York
- Graduate
 - Mayor Margot Garant – The Incorporated Village of Port Jefferson, New York.
 - Mayor Scordino – The Incorporated Village of Babylon, New York

2013 Spring

- Undergraduate
 - Mayor Robert Kennedy, Freeport, New York
- Graduate
 - Mayor Margot Garant – The Incorporated Village of Port Jefferson, New York.
 - Mayor Scordino – The Incorporated Village of Babylon, New York

2013 Fall

- Undergraduate
 - Mayor Robert Kennedy, Freeport, New York
- Graduate
 - Nassau County Commission on Human Rights
 - Long Island Regional Planning Council
 - The Holocaust Memorial & Tolerance Center

2014 Spring

- Undergraduate
 - Social Enterprise Alliance (SEA) – Long Island Chapter
 - Mayor Robert Kennedy, Freeport, New York
- Graduate
 - Nassau County Commission on Human Rights, Nassau County Government, Mineola, New York
 - Long Island Regional Planning Council
 - Office of Community Development, Nassau County Government, Mineola, New York

2014 Summer

- Graduate
 - Mercy Hospital, Rockville Centre, New York

2014 Fall

- Undergraduate
 - Rotacare, Inc.
- Graduate
 - Nassau County Bar Association, Mineola, New York
 - Sustainable Long Island, Inc.

2015 Spring

- Undergraduate
 - RotaCare, Inc.
- Graduate
 - Island Harvest, Inc.
 - Sustainable Long Island, Inc.

2015 Fall

- Undergraduate
 - RotaCare, Inc. (Phase II)
 - Charles Evans Center, Inc.
- Graduate
 - Island Harvest, Inc.

- Canine Companions for Independence, Inc.

2016 Spring

- Undergraduate
 - Charles Evans Center, Inc. (Phase II)
 - Nassau Lend a Helping Hand, Inc.
- Graduate
 - The Health and Welfare Council of Long Island, Inc.
 - Canine Companions for Independence, Inc.

2016 Fall

- Undergraduate
 - The Book Fairies, Inc.
 - Dream 68, Inc.
- Graduate
 - The American Arbitration Association (AAA)
 - The Health and Welfare Council of Long Island, Inc.

2017 Spring

- Undergraduate
 - Smile Farms, Inc.
- Graduate
 - The American Arbitration Association, Inc.
 - Paths for Hope

A TYPICAL CAPSTONE PROJECT

The students in the Capstone Class are divided into two-three consulting teams. Each team was provided with a real-world client and a real-world consulting problem. Each team used the Bloomberg Philanthropies, “Mayor’s Challenge” application to guide the consulting process. This process takes the students through four stages: (1) establishing a solution-driven vision, (2) developing a turnkey implementation plan, (3) determining the impact of the plan, and (4) determining if the solution can be replicated.

The team’s vision is informed by the results of collective research; the team incorporates

programs and concepts that have been used by other organizations. It is *innovative* to the partnering client because the consulting teams create and use resources that the organizations might not have optimized in the past. The teams saw that improvements in areas that were charged or agreed upon with the clients proved to be beneficial for sustainable growth.

The outcome of the consulting experience is a professional presentation to the client and its board of trustees. In addition, the students build a detailed turnkey package which allows the client to execute the recommendations made by the student consultants. It is not sufficient that recommendations are simply made; they need to be actionable. The student consultants must have sufficient detail so that the client's organization will benefit from the students work.

IMPACT ON SOCIETY

There is a need for solutions, such as developed within these consulting teams, which can be transferred across industries. The students learn that the role of business is not simply about profit taking as a priority, but rather job creation and sustainable economic growth that services society – with profit as a healthy by-product. These are the business students that will build the healthy businesses of the future.

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