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# Innovations in Experiential Learning for Adult Learners

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*While there is no single profile of the adult learner in the 21st century, there exists a common desire to obtain a degree in higher education. Adult learners as a group are comprised of a large number of women and individuals from various racial/ethnic groups. In addition, they often possess varied learning styles and maintain multiple roles and responsibilities. Many learners may be interested in gaining entrance to the workforce for the first time, may be seeking a career change, or may be looking to advance one's current career status. Thus, as students learn, it becomes important for them to gain valuable experiential learning opportunities, apply prior knowledge, gain new knowledge, and increase career opportunities upon graduation. One valuable vehicle to achieve these goals is participation in internships. This article will discuss a case study and will describe a pilot program designed to provide adult learners with an experiential learning opportunity in the community for college credit. Issues involved in creating such opportunities for adult learners will be addressed, as will successes and barriers to success. Use of theory related to the scholarship of teaching and adult development, in particular the work of Mezirow, Brookfield, and Boyer, will be used to connect adult education to the need for experiential learning, as distinguished from prior life experience. Recommendations for internship development for adult learners will be discussed.*

*Keywords:* adult learners, experiential learning, internships, adult learning theory

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As they learn, students should not only gain knowledge, but also the ability to apply said knowledge. Experiential learning, through internships is a popular way to provide students with the opportunity to learn how to apply knowledge gained in the classroom. Experiential learning, in different formats also provides students the chance to learn acceptable professional behaviors. Students begin to develop professional identities in their fields. Internships are typically offered to and accepted by traditional students, with fewer life experiences, rather than the non-traditional, adult learner. The literature tells us that adult learners come to the table with significant life experience and are very committed to the "process" of learning, for the purpose of self-discovery and application, rather than merely to obtain knowledge (Brookfield, 2013; Knowles, 1980). It would thus seem that an experiential learning opportunity would be a good fit for adult learners. However, the challenges of being an adult learner, including raising a family, employment, and financial worries often prevent adult learners from engaging in experiential learning opportunities. Therefore, it follows that creating experiential learning opportunities for adult learners must involve innovative pedagogy.

This paper is a case study and will describe a pilot program designed to provide adult learners with an experiential learning opportunity in the community for college credit. In addition, it will describe the development process of a larger experiential-learning program for adult learners. Issues involved in creating such opportunities for adult learners will be addressed, as will successes and barriers to success. Use of theory related to the scholarship of teaching and adult development, in particular the work of Mezirow, Brookfield, and Boyer, will be used to connect adult education to the need for experiential learning, as distinguished from prior life experience.

## APPLICATION OF THEORY

Ernest Boyer (1990, 2000) believed that teaching must not only provide students with knowledge but also must transform their lives in some way. Instructors are charged with studying teaching, as a form of scholarship, in order to improve the learning experiences of their students. Adult learners have a wealth of life experiences to share, and with these life experiences come expectations about the products of their learning. Most adults enjoy learning for the sake of learning, but most have specific objectives, such as promotions at work or job-related requirements in the area of education. Thus, developing learning activities and objectives to meet the complex needs of adult learners is difficult.

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Boyer (1996) also reminded us that higher education and academia have a responsibility in sharing knowledge not only through the classroom, but also through application. Jack Mezirow (1997) takes these ideas a step further and discusses the importance of becoming autonomous thinkers, not only taking in knowledge but applying it in the context of a broader society. Mezirow talks specifically about workforce issues, stating that in order for adults to be productive, working citizens in the workforce of a technologically advancing future, they would need to learn to become more autonomous and self-directed. Although this was written in 1997, it stands true today, as technology continues to change job functions and workplace needs. Mezirow (1997) rightly states that workers need to be able to "understand and manipulate information rather than merely acquire it" (p. 8).

Mezirow et al. (2000) suggest that instructors use learning activities designed to promote active engagement with new concepts and provide the example of participation in social action. Active engagement inside and outside of the classroom helps learners to develop their own ideas about the material and to engage in a discourse or conversation. Learners must be able to critically reflect on material and to apply it in a real-life workplace situation. Thus, learning activities that offer students the opportunity to practice this type of application in a real work setting are invaluable.

Mezirow, Brookfield, and Boyer all build upon the work of Knowles (1980), who developed the theory of andragogy, which specifically addresses adult learning. Cercone (2008) makes an important connection between experiential learning and adult learning theory. Specifically related to internships, experiential learning theories posit that applied learning is important to growth, especially for adult learners, as it connects concepts to current experience or events, making them more immediately relevant (Cercone, 2008).

Similarly, Zigmont, Kappus, and Sudikoff (2011) discuss simulation-based education as a way for adults to obtain hands-on experience, again providing immediate relevance. It forces the learner to apply what they already know, as well as new concepts to new situations. The authors call for "skilled mentors to provide effective feedback and support change for life-long learning" (Zigmont et al., 2011, p. 50). Zigmont et al., (2011) also calls for the mentor to work with the learner on reflection of experience, rather than purely presentation of material.

Studies suggest that experiential learning techniques can facilitate learning transfer. Various techniques such as cooperative learning, project-based learning, and reflective learning offer venues for adult learners to integrate and classroom learning and transfer that learning to real-world settings (Furman & Sibthorp, 2013). The authors suggest that in contrast to didactic teaching formats, experiential learning practices facilitate a complexity of learning and cognitive recall needed for transfer (Furman & Sibthorp, 2013).

The present case study will describe how experiential techniques as embedded in an internship site can foster learning for adult students. This study will incorporate evaluations that will underscore best practices as well as the effectiveness of internships and experiential learning with adults.

## CASE STUDY: AN EXPERIENTIAL COMMUNITY LEARNING EXPERIENCE FOR ADULT LEARNERS

Social workers, human service professionals, psychologists, and teachers in training are frequently mandated to complete a certain amount of hours in the field through a graduate level field or internship experience. Graduate programs in these disciplines, as well as jobs in these areas generally require or strongly suggest some field experience in order to qualify for the position or admission into a program. Undergraduate internships are often held by younger, more traditional students, with fewer barriers to completion. Traditional internships are also generally unpaid or provide a very small financial stipend. Adult, non-traditional learners with full time jobs, families, and financial commitments, may be hard pressed to take on this type of additional learning experience and make it work in the context of their busy lives. It might be challenging to help students understand the benefits of this type of learning opportunity.

Despite these barriers, as discussed above, theory and research demonstrate that adult learners would benefit greatly from the experience. The task then becomes to understand how one might provide an experiential learning opportunity that works for adults. As scholars and educators at an institution that works mainly with adult, non-traditional learners, it is our responsibility to assist students in maximizing their potential. This is the epitome of the scholarship of teaching and learning.

In order to begin to understand how to facilitate this type of opportunity for adult learners, a small pilot was conducted and adjusted over time, which has eventually led to the need for a more formal program. Using Brookfield's (2013) suggestion of small groups for effective learning, 8 students were enrolled and 6 class sessions (every other week) were scheduled, with expectations of 10 to 15 hours of experiential learning taking place during the alternating weeks. The class was titled, Community Based Organizations: A Hands on Learning Experience. The specific goal was to provide students with an actual experience in the field that was flexible enough to fit into their current schedules, which most times included work and caring for family. Students reported that it was difficult to make a transition into a new field of work without ever having an experience in the new field. Thus, the authors wanted to provide an experience for students, which would allow them to evaluate goodness of fit, as well as provide some level of professional experience. In this pilot pilot, all students worked within the same organization. The authors worked with the director to develop a list of potential opportunities for students with different interests. For example, there were some opportunities or tasks that involved administrative work and others that included direct work with clients that were served by the organization.

Evaluation of the learning opportunity was conducted as a quality improvement measure, using qualitative group discussion and interview meetings with students. Content analysis was used to develop themes and understand student experience. All students agreed to provide feedback for quality improvement purposes. Demographics for the very first group ranged in age, from early 20's through to mid 50's, and most students identified as Caucasian, with one student of Russian descent. The students were all enrolled in undergraduate degree programs and their areas of study, or academic areas of interest varied, although most were interested in community and human services, psychology, or education. One student in particular was focused on getting a degree in business, management, and economics, but interested in non-profit organizations and community based agencies.

Students were introduced to the executive director of a grassroots community based organization within the first couple of class sessions and learning assignments were developed. Students were given a list of possible projects to choose from, based on needs of the organization. Written assignments were open ended, to account for the different experiences of each student. Readings consisted of a book and several peer-reviewed journal articles, all on working within a grassroots community based organization. Each hands-on assignment focused on some area of interest that the student had that matched one of the organization's needs. For example, the student who was interested in a business degree was able to help the agency organize records using an excel database. Another student interested in working with people, was able to work under the task supervision of an Master of Social Work (MSW) intern, helping a participant of one of the organization's life skills programs to complete paperwork for a referral for a social service. The students all learned about engagement with organization staff and clients, as well as different functions of a community based organization. Students were able to identify strengths and weaknesses, and apply the material learned in their readings to the actual interactions that they had in the field.

Following this initial pilot, detailed feedback was obtained in the form of a discussion group at the end of the class-term, as well as written feedback in student evaluations. The students also participated in short individual discussions to review their experiences. There were several salient themes, which assisted the authors in further developing pedagogy for adult students in experiential learning. The following questions were asked to elicit feedback: 1. How was your experience in the field? 2. What were some of the most helpful things about doing this hands on learning? 3. What were some of the biggest challenges? 4. How could we improve this for future students?

The first theme centered around the timing of the class meetings. Students felt that the group meetings were not as helpful as individual time spent with the instructor. Group meetings required consistent time from their hectic schedules, whereas individualized meetings were more easily scheduled around their work and family commitments. One student said, "I really enjoyed the time I spent individually talking with AS (the instructor) about my experience downtown and felt that this was more helpful than the group. It was interesting to hear about the other students' experiences, but it was hard to make time for this extra meeting 6 times in the semester, in addition to the hours I spent downtown. Fewer larger group meetings would have been better for me and my schedule."

The second major theme reflected that students would have preferred more time in the field at the organization, rather than spending 6 sessions in the classroom. For example, one student said, "I greatly enjoyed my time in the city at [organization] and learned so much about what people go through when they need services for different things. I would have liked to spend more time there and learned more about helping people directly instead of meeting so many times in the classroom." Another student reflected, "There was so much to be done down at [organization] and I have never had the opportunity to volunteer or do an internship before this, so I just wanted to keep working and learning about what else they do there. I feel my time could have been better spent doing more there, spending more hours there, and maybe less class sessions. The hands on part was the best part of the learning for me."

Third, students also felt that the written assignments were too open-ended, and that further structure would have been helpful in organizing their thoughts. The instructors chose initially to leave the assignments open for students to reflect on their experiences, as they would all be different. Students were asked to identify specific things that they learned and how this changed their thoughts about the field or amplified what they already thought. There were few structured questions and the assignment allowed each student to write and form the paper as they wished. This was anxiety producing for students, and they would have preferred to have more specific questions to respond to. One student said, "The assignments, especially the final paper, were very hard for me to figure out. I struggled with knowing what to write about and how to write it. I knew I learned a lot but needed some more direction in terms of how to spell it out."

The fourth theme reflected that students learned a great deal from the experience and felt that it was more beneficial in some ways than their typical classroom experience. One student said, "It is hard to understand what the work is all about when you read about it in a book or hear about it from a speaker. Actually being down at [organization] gave me a true understanding about what this kind of work is about. It feels more meaningful than I originally imagined." Another student said, "After being in the corporate world for so long, I was very nervous to get involved and actually do something in this new field. I read about and heard about it, but that was not really helpful in figuring out what it was like in the real world. Once I was there, I saw that this is really something I am interested in, and it is not just something to think about and read about. There is real potential for me to do this work."

Taking all of this feedback seriously into consideration, the learning opportunity was modified. Rather than offering small group class learning sessions, an independent study was developed. Students now work independently with the instructor and the organization to build their learning experience. Students meet regularly with the instructor and are connected with one another in the field in order to share ideas or meaningful knowledge gained through their learning experiences. Students meet with the instructor(s) both at school, in the instructor(s) office and in the field. This peer-related feedback and conversational discourse is essential to the adult learner's development (Brookfield, 2013; Mezirow, 1997). Written assignments were also altered to provide some more structure and direction. A certain amount of flexibility remains, to encourage critical thinking and individualized responses to the reading, as applied to their experiences. The assignments were also broken down into 3 smaller assignments, allowing students to reflect on the literature and what they would like to get out of the experience and then to reflect on the actual experience. This arrangement has been more effective in engaging students in the learning process, so much so that there have been more students interested and enrolling than the partnering organization can handle. Ongoing evaluation through student and organization discussion has led to consistent revision of learning opportunities. The increased interest led to the development of another community based experience, through a second grassroots organization, using the same independent study framework.

## DEVELOPMENT OF AN INTERNSHIP PROGRAM FOR ADULT LEARNERS

The number of students interested in and registering for this type of learning experience has multiplied, indicating a great need in this area. The increased interest and need also demonstrates that the experience has been beneficial to the students who have participated, as they have shared their experiences with others, generating additional interest and registration. This pilot experiential learning opportunity has grown into the development a larger internship program, designed specifically for adult learners. An internship program for adult, non-traditional students may look different than those at traditional institutions, working with more traditional learners. To this end, the following has been taken into consideration, during the development process: 1. Finding organizations and internship sites that are flexible with internship hours, 2. Creating opportunities outside of the traditional classroom environment for social learning through peer interaction (Brookfield, 2013), and 3. Developing semi-structured assignments and learning activities, providing the student with the opportunity to become a more autonomous thinker (Mezirow, 1997).

Finding organization and internship sites with flexible hours can be difficult. Working with grass-roots, community based organizations has proven to be successful, as these organizations often have fluid hours and flexible projects. Projects can often be completed partially in the office, partially at home or online, and partially in the field or community, leaving the student with many options. Hospitals and other similar organizations with large existing volunteer departments and needs during off-hours are also good options. Although developing connections and completing paperwork in a bureaucratic environment, such as a hospital may prove challenging, it is worth the time and effort. Hospitals are equipped to work with large numbers of "volunteers" and various types of students in different capacities and they run 24 hours/7 days a week, leaving many options available for the adult learner.

Community centers with broad ranges of programming options have also yielded opportunities for adult students who need flexible options. These centers offer programs from early morning into the late evening, as well as on weekends. There are available opportunities for work with young children in early childhood programs, children and families in sports and afterschool programs, as well as programs designed to help senior citizens. Adult learners are welcomed in these environments, as they typically have a level of responsibility and awareness for general workplace ethics and behavior. Many of these centers, as well as larger hospital organizations, screen students for internships through their volunteer departments and procedures.

Creating opportunities for discourse and peer feedback are essential to the adult learner's development (Brookfield, 2013; Mezirow, 1996). In order to facilitate this, a two weekend seminar is suggested, providing the opportunity to share experiences and knowledge, while learning about professional issues in the field. The seminar, offered over two weekends, rather than in traditional class format, accommodates the schedules of adult learners, taking the reality of their time limits and commitments into consideration. The trust developed between student and faculty, which includes faculty effort to find flexible opportunities, is invaluable as students work to find compromises in their schedule to fit in the internship. Although developing research demonstrates that trust is essential in the learning the notion of direct connection between this trust and student willingness to find compromises in their schedules warrants further research (Goh, 2002). This practice will be instituted going forward, as it required coordination of space and staffing for the building, as well as scheduling sessions around another weekend learning program.

The development of assignments and learning activities related to the internship experience has been a challenge, although students respond well to readings that are very relevant to the work they are doing within the community based organization. Reading assignments are tailored to the type of organization and population that the student is working with. This requires some common readings for all students, to encourage discussion from a common perspective, in addition to individualized readings based on their own work. Students are invited to seek out readings that apply to the work they are doing in the community and to specifically discuss why those readings were chosen. This type of application of material and self-directed learning activity will encourage autonomous, critical thinking and help students to become more engaged, responsible learners, taking more initiative as they process information. Thus it is recommended to blend common readings with individualized readings which are sought out by the students.

Use of case studies is also recommended, although students might be asked to develop their own case study based upon their experiences in the field/community. For example, students might write a case study based upon an experience or situation within the field and share this case study with the larger peer group during one of the weekend seminars, inviting discussion and sharing of ideas. Students may learn different strategies for working with the situation described. This is an alternative to Brookfield's (2013) scenario analysis suggestion, in which a fictional vignette is used to spark discussion.

As the larger internship program is developed and more hours in the field are required for student learning, it would behoove instructors to develop activities that ask students to reflect on their experiences including awareness of value conflicts. Scenario analysis will be critical to students learning how to interact professionally and modify responses in client interactions. Finding ways to use blended learning modalities to further provide flexibility for students already stretching their time to accommodate internship hours will also be important. Utilizing online learning platforms and chat spaces could allow students to watch practice examples through video clips, as well as practice responses to client interactions through online role play. Using synchronous chat boxes would allow students to come up with real time responses to possible practice situations, whereas asynchronous activities would provide students with time to reflect upon and offer reasoning for their responses (Graham, Woodfield & Harrison, 2013).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, developing experiential learning opportunities specifically for adult, non-traditional students in an undergraduate setting is not easy, but is well worth the time and effort. It is also a responsibility as academics, to provide these opportunities, despite the challenges and barriers. It is essential to assist our students in finding ways to stay relevant in our communities as the economy and job functions shift. Adult students must learn new skills in order to start new careers. As teachers and scholars, it is important to constantly evaluate and re-evaluate our pedagogy, especially as it relates to current student needs (Boyer, 1990). Teaching and learning should be a parallel process, academics learning from teaching experiences, making appropriate shifts in pedagogical methods and techniques, as students learn and provide feedback on their own learning experiences.

It is seems through preliminary piloting that a great need for these learning opportunities and experiences exists. As students learned about the possibilities and the experiences of other students, registration grew and the initial program began to outgrow itself rapidly. This suggests a greater need in this area, although more data should be gathered from a larger group of adult learners to understand more about these needs. Although new pedagogical strategies are being developed, it is still important to ground new learning opportunities and associated activities in existing theory and literature. As the larger internship program is in its first stages, more formal evaluation will take place, which will aid in continuous development. As well, more research on a larger scale is necessary to learn more about the inner workings of experiential learning and internships for adult, non-traditional learners, as this is new and innovative work.

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# Case-in-Point Pedagogy: Building Capacity for Experiential Learning and Democracy

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*Experiential learning in and out of the classroom provides students with opportunities to learn from reflecting critically on concrete experiences. This article introduces Case-in-Point (CIP), an experiential teaching and learning strategy that uses critical reflection-in-action within the context of the classroom environment to modify behaviors in real-time. We broaden the use of CIP beyond its original realm of application, teaching leadership, to instruction in a range of disciplines, and we explore its use to build capacity for experiential learning and democracy.*

*Keywords:* case-in-point, pedagogy, experiential learning, critical reflection, democracy

## INTRODUCTION

The call for engaged, experiential education is not new. Dewey (1938) noted the tensions in educational theory between traditional and progressive approaches – the former focused on instruction for the acquisition of knowledge and the latter based on experience and discovery. Barr and Tagg (1995) pointed out that higher education insti-

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tutions have been governed too long by a traditional "instruction paradigm," focusing on quality of instruction/instructors for the purpose of transferring knowledge to students (p. 13). They advocated a shift to a "learning paradigm" (p. 16) in which the educational experience is framed around discovery and construction of knowledge, development of students' competencies and talents, and the creation of powerful learning environments. The American Association of Colleges and Universities' (AAC&U) *Liberal Education and America's Promise* (LEAP) initiative advocates the use of high-impact educational practices (e.g., learning communities, collaborative projects, internships) in pursuit of essential learning outcomes that prepare students for the complexities of a diverse and changing world (AAC&U, 2007; Kuh, 2008). Higher education can be a place where students develop as "empowered-civic-actors," but to accomplish that we must support them in being "empowered-actor-learners" in their own education (Clayton et al., 2014, p. 6). Students need opportunities to experience democratic processes, learn the values of democracy, and see their education as more than job training. Yet, today's educators continue to be challenged by systems and cultural trends that reward instruction over learning, which creates barriers to building capacity for democracy.

Additionally, economic trends are influencing educational trends, including positioning students as consumers of learning processes (Levine & Dean, 2012). The rising cost of tuition, coupled with access to enhanced technology, calls into question the value of traditional knowledge-transfer pedagogies (i.e., lectures). Students can find online programs that provide the same knowledge for lower cost. These conditions create high expectations for institutions to provide high-impact learning experiences that prepare students for civic and professional roles.

Experiential learning strategies such as internships, practica, study abroad, undergraduate research, and service-learning are dynamic, high-impact practices that typically create conditions for students to move beyond traditional classrooms and into learning contexts in broader communities (e.g., workplaces, community organizations). What if students experienced contextually-rich experiential learning in their classrooms before going abroad, taking a job at an internship, or entering a service-learning partnership? How might students – and, in turn, these complex activities and relationships – benefit from applying knowledge in a classroom prior to doing so in an external environment? How might they be better prepared, empowered, and effective both as learners and as citizens? Most fundamentally, how can we utilize experiential learning *in* the classroom to prepare for life and work beyond campus? While many experiential learning activities can be facilitated within classrooms (e.g., role-playing, problem-based learning, group

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projects, debate and deliberation), we suggest that case-in-point (CIP) pedagogy is a powerful vehicle for classroom-based experiential learning in real-time that can build capacity for other forms of experiential learning and for democracy.

CIP was originally developed as a pedagogy to teach leadership, but we find it applicable to instruction in a variety of disciplines. In this article, we outline key components of CIP pedagogy. We share several examples of how CIP can occur both within and beyond the classroom in a variety of disciplines. We also describe how CIP can cultivate reflection skills, facilitate exploration of values and behaviors, and prepare students to contribute to democracy. Although CIP is particularly well-suited to service-learning because of its ability to create spaces to learn about democracy in democratic ways, the pedagogy can build capacity to participate in other forms of experiential learning such as internships, study abroad, and undergraduate research.

## CASE-IN-POINT

Case-in-Point (CIP) is a teaching and learning strategy by which students learn a practice by reflectively doing the practice in real-time (Green & Fabris McBride, 2015). The method was pioneered by Ronald Heifetz, Marty Linsky, and colleagues at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government with specific application to teaching the practices of adaptive leadership (Daloz Parks, 2005; Green, 2011), which is the process of "mobilizing people to tackle tough challenges and thrive" (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009, p. 14). The CIP method creates the conditions for students to observe and practice concepts in real-time; it is "the process of directing a group's attention to teachable moments, then holding collective focus on those moments long enough for individuals to engage themselves and one another in new and productive ways" (Green & Fabris McBride, 2015, p. 43). The following three classroom scenarios illustrate CIP through "teachable moments" across different course contexts and subject areas.

### Scenario One: Examining Challenges of Research

> An undergraduate research methods class of 16 students is learning how to conduct structured interviews. The instructor pairs them up to interview one another in class using questions from their proposed research projects. The instructor's objectives are for students to have direct practice interviewing and to learn about how interview techniques can influence the authenticity of responses. Halfway through the first set of interviews, the instructor pauses the class and asks the interviewees, "How many of you feel you are trying to be calculated or careful in your responses?" A few of them raise their

hands. She then asks, “What is making you feel this way?” The students indicate that the location of the audio recorder is visible and that they are aware of the interviewer actively taking notes. The class discusses how the interviewees’ experiences are influenced by the actions of the interviewers and how that dynamic might emerge in future research projects. One student says that researchers should not prioritize “getting the information” over “being with the participant.” Another student says that, just like her, participants may want to be portrayed in a good manner, which might influence how they answer questions. The instructor then invites both the interviewers and interviewees to make adjustments for the second half of the session to help encourage more open and authentic responses.

**Scenario Two: Experiencing Discomfort in Community Engagement**

A group of 20 students in a community-engaged communication studies course is developing a deliberative dialogue protocol that aims to elicit stories from community members around food justice. They want to create the conditions to hear the stories of people experiencing food insecurity, but they find it hard to decide what is appropriate to ask. The instructor sees this as a moment to teach about discomfort and vulnerability as inevitable and even necessary components of facilitation in community work. She intervenes by saying, “It sounds like visiting with people experiencing food insecurity would be beyond your comfort zone. What discomfort are you feeling right now? What would it look like to be vulnerable right now?” The students share how nervous and uncomfortable they feel just having this conversation. In doing so, they recognize how they are demonstrating vulnerability with the other members of their learning community. The opportunity for the students to explore vulnerability in the conversation helps them be more comfortable with vulnerability as an element of the dialogue protocol they are designing.

**Scenario Three: Practicing Environmental Ethics**

A biology class of 50 students is out walking a nature trail to identify plant species. The instructor intends to use the campus as a laboratory for plant identification and also wants to create the conditions for learning about environmental ethics. As they walk past a creek that has several plastic bottles floating near the edge, the instructor asks if anyone has picked up any trash on their journey. A few students show they have picked up a few stray items. He asks, “Why didn’t anyone go into the creek to pick up the bottles?” The group reflects on their competing values of wanting a clean environment and personal convenience. It is more convenient to pick up a few items on the dry trail and carry them than it is to potentially get muddy and wet and have to carry more items as they walk. The instructor asks the students to think about other times they have chosen convenience over the environment and to think about examples in their daily lives of moments when they could give up small bits of convenience for the greater good of the environment. After the students discuss these questions in pairs, he has the class turn to walk back toward their building and asks, "What would it look like to do that right now?" As they walk some students experiment with new behaviors (e.g, walking farther to pick up trash, getting their hands dirty) – testing the balance between their environmental and convenience values. This activity serves as a starting point for their group projects aiming to raise awareness about environmental ethics.

## THE MECHANICS OF CASE-IN-POINT

In each of these scenarios, instructors and students engaged in experiential learning through an intentional CIP approach. Table 1 summarizes a framework for CIP developed by Green and Fabris McBride

**Table 1: 5-Step Framework for a Case-in-Point Session**

| | Teaching Leadership | Teaching in Any Discipline |
|---|---|---|
| Step 1 | Know which leadership principle or competency you want to teach. | Be aware of learning outcomes that can be achieved through critical reflection on designed or serendipitous moments. |
| Step 2 | Engage your group and get them interacting with some minimal sense of shared purpose. | Create or utilize a common experience amongst students or identify a teachable moment. |
| Step 3 | Shine light on a moment, pattern, or dynamic that could relate to the leadership idea you are trying to teach. | Create the conditions for anyone in the system to shine light on a moment, pattern, or dynamic that could relate to a learning outcome you want to cultivate. |
| Step 4 | Use the case you have illuminated to encourage or provoke group members to practice leadership skills. | Use the moment, pattern, or dynamic to have people in the system practice reflection-in-action, examine values and behaviors, and practice changed behavior in the moment. |
| Step 5 | Debrief and invite learners to reflect on how to apply the ideas in the real world. | Debrief and invite learners to reflect on what occurred during the session for deeper understanding of the learning outcome. |

**Left column excerpted from Green and Fabris McBride, 2015**

(2015); their specific, 5-step framework (excerpted in the left column) has been used by instructors and trainers in and out of formal education to teach principles of adaptive leadership. In the right column, we have broadened this framework to include teaching in any discipline.

**Step 1. Be aware of learning outcomes that can be achieved through critical reflection on designed or serendipitous moments**

CIP is a tool that allows educators to use what is happening in the moment to achieve learning outcomes. Not every teachable moment must be utilized; the instructor needs to keep in mind the learning outcomes of the course and take advantage of the particular moments in the room that will help students achieve them. For example, the instructor in the research scenario understands that teaching both interview skills and challenges of research such as authenticity of responses meet learning outcomes for the course. She facilitates this classroom interview activity knowing that issues of authenticity are likely to arise.

**Step 2. Create or utilize a common experience amongst students or identify a teachable moment**

It is vital for students to have a shared experience that allows them to form a working system. It is in the system that they will apply new learning and give and receive feedback. For example, the biology instructor takes all of his students near the creek with litter. He knows that many of his students saw the bottles and continued walking, so he used this as a teachable moment that most of the students in his class shared. He did not plant the bottles before class or know with certainty that the students would not pick them up, but he knew that somewhere throughout the walk it was likely students would choose convenience over the environment.

**Step 3: Create the conditions for anyone in the system to shine light on a moment, pattern, or dynamic that could relate to a learning outcome you want to cultivate**

The system will produce opportunities that can help generate teachable moments. The role of the facilitator is to be observant and call attention to (or “call out”) the pattern, moment, or classroom dynamic. For example, in the community engagement course the instructor observed uncertainty in the students’ actions in creating the protocol and noted that no one wanted to admit their discomfort. She was able to shed light on this moment by asking the students if they felt vulnerable, which created an open door to discuss and explore that vulnerability. Instructors can use such teachable moments to help students explore what is happening in the system, diagnose why, and try to make a change. Additionally, they can create the conditions that encourage students to surface and direct attention to these moments themselves, which usually occurs after the learning community has established trust and the students have participated in other CIP experiences.

### Step 4: Use the moment, pattern, or dynamic to have people in the system practice reflection-in-action, examine values and behaviors, and practice changed behavior in the moment

CIP assumes that learning happens in systems, that everyone plays a role in the system, and therefore that everyone can change the system. To create change requires not only the ability to recognize patterns, but also to make meaning through reflection and to make immediate changes. For example, in the research course, students modify their behaviors related to interviewing and implement it in the same class period. They can see through this implementation if any of their changes increase authenticity of participant answers. The cycle of observe, interpret, intervene (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009), which is described in more detail below, is continuous and iterative, meaning that participants should make immediate observations about the effectiveness of their interventions. This process may occur several times during a CIP session. Through this process students can learn if their new behavior is or is not making change to the system. This real-time feedback loop is what provides value over reflecting after experience or reflecting during experience but not applying learning to modify behavior in the moment (i.e., during the CIP session).

### Step 5: Debrief and invite learners to reflect on what occurred during the session for deeper understanding of the learning outcome

It is important to make clear when the CIP session ends and the debrief begins. In the debrief, learners should not try to implement new interventions. Instead they replay, reflect, and analyze the actions that occurred in the session; this is what Schön refers to as "reflection-on-action" (meaning, after the action not, as with "reflection-in-action," during the action). The reflection elicits new understanding as learners hear multiple interpretations from other voices in the system. Learners are required to "get on the balcony," (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009, p.7) which means reflecting on the system as a whole.

Before the end of each class period, the instructor should make clear the CIP session is over and allow students to make observations and interpretations about how their modified behaviors played out in the system. The three scenarios above do not illustrate the debrief portion of CIP. The instructor in each scenario, however, would wrap-up the class period with debrief questions. For example: Did the participants in the research example elicit more authentic answers? Did the biology students feel their value of the environment outweighed the inconvenience of getting dirty? Did the vulnerability of the community engagement class lead to better progress on creating a dialogue protocol in the midst of discomfort?

## Four Levels of Attention in CIP

As previously noted in steps three and four, the CIP process relies on the ability to diagnose situations by identifying moments, patterns, or dynamics that are happening in the learning space. These patterns may be observed at four levels of attention: individual, relationship/interpersonal, group/system, and context (Johnstone & Fern, 2010). The intentional use of observations, interpretations, and powerful questions at these four levels can help learners explore how an individual's actions are perceived by the group (individual), common patterns amongst member of the group (interpersonal), unique characteristics of the group (system), and external forces affecting the group (context). Facilitators may choose to address any of these four levels when calling out a case (i.e., identifying the real-time scenario). Figure 1 highlights a diagnostic question (taken from Green & Fabris McBride, 2015) as well as examples of what patterns of action could look like at each level as they might emerge in various experiential learning contexts.

## BUILDING CAPACITY FOR EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING AND DEMOCRACY

**Figure 1: Diagnosing at Four Levels of Attention**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Individual**<br><br>-What is that person doing, and why?<br><br>Examples:<br><br>-The study abroad student acts as the know-it-all.<br><br>-The undergraduate researcher is not citing sources very often. | **Interpersonal**<br><br>-What is the pattern of behavior between individuals, and why is it occurring?<br><br>Examples:<br><br>-Two internship students act competitively with each other.<br><br>-The study abroad students spend most of their time with other study abroad students and not the local people. |
| **System**<br><br>-What dynamics and patterns are at play in this room?<br><br>Examples:<br><br>-The service-learning class continues to seek easy fixes that make them seem like heroes.<br><br>-The internship student is constantly put down by other employees and not given meaningful tasks. | **Context**<br><br>-What outside forces are affecting this group?<br><br>Examples:<br><br>-The undergraduate researcher becomes curious about how local elections influence civic engagement amongst students as a new research question.<br><br>-The service-learning student feels tension between religious values and values of inclusion at her service-learning site. |

One of the central purposes of higher education is to develop students' capacity for effective, active citizenship. CIP creates a context for students to achieve important disciplinary learning outcomes while also developing their capacity to learn and bring about change within not only their campus-based learning communities but also within the broader civic communities of which they are and will be citizens. The pedagogy thus builds capacities for experiential learning and for democracy. At the heart of these intertwined capacities are (1) critically reflecting-in-action to assess values and behaviors and implement change and (2) understanding how the learning system is a microcosm of broader social and organizational systems.

## Critical Reflection-in-Action

In experiential learning, the relationship between action and reflection is key to moving toward learning outcomes. Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning model illustrates a four-stage cycle by which we learn: concrete experience, observation and reflection, forming abstract concepts, and testing new situations. To achieve substantial learning, we must engage in reflection; action is not enough. Ash and Clayton's (2009) DEAL model provides a structure for *how* to undertake critical reflection in order to generate, deepen, and document learning. The DEAL model offers a structure for guiding learners to make meaning of (i.e., learn from) their experiences, which helps improve the "quality of thought and of action and the relationship between them" (Ash & Clayton, 2009, p. 27).

*When* we reflect can also make a difference in the kind of learning and change that results. Schön (1983) contrasts reflection-*on*-action (after the action) with reflection-*in*-action (during the action). He was concerned with how to help individuals transfer academic content to professional contexts and build capacity for lifelong learning. Reflection-in-action creates the opportunity for individuals to examine values or behaviors in the moment, which leads to two benefits: (1) the individual becomes more aware of lived values, and (2) the individual has the opportunity to make immediate changes. If changes are made in the moment, the individual can see how those changes make a difference in the moment. Reflection-on-action provides an opportunity for individuals or groups to reflect when not distracted by the action. This can lead to new insights as well.

*Why* we reflect can influence our change-making process. Argyris and Schön (1978) distinguish between single- and double-loop learning; critical reflection can generate either or both of these types of learning, depending on our purposes in undertaking it. Single-loop learning leads to changing "strategies of action." For example, if an employee observes at the beginning of his shift that the sanitation bucket has cold water, his reflection on the negative consequences of that action might lead him to leave the next shift with hot water. Double-loop learning examines the values behind an individual or organizational practice, therefore potentially leading to a change in not only a behavior but also the assumptions or values that produce it. If the same employee examines the values behind the cold water having been left in the previous shift, he might wonder if accommodating time pressures (e.g., by clocking out early) is valued more highly among his co-workers than preparing for the next shift. Addressing this issue – perhaps by talking with those workers about the pressures they feel and being part of revising shift change policies and practices instead of just changing his personal behavior – can result from critical reflection oriented toward understanding and changing underlying systems. The ability to make this kind of change in the underlying system is in line with developing democratic skills to enact change for the common good.

Critical reflection oriented toward double-loop learning produces a practice where individuals confront their espoused theory with a theory-in-use. An espoused theory-in-action (or ideal value), such as "taking care of the environment" contrasts the theory-in-use (or lived value): "I do not like to be inconvenienced." It is more difficult to own one's espoused values when faced with one's theory-in-use when they contradict each other. Critically reflecting on the discrepancy may lead to a change in behaviors that live up to the espoused theory or a realization that the theory-in-use is actually the dominant value.

CIP pedagogy is a powerful tool to help us understand and enact how, when, and why to reflect. The CIP framework builds on Kolb's cycle through a similar process called an Adaptive Cycle: observe, interpret, intervene (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009). Essentially, it is experiential learning in real-time. The participant makes meaning in the moment by moving from the "dance floor" (place of action) to the "balcony" (p. 7) (place of observation and reflection/meaning making), back to the "dance floor" (experiment/intervene). In doing so, participants are not only actively participating in the system, they are also able to see the system as a whole. When participants notice that there is a gap between espoused values and behaviors, CIP provides opportunities to explore this gap through real-time analysis.

## Microcosms of Democracy

Palmer (2011) writes, "We learn from how we are taught as well as what we are taught, and it is important that we learn democracy… democratically" (p. 133). CIP pedagogy lends itself to learning democratic values and processes because the framework itself is democratic – creating conditions for collaborative, shared decision making in which students become experts on their own actions. Thus, CIP creates a kind of real-time "holding environment" (Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009, p. 155) or laboratory in which to experience and explore the intersections of course topics and democratic practices. The dynamics and engagement in the classroom system is a microcosm of other broader organizational, political, or social systems in which we are all situated.

It can be overwhelming, if not impossible, to try to teach students how concepts work in all scenarios – in other words, to try to "cover the field" (Palmer, 1990, para. 13). It is much more effective to help students experience and come to understand deeply how concepts play out in systems, or what Palmer calls "teaching from the microcosm" (para. 16) – using particular, immediate instances of a concept to examine it in its full complexity and range. Learning in this way allows students to understand and apply their in-the-room (microcosm) practice to systems, organizations, and society more generally. CIP is a way to bridge systems, for example by utilizing the experience of being a member of a classroom community to build capacities for membership in broader communities.

In the scenario of the community engagement course, the students surfaced their discomfort and uncertainty about talking with – much less actually interacting with – people who experience food insecurity. Their experience in the classroom is layered with issues of diversity, privilege, and "othering." The classroom system manifests the same issues found in other, broader systems, acting as a microcosm of those broader systems. Letting the students examine their discomfort and practice being vulnerable with one another can build their comfort level with being vulnerable in other uncomfortable situations. This does not mean we never need to leave the classroom, but it does provide opportunities for students to learn in the classroom with peers and thus build their capacities to learn and work effectively with others. It is arguably more responsible to build capacity for multiple competencies (e.g., valuing diverse voices, embracing conflict) before going into the broader community.

CIP has the potential to develop engaged citizens through co-created learning communities. Students can get excited having responsibility for thinking and behaving in ways that advance the system: "Students' commitment and curiosity are fueled when they take responsibility for action with consequences for other people, and this, in turn, leads to increased effort and attention" (Eyler, 2009, para. 12). CIP creates an environment in which interactions within a system become the textbook or a learning laboratory to teach and practice the purposes and processes of democracy.

CIP can be used to surface issues of power and authority and also to encourage students to actively participate in and reflect on these issues as they exist in the classroom. For example, students organizing themselves for small group work may uncover values, loyalties, and defaults that perpetuate systems of marginalization. It is not uncommon for students to default to modes of decision making that provide quick answers or quick solutions. CIP allows us to consider how these behaviors mirror tendencies to rush through democratic processes in the name of efficiency or to avoid the hard and time consuming work of trying to understand one another. So while CIP was developed as a way to teach the practices of leadership, it provides a powerful framework for teaching democracy.

## IMPLICATIONS

There are risks in using the CIP pedagogy. CIP purposely diffuses power in the classroom, leading to increased pressure for students to take action without direction. Prior experience in educational systems may well have reinforced their roles as consumers of knowledge rather than active participants in their own learning, with the result that students are not used to learning this way and it can be disorienting. Students who find such discomfort too much to handle may become upset, lost, or disengaged. Their discomfort or perceived lack of direction could be reflected in teacher evaluations (see Hufnagel, 2015).

Clayton and colleagues (2014) describe how students used to more traditional pedagogies who are newly engaged in experiential learning can lose confidence in learning how to learn and default to over-reliance on and desire for high levels of structure. They also suggest that faculty, staff, and community members might similarly experience discomfort or hesitancy as participants in and facilitators of counter-normative practices. CIP pedagogy positions facilitators of learning in non-traditional roles. They may be criticized by colleagues and students for the relative lack of direction, protection, and order they provide in the classroom; they may face resistance from others and insecurity from within. It is helpful to find allies who have experience with non-traditional teaching who can provide support. And it is important to understand that, as Clayton and colleagues suggest, these challenges "have, as their flip sides, the potential to transform us and the broader systems within which we live and work … because they require and foster shifts … to democratic paradigms, identities, and structures" (p. 27).

CIP can be a risky and disorienting experience for everyone, and we believe it is best learned through experience. The Kansas Leadership Center (KLC), a nonprofit organization committed to developing civic leaders for the common good, provides in-depth experiential seminars to individuals interested in learning to use CIP. We recommend that instructors seek out resources to build their own capacity for using this pedagogy before implementing it (see, for example, Daloz Parks, 2005; Green & Fabris McBride, 2015; Hufnagel, 2015; Johnstone & Fern, 2010). Additionally, more research is needed around the use of CIP in disciplines beyond leadership studies and in various experiential learning contexts. The development of discipline-specific and experiential learning applications will help faculty, staff, and students implement this pedagogy effectively.

## CONCLUSION

Democracy is both a political system and a way of life, and for it to flourish we need to develop democratic values in citizens (Dewey, 1937/2010). Saltmarsh and Hartley (2011) claim that an effective way to develop values of democracy (e.g., participation, task sharing, reciprocity in public problem-solving, inclusiveness, and equality of respect for all who contribute to community) is through practice within educational experiences.

Dewey (1937/2010) set the foundation for experiential education to develop students as citizens through empowering them to be actors in – rather than spectators in or merely recipients of – their own education. The relationship between education and democracy calls for faculty to align democratic purposes and processes with pedagogical design to provide democratic learning spaces for learning and enacting the knowledge, skills, habits, and identities of democracy. Clayton et al. (2014) provide five examples of walking the talk of democratic engagement in experiential learning: (1) designing program-level operations to cultivate student ownership, (2) designing the first days of class to build students' capacities as empowered actors, (3) designing a course to engage students locally in international human rights discourse, (4) designing an academic program as partners, for partnerships, and (5) designing popular education and graduate work to advance social justice. As we have illustrated, designing real-time democratic learning space through CIP adds to this list as another powerful way to have students learn democracy through democratic processes.

CIP creates the conditions to explore values and behaviors at play in any given situation and to practice revised behaviors in the moment. Participants learn from exploring their own values as well as those held by the system. CIP is an underutilized but powerful way for participants to engage in experiential learning and, we believe, should be applied more widely in higher education beyond leadership studies. It can help develop students' capacities for building a better world as they actively practice and critically reflect on democratic values and behaviors. CIP allows students to experience democratic purposes and processes in real-time and become agents in their own and others' learning and agents of change in their communities.

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# Comparison of Student Retention Models in Undergraduate Education From the Past Eight Decades

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*Student retention and completion rates are challenging issues in higher education. In the academic domain, pressure exists for every institution to come up with strategies that support student success from enrollment through graduation without compromising academic or accreditation standards. This paper presents the findings from a review of student retention models dating back to over eight decades to identify the key factors for retention. Specific recommendations for adaptive and sustainable retention agenda are made. Critical implications of this review directly impact institutional policy makers, researchers, faculty, and decision makers and provide a framework for the development and implementation of viable, adaptive retention initiatives and strategic plans.*

*Key Terms:* College Dropout Model (CDM); Student Attrition Model (SAM); Student Integration Model (SIM); and Student Mortality Model (SMM).

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## USE OF LANGUAGE AND TERMINOLOGY

While there are no standard definitions of retention, persistence, or attrition, scholarly definitions have been reviewed (Noel-Levitz, 2008; Seidman, 2005, Ch. 4). In this paper, the definitions of the major terms are conservatively expressed as follows: *Attainment* – reaching the desired goal toward which the learner has worked; *Attrition* - loss of students from all forms of higher education before completion of their program of study; *Completion* - successfully finishing, realizing, accomplishing, achieving, or fulfilling a program of study to reach the desired goal; *Dropouts* - college students who enroll, but leave college and do not return or do not stay until graduation (Boshier, 1973); *Persistence* - a phenomenon whereby an individual student successfully fulfills specific course requirements leading to graduation; *Retention* - broadly, this is an institutional characteristic, whereby students remain and consistently re-enroll all the way through graduation; and *Stakeholders* - refers to practitioners in the education retention agenda: faculty, staff, administrators, advisors, donors, alumni, public, private companies, students and/or their families.

## INTRODUCTION

Student retention, persistence, and graduation are major and ongoing strategic concerns in colleges and universities (Adelman, 1999; Braxton & Hirschy, 2005; Seidman, 2005; Marsh, 2014). Student retention is an issue of national importance, and the quest to develop more efficient ways to support student success remains a fundamental goal for every institution of higher education. This is a broad and complex issue that, despite decades of research, academic institutions continue to struggle with in realizing effective programs to reduce student attrition rates (Swail, 2004; Braxton & Hirschy, 2005). The diversity of this topic includes traditional and non-traditional students (Bean, 1985; NCES, 2013), online learners (Rovai, 2003), two-year (Bryant, 2001) and four-year college students (Strauss & Volkwein, 2004), transfer students, minority student populations (Seidman, 2005), and many others.

Generalizations about retention can be misleading due to the uniqueness of each institution, academically, culturally, and otherwise. The major obstacle is a lack of integrated efforts to better understand student retention, where stakeholders at all levels of the institution become involved in redefining and modifying their retention programs. The retention agenda is further complicated by the lack of uniform standards/

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metrics that define student success (Bean, 1990). Further, predictors of student success are varied and include: the student intention to persist; institutional policies; student commitment; student academic achievement; academic history; high school experience; and social integration. There is an increasing number of traditional and non-traditional students seeking and expecting alternative higher educational opportunities (NCES, 2013). Students drop out for a multitude of reasons including, but not limited to, academic challenges, social issues (Spady, 1970; Bean, 1980; Berger & Lyons, 2005), and financial reasons (Schneider & Lin, 2011). Added to the mix are the diverse educational and socioeconomic backgrounds among students and what they bring into the learning environment.

The portrait of today's student is fundamentally different from the past and continues to evolve (Levine & Dean, 2012). For instance, the prospective college graduate of today may have any of the following: several transcripts from multiple institutions that are later combined into a single degree transcript; complete alternative/specific courses to enhance workforce skills, rather than for graduating purposes. Some students enroll in college simply to "*see how it feels*" rather than having a graduation agenda; or take other classes online in addition to traditional face-to-face classes. Added to the mix are multiple degree transfer pathways, a relatively new academic avenue of advancement in the educational enterprise.

Retention is a strategic issue for institutional success that attracts a variety of stakeholders, such as federal, state, and private parties, and influences institutional rankings. The millennial workforce and the new generation of students constantly require adaptive and evolving student-centered approaches for their success. The completing agenda needs to be modified beyond the traditional idea of getting a college degree, completion of the baccalaureate degree, or transfers out of the institution. The retention agenda depicts a complex interaction of the characteristics of an institution's culture, its practitioners, and the student.

The primary aim of this paper is to review the background and structure of student retention strategies for the past eight decades. The two secondary objectives of this paper are to suggest new retention strategies based on available evidence and propose an adaptive retention culture that permeates across all educational institutional players.

## OVERVIEW OF STUDENT RETENTION MODELS

### STUDENT ATTRITION AND INTEGRATION MODELS

Over the last eight decades, many writers and scholars have proposed several models and frameworks to explain student retention rates in post-secondary education. Consistent themes include academic, non-academic, socio-economic, and institutional factors. Briefly, from the 1970s to about 1999, two main conceptual models emerged to guide thinking about student retention and persistence: Student Attrition

Models (SAM) and Student Integration Models (SIM). The SAM proposed that the events that occur before a student's departure from the college are beliefs that shape attitudes that affect the decision to remain enrolled or to drop out of college. The SIM proposes that the decision for a student to drop out or continue to enroll is strongly influenced by the degree of academic factors (grades, motivation, values, roles, etc.) and social integration (friendships, connections, interactions, etc.).

## CRITICAL COMPONENTS OF SAM AND SIM MODELS

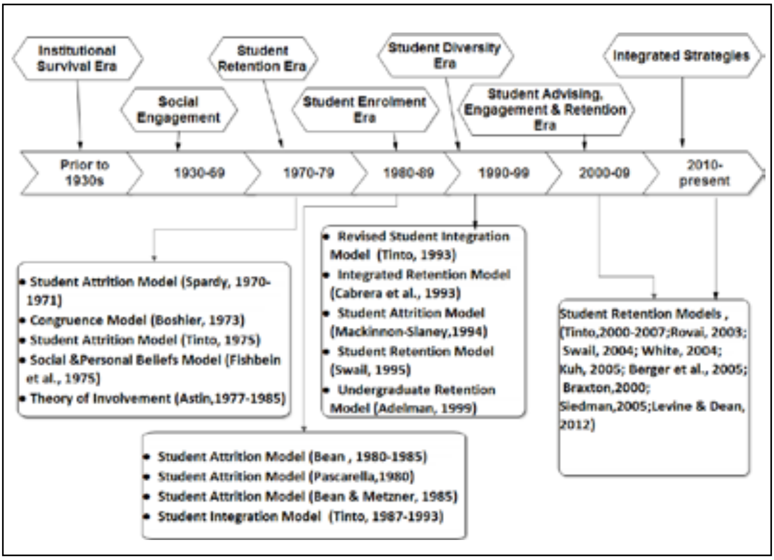
Tinto's SAM (1975) suggested a "*good fit*" between the students' intent and the institution is a key factor in student persistence and attrition. This considers both formal and informal interactions and experiences. In a revised SIM model, Tinto (1993) identified three primary sources of student departure, namely, academic difficulties, the inability of students to fulfill their educational and workforce goals, and their failure to integrate into the social culture of the institution. The missing part in Tinto's models is the influence of factors external to the institution on student retention.

In particular, Tinto's SAM was an expansion of Spady (1970-1975), who examined dropout rates in higher education. Key to Spady's research was the interaction between student attributes (e.g., dispositions, interests, attitudes, and skills) and the university environment (influences, expectations, and demands). In the same year, Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) researched models that focused on the importance of student intentions, based on beliefs and specific implied behavioral influences of retention, perceptions, experiences, and attitudes experienced before or during the college years. Five years later, the concept of student attitudes, student intentions, actions, habitual versus reasoned behaviors, and knowledge was reviewed (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010).

Bean (1983-1985) suggested the link between student attitudes and behaviors and modified a theory by Fishbein and Ajzen's Social, and Personal Beliefs Model (SPBM) in 1975. Students' intentions and attitudes were used to predict subsequent retention rates. Tinto's (1975) and Bean's (1982,1985) models gave rise to new research on student retention and completion to include minority students, students of color, first-time college students, students who commute to campus, two-year college students, four-year college students, transfer students, non-traditional, and general adult students and graduate students

Boshier's Congruence Model (1973) detailed the reasons for dropout in adult learners as based largely on socio-economic, psychological, and institutional factors. Cross & McCartan, 1984 identified the following barriers for adult learners: family responsibilities; financial issues; health challenges; and commuting to college. In the same year, Bean (1983) and Pascarella (1980) independently worked on issues concerning student/faculty informal communication. They found a strong positive relationship between quality of student-faculty informal communication and students' educational intents, attitudes, academic successes, personal development, and persistence. The frameworks and models spanning the last eight decades are summarized in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Historical timelines of student retention strategies for the past eight decades. Broadly, these are: before the student retention era, the social engagement era, and institutional survival era. More recently, student diversity and motivation has brought about a variety of institutionally driven strategic issues (e.g., advising, mentoring, counseling, enrollment, financial aid and grants, etc.).**




## KEY COMPONENTS OF STUDENT RETENTION MODEL

The seven broad eras emerging from this eight-decade analysis and shown in Figure 1 comprise the following: before 1930; 1930–1969; 1970–1979; 1980–1989; 1990–1999; 2000–2009; and 2010 to present. The SAM models (Bean, 1980, 1990) and SIM (Tinto, 1975, 1993) are some of the most widely used frameworks to examine student transition, attrition, and departure up to the present day. Also, the College Dropout Model (CDM) by Tinto (1975) focused on financial and social barriers and institutional support strategies, which also deserve mention in this abbreviated history. However, these models and frameworks have evolved over time in response to changing student demographics and diversity (van der Werf et al., 2009). As a preface to this discussion, the difference between the SAM and SIM is all about the relative importance attributed to student retention factors external to the institution. Table 1 shows a summary of different models and the important concepts that are identified with the models.

**Table 1: Summary of Models, Frameworks, and Key Ideas**

| Models | Key Ideas and Focus | Key Reference(s) |
|---|---|---|
| Student Mortality Model(s) (SMM) | College size and time it takes a student to complete a degree. | McNeely (1937) |
| Student Attrition Model(s) (SAM) | Student-student and student-campus interactions; | Spady (1970,1971) |
| | Student intentions, motivation, experiences, and external institutional factors on student attrition and persistence; | Bean (1980,1983) |
| | Academic and non-academic factors, including pre-college variables and student social integration in college; | Tinto (1975,1982) |
| | The right fit between student and institution in which they are enrolled. | Pascarella's Attrition Model (1980) |
| Student Integration Model(s) (SIM) | Modification of SAM of 1975. Academic challenges, student-institutional fit, and the failure of students to resolve their educational and occupational goals as reasons for student's departure. | Tinto (1987,1993) |
| | Student social life and academic life. | Pascarella & Terenzini (1979) |
| | Attrition issues for adult learners. | MacKinnon-Slaney (1994) |
| Theory of Involvement (TI) | Student involvement in college where enrolled, and institutional policies. | Astin (1968,1985) |
| Social & Personal Beliefs Model (SPBM) | The importance of student intentions, beliefs, and behavioral influences. | Fishbein & Ajzen (1975) |
| Student Faculty Interactions Model (SFIM) | Student-faculty informal interactions. | Pascarella (1980) |
| Dropout Syndrome Model (DSM) | The combination of student's intent to leave, actually leaving, and actual attrition. | Bean (1985) |
| College Dropout Model (CDM) | Combination of financial barriers, Social barriers and Institutional support strategies. | Tinto (1975) |

Astin (1968, 1987) presented a comprehensive study of how students' behaviors and attitudes change as they develop in college and achieve academic excellence. Educational programs, faculty, student peer groups, students' college experiences, and institutional culture all influence the shaping of a student's personality, behavior, values and beliefs, and, ultimately, overall development. Astin (1993) proposed the Inputs, Environment, and Outcomes (IEO) model. The main conclusions were that assessment and evaluation activities in the classroom setting enhance learning. These provide necessary feedback to both educators and learners. In particular, the core concepts of this model are that educational assessments are not complete unless the evaluation includes information on the student's educational IEO. Also, Astin (1985, 1993) also created five basic tenets of student involvement and development: psychological and physical investment; continuous investment; quantitative and qualitative investment; learning outcomes tied to quality and quantity of involvement; and educational policy effectiveness in motivating students. These concepts have widespread applications in higher education institutions and complement other classic theories of student development. The Student Development Theory (SDT) of Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) revisited and improved on this concept.

The central institutional implication of the models presented above is that academic stakeholders need a social engagement agenda for their students. Research inspired by these models has focused on single-institution studies and, thus, ignores the influence of differences in institutional dynamics**.** Tinto (2012) advocated for an improvement agenda directed at fixing institutional gaps instead of disadvantaging students. Institutional and faculty strategies focused on redesigning students' classroom experiences were found to be key factors in improving student retention and completion.

It should be noted that most of the models of student attrition that were developed before 1990 contained some sweeping generalizations and lacked specific student demographic data. After the 1990s and 2000s, student diversity, race, equity, online education, two-year, and four-year college students were added to the retention matrix. According to Braxton (2000, 2005), more than 25% of the students who entered four-year institutions and 50% who entered two-year institutions left at the end of their first year. Drawing on the student retention work of Tinto (1987), Tinto (1993), and Braxton (2000) presented a modified model of college student persistence by exploring the relationship between Astin's (1975, 1987) theory of involvement and Tinto's (1987) theory of student departure. Scholars researching the first year experience were added to the retention agenda (McInnis, 2001; Bean, 2005).

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) developed and expanded on their earlier findings from the 1980s and 1990s regarding how students grow and develop during college. In particular, a variety of critically important student outcomes, such as cognitive and intellectual growth, psychosocial change, moral development, and career and economic impacts of college, are covered. Seidman (2005) examined some areas critical to the retention of students, including history, theories, concepts, and models. The financial implications and trends of retention are analyzed, and the retention of online students and community colleges are combined in modeling student success. Levine and Dean (2012) analyzed today's undergraduate college students by examining their expectations, aspirations, academics, attitudes, values, beliefs, social life, and politics. The major conclusion is that today's students need a very different approach than the undergraduates who came before them, which requires a radical shift in institutional culture. More recently, Levine and Dean (2012) conducted comprehensive research on college students in quantitative and qualitative longitudinal studies spanning three decades. Renn and Reason (2012) analyzed student demographics, enrollment patterns, campus environments, and a range of possible outcomes related to learning, development, and achievement. A slight modification of the same analysis performed by Astin (1968) found that differing experiences, needs, and expectations of traditional students, non-traditional students (e.g., adult and returning learners, veterans, and immigrant populations) are important in student retention efforts. Currently, typical retention efforts comprise recruitment and admission strategies; orientation strategies; and early assessment and placement strategies focused on the "first-year experience." According to Crosta (2013) and Bean (2005), developing effective retention and dropout prevention strategies requires a clear picture of who these early dropouts are.

## DISCUSSION

Student learning outcomes refer to specific objectives that students achieve as a result of learning opportunities. These include the integration of past and current research and evidence-based strategies that support student success from enrollment through graduation. The major problem is that most institutions are reactive and not proactive concerning retention policies and strategies. Dealing with an increasingly diverse student mix that draws from different cultures, with a wide age range, various life experiences, and varying levels of academic preparation can be a daunting task (McInnis, 2001). Data-driven student retention indicators benchmark reports and surveys are publicly available (NCES 2013-2015; Noel-Levitz, 2013; OEDb, 2013). Students at risk predictive models and student success predictors can also be modeled and monitored.

Effective retention and completion initiatives need to constantly scan the internal and external environments to better understand student needs, allocate resources efficiently. That way, institutions continuously improve their programs, and regularly evaluate their business model(s). Good practices in undergraduate education are recommended, and have been reviewed elsewhere (Koljatic & Kuh, 2001). Now, building on the "*Nine Themes on College Student Retention*" (Bean, 2005; Seidman, 2005) and incorporating the "*Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*" (Chickering & Gamson, 1989) are the most effective, efficient, and scalable retention strategies are suggested. Briefly, these authors emphasized the need to encourage student-faculty interactions, practice active learning techniques, provide prompt feedback, and emphasize time on task. Communicating and promoting high expectations and respect for diversity were constant themes. Details on student motivation for them to participate actively in all aspects of the educational process are beyond the scope of this article, but have been reviewed elsewhere (Noel-Levitz, 2013; Demetriou & Schimitz-Sciborski, 2011).

Integrated student successes are a set of overlapping favorable or desirable student outcomes whose indicators in higher education include student persistence and retention, agenda completion, achieving program outcomes (i.e., when students achieve satisfactory or superior levels of academic performance), institutional support of the learning environment, and useful advice. The questions to answer at each stage are: Why are students in college? How best can we prepare them for an increasingly knowledge-based and globally competitive landscape? How can we accomplish this without compromising standards and keep up with accreditations? Fulfilling the answers to these questions calls for robust and sustainable initiatives, such as early assessment programs and targeted advice (advisory services). Problems and potential challenges can be identified, and mechanisms put in place to support student success.

## RECOMMENDATIONS: REDEFINING THE RETENTION AND COMPLETION AGENDA

The completion agenda refers to broad-based reform initiatives led by institutions, academic practitioners, state and policymakers, herein referred to as "stakeholders." The objective is to increase the number of students completing or attaining their diplomas or certificates. In this article, historical accounts of the processes that enhance student completion rates have been examined and summarized. The main recommendations include the need for academic success and retention to be re-defined and expanded to reflect the typical millennial student. Also, data-driven models for predicted probabilities of degree completion rates need to be integrated and shared. Institution-wide monthly/yearly updates of dropouts need to be shared and discussed across academic disciplines. Where possible, exit interviews need to be carried out to have a better understanding of sources of dissatisfaction from the affected parties. A reflective, adaptive, sustainable retention and completion culture must permeate across all institutional players and students. Having a personalized agenda as a strategic retention tool is also advocated by these authors. With increasing numbers of international students at U.S. institutions, immigration issues, and financial constraints are constant themes real world of international education, and these need constant review and assessment.

Issues addressed relate to how colleges can succeed in understanding the types of students they are enrolling all the way through graduation. Although traditional thinking about transfer involves a single sequence from a two-year college to a university, institutions need to respond to the complex needs of students today, who often attend multiple institutions, some of them concurrently, as they work toward their academic requirements and, ultimately, graduation. Added to this is the online education that provides them with convenience.

Understanding the types of students and their needs should be a strategic imperative for academic institutions if they are to limit dropout risk factors. Full-time students, part-time students, working adults, and non-traditional students struggle to balance their work and higher education with very complex lives. Temporary situations whereby students voluntarily interrupt their enrollment for one or more terms/semesters and re-enroll at another institution are not adequately captured in the graduation agenda. There are several reasons that contribute to this equation: employment, social issues, financial constraints, and unintended situations that develop during their academic journey. Heyl & Damron (2014) in their scholarly article "*Should I Stay or Should I Go*?" succinctly put it as follows: "*Navigating the tension between competing pressures and priorities can put anyone in an 'emotional bubble,' insulated from more rational decision making*."

In its current rendition, the retention agenda removes these student populations from institutional success factors even if they come back and graduate or if they launch successful initiatives elsewhere. Academic institutions that succeed in the retention agenda have a better relationship with their students and redefine student success in the light of the new millennial student. Finally, we note that the new reality of the higher education puzzle represents a fundamental shift in student demographics, needs, experiences, academic, social, and psychological behaviors, and any retention agenda should not compromise the quality and standards of excellence in education.

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# Maximizing Concept Application with Hands-on Team Projects in a Concentrated Public Relations Course

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*A unique pedagogical challenge is presented in the form of a concentrated 400-level introductory public relations course that meets for a total of 15 lessons of 2.5 hours each. The instructor details the benefits of active learning in the classroom, as well as how the use of team projects helps bring real-world examples and hands-on experience of public relations research, planning, communication and evaluation into a classroom of upperclassmen and -women who, through this course, are gaining an introduction to a field they may consider for graduate study, internships or future employment. Rationale for the use of such projects are discussed, including benefits of active learning, appealing to the millennial generation, "real-world" application beyond a textbook, enhancing students' autonomy in the classroom, and the importance of working in a team. Each project is outlined in terms of its methodology, aspects of student autonomy, objective and analysis. Conclusions and implications are discussed.*

*Keywords:* Public relations, active learning, pedagogy, projects, millennials, technology, student autonomy, teamwork, application.

## Concentrated Public Relations Course

The experience of teaching abroad offers many advantages to the educator, including first-hand experience in the differing nature of educational institutions themselves. The following case study occurred over the course of four years teaching overseas in Singapore. While larger lecture-style classes in the United States or Singapore can easily number in the hundreds, an experience that could render a Western instructor feeling a sense of culture shock involves discussion-style, writing-intensive classes that are filled to a capacity of 50-55 students. When given the opportunity to teach summer sections of a public relations (PR) course, the following unique pedagogical challenge was encountered: How to provide hands-on experience to a large group of students in a 400-level introductory professional course within a concentrated timeline. This paper details the nature of the course, the use of teams, and then focuses on the benefits of team projects. Each project is analyzed in terms of its method, level of student autonomy and objectives. Discussion of outcomes and implications for instructors of similarly structured courses follow. While the case study detailed in this article concerns the comparatively unique experience of teaching an accelerated, large discussion-style course in Southeast Asia, the projects presented for consideration are ones that could easily be adapted for use in any size class in any location.

## NATURE OF THE COURSE, TEAMS AND ASSESSMENTS AND ACTIVE LEARNING NATURE OF THE COURSE

The two sections are filled to capacity with 50 students in each section, are conducted in a discussion style and meet three times a week for two-and-a-half hour meetings. The summer session covers the same amount of material as would be contained in a standard 15-week course, but the summer version convenes for a total of fifteen meetings. To complicate matters further, the course is designed to be an introductory PR course taught at the 400-level. The global edition of Wilcox, Cameron and Reber's *Public Relations: Strategies and Tactics* text, currently in its 11th edition, was selected by the instructor for this course (Wilcox, Cameron & Reber, 2015).

## NATURE OF TEAMS WITH RESPECT TO TEACHING IN A SOUTHEAST ASIAN UNIVERSITY

A technique employed by the instructor for adapting discussion and writing-style courses to the large class sizes prevalent in Singapore

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is dividing students into five-to-six-person teams. While a business communication discussion-style course with a focus on writing, for example, might seem overwhelming with an enrollment of 55 students, it is far more manageable and enjoyable for all involved when it is compartmentalized as a course with an enrollment of 11 teams of five students each. This arrangement is beneficial not only in the assignment of teamwork, but also in the leading of class discussions, assessment of attendance and contribution, and creating an overall sense of bonding in a class size that might render a quieter student lost in the crowd.

## WHY USE HANDS-ON PROJECTS?

Hands-on projects were found to be particularly beneficial in this accelerated 400-level professional course for the following five reasons: 1) Benefits of active learning, 2) Appealing to the millennial generation, 3) "Real-world" application beyond a textbook, 4) Placing students in the "driver's seat" and 5) The importance of working in a team.

## BENEFITS OF ACTIVE LEARNING

In their 1991 monograph, Bonwell and Eison explore the then-relatively new concept of *active learning*. The authors define the concept as entailing five characteristics:

> 1) students are involved in more than just listening, 2) less emphasis is placed on transmitting information and more on developing students' skills, 3) students are involved in higher-order thinking, 4) students are engaged in activities and 5) greater emphasis is placed on students' exploration of their own attitudes and values (Bonwell and Eison, 1991, p. 19).

Lubbers and Gorcyca expand on these characteristics in their article exploring the likelihood of instructors using active learning strategies in public relations classes. Lubbers and Gorcyca conclude that such strategies are likely to be superior to passive teaching methods (Lubbers & Gorcyca, 1997). Additional support for these claims is found in Wang's 2016 peer review of a faculty course portfolio, in which Wang details a two-week crisis management simulation exercise in a 400-level public relations theory and strategy class in which students managed a three-stage fictional crisis of bedbugs on campus. The use of the simulation activity improved student learning outcomes and received positive qualitative feedback as well, with students indicating that the project provided them with a believable real-life scenario in which to put theory into practice (Wang, 2016). In addition to these benefits of active learning, such projects also provide stimulation that passive learning strategies may not.

While there seem to be no tried-and-true research methods to determine the precise attention span of the university student (Wilson & Korn, 2007), the grueling two-and-a-half hour long lesson periods of this concentrated summer course lend best to varied teaching methods. Bunce, Flens and Neiles (2010) suggest that as students cannot pay continuous attention for an entire class lecture (which they denoted as 50 minutes), instructors should include activities that are student-focused. In their study, they used personal response devices, colloquially called *clickers*. Other research not only supports interactive lectures as a preferred and successful classroom format, (where the traditional lecture format is punctuated with breaks where students engage in activities or discussion) but also that this style is successful in universities outside of the United States and across disciplines (Miller, McNear & Metz, 2013; Myllymaki, 2012; Rehman, Afzal & Kamran, 2013).

In order to keep and maintain student attention during these lengthier meetings, the instructor designed a typical class day to start with announcements and/or a 15-minute student-corrected quiz to test retention of material, then progress to a 20-30-minute "key points" lecture that includes at least one video clip for analysis and discussion, a 30-minute case study presentation and discussion which is led entirely by a student team, and then either another 20-30-minute lecture followed by a class discussion, or a team project. A ten-minute break, the timing of which is announced at the beginning of the class, comes partway through the period, which drastically reduces the number of times students leave the classroom for personal needs during the aforementioned activities.

In this way, the class period is divided; students are not only listening to a lecture, but they are also periodically standing up and moving, listening to speakers other than their lecturer and interacting with one another. In this way, team projects are an integral part of the curriculum. One day out of each of the three meetings per week involves working with their teams on a hands-on application of the material they are learning.

## APPEALING TO MILLENNIALS

The university students encountered in this case study – and those with which current instructors are familiar – are of the Millennial Generation. Millennials are loosely defined as those born between 1982 and 2000 (Howe & Strauss, 2000), with the most recently born millennials being considered *digital natives*, or those born into a world where the World Wide Web and hand-held electronics have always existed. These Millennials are characterized by operating at "twitch speed" (Prensky, 1998, p. 14) and having a preference for multitasking, a desire to be networked with one another and a strong predilection toward digital technology (Prensky 2001; Schrum & Levin, 2015). Indeed, all students in this university come to class equipped with laptops, tablets, electronic notebooks or at the very least, an internet-enabled smart phone[1].

With these characteristics in mind, hands-on projects, during which students are able to interact with one another while using digital media in conjunction with traditional classroom assessments, seem to be an optimal way to reach the Millennial student.

## "REAL WORLD" APPLICATION BEYOND A TEXTBOOK

In a perfect world, a 400-level PR course would involve real-world training through such activities as a volunteer program, job shadowing or a class project with a community client. However, the length of the course (five weeks) combined with the number of students in each class (50) topped with the fact that the course serves as an introductional overview to the field make this concept unrealistic. Students have had no previous experience with PR; this course is their foundational introduction. Therefore, the instructor was tasked with trying to find a way to give students a real-world application of the material beyond the textbook, yet also within a structured environment for students starting out with no field-related knowledge. Two guest speakers who currently work in PR (one residing locally in Southeast Asia and one residing in the United States who speaks to the class via Skype) are invited to give guest lectures which are combined with lengthy student-driven question-answer sessions. However, an element of applied student learning would still be preferred. Group projects that require students to explore real cases, real PR firms and real companies outside of the textbook give them this opportunity.

## PLACING STUDENTS IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT

A balance of structure and autonomy within the classroom provides an optimal learning environment in which students are likely to feel more invested in the course (Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio & Turner, 2004). Therefore, the course was designed to give students free rein to choose topics, cases and the direction of their assignments as frequently as possible. These projects are structured around a set of questions to guide discussion and the formation of their final output – a 2-to-3-page brief that teams turn in following the activity – but aside from that, students are given many opportunities to drive their projects on their own volition.

In each outline of the projects given below, a section entitled "Driver's Seat" – a title which alludes to students' ability to steer their own course of action within a class rather than be merely "passengers" in a class driven entirely by an instructor – will further detail specific ways in which autonomy is given to the student teams.

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[1] While it never occurred during this case study, it should be noted that to avoid economically-based discrimination, the instructor should be prepared to accommodate any student who does not have such a device. During team projects, sharing of devices is allowed and encouraged, and online surveys or forms used during the class (e.g. SurveyMonkey, Google Forms) allow multiple submissions from the same IP address, which enables a student to pass a single device to multiple students so that they can complete the task.

## IMPORTANCE OF WORKING IN A TEAM

Robles (2012) asked 57 business executives to name soft skills that they felt were important attributes in today's work place. *Teamwork* made the top ten list. When asked to rank the importance of those skills on a scale from 1 (not important) to 5 (extremely important), 40 of the 57 individuals ranked *teamwork* as either very or extremely important. One could also argue that the other nine soft skills listed in this study (integrity, communication, courtesy, responsibility, interpersonal skills, professionalism, positive attitude, flexibility and work ethic), are also skills that are built through regular teamwork (Robles, 2012, p. 455-456).

While the instructor constructed a grading schema in such a way that individual assessment constitutes more than half of the students' final grades, a large percentage is determined by the quality of work produced as a team. Students were encouraged to "work it out" if they encounter conflict. Learning how to disagree professionally, navigate conflict effectively, firmly state ideas and work collaboratively are skills that cannot be taught through book-learning, spoon-feeding or hand-holding. Thus, the group projects given in this course also benefit students as a way to build soft skills that will be crucial to them in the workplace.

## MAXIMIZING CONCEPT APPLICATION THROUGH HANDS-ON PROJECTS

The projects were designed to correspond to one chapter from each of the five units that Wilcox, Cameron and Reber denote in their text (Wilcox, Cameron & Reber, 2015). While each project corresponds to a chapter and unit, they are not mutually exclusive entities. The questions and team discussions are designed to cumulatively build on the knowledge that students are gaining throughout the semester (see the project handout sheet content in Appendix A).

The next section will detail the synopsis, method, student autonomy ("driver's seat") and analysis of each of the five projects.

### PROJECT 1: "PR ETHICS AROUND THE WORLD"

**Synopsis.** Students are randomly assigned PR codes of ethics from two foreign countries and must analyze, compare and contrast the codes.

**Method.** Codes of ethics were collected from PR associations around the world through extensive online research. Ethics statements that were not available in English were translated using Google Translate software. Students were notified that they might receive a computer-translated file, and thus they should not consider language errors in their analysis. There were 23 codes in all, from Argentina, Australia, Austria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Israel, Kenya, Mexico, New Zealand, Poland, Russia, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden and Turkey, as well as the international Codes of Athens, Lisbon and Venice. Codes from the United States and Singapore were excluded due to potential for existing familiarity or prejudgment.

On the day of the project, the codes are numbered and distributed by asking each team to choose two numbers between 1 and 23, eliminating numbers as they are chosen. In this way, teams were blindly assigned two codes. The codes are housed on a class portal website and are accessible as downloadable PDF files.

First, as individuals, students are to read each code and list three ways in which they are similar and three ways in which they are different. As a group, teams then discuss the codes with the objective of composing a 2-3 page brief considering each document's strengths, weaknesses, overarching similarities and particular differences, as well as reasons these similarities and differences might exist. Teams are reminded that their goal is to analyze each document objectively, not to choose the "best" or "winning" code.

**Driver's seat.** Aside from being given the codes they are to analyze, the direction of the assignment is up to the students. The questions on the handout provide directions that their analyses can take, but the students determine their own research of each country. Papers have revealed investigations of such themes as countries' histories, cultural dimensions, political environments, levels of journalistic freedom and economic health and how these factors might influence the practice of public relations. Impressive analyses are born from this project.

**Analysis.** The idea for this assignment for analyzing international PR associations' codes of conduct was inspired in part by Suggested Projects and Discussion #3 from Chapter 3 of the Pearson-issued instructor's manual for the Wilcox, Cameron and Reber text to analyze codes of conduct within organizations (Wilcox, Cameron & Reber, 2015): *Have students search various websites for organizational codes of conduct. Lead a discussion on the common elements included in the codes that they reviewed and how those elements guide the company/organization in their ethical success* (Pettigrew & Lingwall, 2015, p. 20).

The main objective of this assignment is to cement a respect of the importance of ethics in the field of public relations, as well as to develop an understanding of the cultural variables that might influence the different interpretations of what is considered ethical behavior in one country versus another.

This is a fun project with which to kick off the first week. Students are not yet entirely familiar with one another, so being given something concrete to analyze and discuss seems to provide them with common ground, which is, in actuality, a secondary objective of the assignment. An impressive level of curiosity combined with fascination at the differences between the codes they are given often leads students to take the initiative to read additional codes besides the ones they are assigned. A combination of student expertise (e.g. some with interests in history, others with interests in politics) creates a seemingly positive experience with team synergy while simultaneously providing the opportunity to explore a dual theme that is pervasive in the field of public relations: How to define ethical behavior, and how to enforce it.

## PROJECT 2: "IABC GOLD QUILL WINNERS: WHAT WOULD YOU DO?"

**Synopsis.** Students read a Gold Quill Winner case as chosen by the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), consider how they would prepare for the situation, and compare and contrast their plan against the real-life winner's plan.

**Method.** A hyperlink to the IABC's website featuring their current and past Gold Quill Winners case submissions ("Gold Quill Awards: Winners," 2015) is posted to the class website. Students are given time to read through several cases, and then decide as a team which case they will analyze.

Individually within their teams, students first read the "Need/Opportunity" section of the submission. Stopping at that point, they record notes about their impressions of the situation and what they would do. Then, working as a team, they consider their intended audiences, goals and objectives, a rough idea of a plan, how the results will be measured, and what challenges will be present in enacting the plan. This assignment is designed to correspond with materials covered in previous chapters concerning research, program planning, communication and evaluation. Finally, students read the "rest of the story" in the remainder of the case submission. Upon learning what the PR professionals did in this scenario, they can compare and contrast the similarities, differences, strengths and weaknesses of their plan to the real plan in a 2-3 page brief.

**Driver's seat.** Students are able to choose whichever case study they wish to analyze as well as work together to devise a plan they feel would speak to the needs and opportunities presented in the first part of the case. Additionally, they are encouraged to develop their own parameters for the assignment – some choose to keep the "setting" of the case in the city of origin, and some students choose to address the need/opportunity as if the case study were hypothetically set in their home city or country.

**Analysis.** The idea for this project was inspired in part by a statement in Chapter 6 of the Pearson-issued instructor's manual for the Wilcox, Cameron and Reber text (Wilcox, Cameron & Reber, 2015) suggesting instructors to contact the PRSA or IABC to request materials related to successful past campaigns (Pettigrew & Lingwall, 2015, p. 35). Based on past personal experience with award submissions to such professional organizations while working in public relations, the instructor decided to have students look up particular case studies that interested them from the IABC Gold Quill Award website. IABC was chosen to suit an international group of students. The IABC initiated the Gold Quill Awards in 1971 with the aim of recognizing exemplary strategic communication programs around the world ("Gold Quill Awards: About," 2016). Benefits of introducing students to this organization are twofold: 1) Students become aware of a globally-recognized professional organization and 2) Students may later avail themselves of the information found on the IABC website and network. The objective of this project is to show students, through a flexible assignment and team autonomy, that PR planning is "harder than it looks" when one is coming up with a fresh idea from scratch, as opposed to reading about what has been done in retrospect.

Final assignments for this project have shown great ingenuity and outside-of-the-box thinking. Students have created ideas for social media campaigns complete with hashtags; some have created innovative events; others have come up with proposed partnerships with local media and celebrities. While directions for how much outside research they must do are intentionally kept unencumbered by source types or numbers of resources, students show excellent self-directed learning in researching relevant statistics, costs and similar event success rates. Additionally, as students read the real-life plan, they can see glaring concepts they missed (e.g. we didn't think about how much our idea would cost… we used social media but didn't realize how effective traditional media could be…). This project effectively gets students to learn from PR professionals' accounts as well as to begin to think like a PR professional despite their limited experience with the field material.

**PROJECT 3: "THE PERSUADERS ANALYSIS"**

**Synopsis.** Students watch a 25-minute clip of the PBS documentary *The Persuaders*. Four critical thinking questions guide a group discussion. The group chooses two critical thinking questions from which to build a theme for a 2-page brief.

**Method.** With time constraints in mind, a clip of the PBS documentary series *The Persuaders* was chosen for screening which focuses on audience oversaturation of advertising messages as well as the integrated marketing communication campaign surrounding the launch of Song Airlines, a Delta subsidiary, in 2003 (Goodman, Goodman, Soenens & Rushkoff, 2004).

While watching the video, team members are asked to consider the answers to four critical thinking questions. After taking a short time to compose their thoughts on the questions after the video, teams engage in a group discussion of their impressions. Using their discussion points from two questions as a theme, teams compose a 2-page brief.

It is entertaining to note that this project handout is universally met with outright dismay as the request went out for papers to be shortened from a length of two to three double-spaced pages down to two. Learning how write concisely is a valuable skill for students to learn, and this new guideline provides an opportunity to practice this particular ability.

**Driver's seat.** While the topic and critical thinking questions are provided, the nature of this paper is perhaps one of the most autonomous out of the five projects. For some students, the lack of content requirement seems daunting; for others, a welcome idea. When pressed for more details, students are instructed that an overall theme of their choosing from their discussion of two of the questions must drive their paper.

**Analysis. T**he idea for having students watch this particular documetary comes from Suggested Projects and Discussion #2 in Chapter 9 of the Pearson-issued instructor's manual for the Wilcox, Cameron and Reber text (Wilcox, Cameron & Reber, 2015), stating: *Another good video to show students to demonstrate the role of persuasion in the communications industry is the PBS video, "The Persuaders". The video is available online in segments* (Pettigrew & Lingwall, 2015, p. 46). Two of the critical thinking questions were adapted from PBS's online forum for the show ("Forum: So how should we think about all of this?" 2004).

The objective of this assignment is to crystalize the understanding of the synergy that can exist among cooperative advertising, PR and marketing departments and firms. Additionally, students gain an understanding of the saturated market they will someday be vying for as mass communication efforts become ever more creative in their endeavor to be heard above the din.

This course consistently touches on the theme of integrated communication: that combining public relations, marketing and advertising into one holistic concept is a valuable mindset. *The Persuaders* and the ensuing discussion questions enable students to see how one field can help the other to influence public opinion, as the story of the ill-fated budget-friendly Song Airlines provides a cautionary tale of what happens when an abstract brand concept is created before a business. Students are asked how PR could have helped save Song Airlines, and their papers show that they are starting to think along the lines of the R.A.C.E. (Research, Action, Communication, Evaluation) acronym they encounter early in the semester – papers entail discussion of better research, planning, communicating, as well as the evaluation of measureable objectives.

## PROJECT 4: "ONLINE PRESS ROOM EXPLORATION"

**Synopsis.** Students review the first 100 businesses listed in *Global Fortune 500*, then select two businesses and explore their online media centers.

**Method.** A link is placed to the annual list of the *Global Fortune 500* (e.g. Global 500 2015) on the course website. This list was chosen rather than *Forbes* because of the international nature of this particular body of students. In interest of time, students are limited to the first 100 businesses, and must decide as a team which two they will analyze. Students then find the companies' websites and search for the online news rooms/media centers. Individual impressions of the page are recorded, which leads to a discussion guided by a loose set of parameters. Students compare and contrast the qualities of the newsrooms they have explored in a two-page brief.

**Driver's seat.** Teams have complete freedom to choose from a list of one hundred top global companies. Additionally, the exploration of these companies and their news rooms is driven entirely by them. With the instructions to "think like a journalist," they are encouraged to determine whether they will focus on an international or local web page, what criteria they will use to assess the media rooms (aside from the guiding questions on their worksheet) and ultimately, the direction that their analysis brief will take.

**Analysis.** This project is inspired in part by the Suggested Projects and Discussion #2 in Chapter 13 of the Pearson-distributed instructor's manual for the Wilcox, Cameron and Reber text (Wilcox, Cameron & Reber, 2015): *Ask students to visit the pressrooms of several different websites. Discuss the organization of most online pressrooms and the type of material that is made available through an online pressroom* (Pettigrew & Lingwall, 2015, p. 62).

The objective of this assignment is to encourage students to take the point of view of the journalists for whom the media center should be designed. This in turn will hopefully help them see the value of different page attributes and the disadvantages of others from the perspective of the PR agent who may advise on the design of such a site and serve as a liaison to the media.

Students seem to enjoy choosing companies to analyze and the process of making this choice can be fraught with high-energy decision-making tactics. Some choose companies within the same industry (e.g. Apple and Samsung) while others choose wildly different industries (e.g. Nestlé and Royal Dutch Shell). In addition to elements proposed by the worksheet, students also commented on such topics as the user-friendliness of the sites, the manner in which past news releases are organized, the presence of a search engine and the availability of multimedia and social media connections. By having to search for and navigate these newsrooms themselves, this project places students in the role of both the journalist and PR agent.

## PROJECT 5: "CORPORATE PR NIGHTMARES"

**Synopsis.** Teams are randomly assigned one case from the annual top-ten lists of PR crises as analyzed in *The Holmes Report* (Holmes, 2015; Sudhaman, 2015). Students must investigate the story, compose an outline for a strategic conflict management plan, then compare and contrast their strategies with what actually happened in a two-page brief.

**Method.** *The Holmes Report* is reviewed for the analyses of the top ten PR crises of the year. Cases are selected which are most likely to spark the highest level of interest among students and occasionally cases are eliminated which may be emotional triggers (e.g. this year, Malaysia Airlines was highlighted, and as these students live in the region from which MH370 disappeared, choosing this case for a class project would have been in poor taste). Therefore, chosen cases span a few years of *The Holmes Report* articles.

Each case is pasted into a Word document that is hyperlinked back to the original article. This way, each case can be divided into three sections: Introduction, Analysis and Lessons Learned. Much like in Project #2 where students first read the Need/Opportunities, for this project, students first read the introductory paragraph for each case. They individually brainstorm a list of research questions they would ask corporation leaders if they were handling the crisis. Then, as a team, they investigate the case and outline a strategic conflict management plan. Finally, they read the rest of *The Holmes Report* article as well as other sources and analyze their strategy in the context of what actually happened.

**Driver's seat.** Aside from being assigned a case to work on, students direct their own investigation and creation of their plan. They alone determine how deeply they investigate the story and what sources they use.

**Analysis.** The objective of this project is to bring what students have learned over the past five weeks to culmination. While crisis planning is certainly only a part of the broad spectrum of PR activities, it is an arena which brings all manner of skillsets to the fore. Students must consider what critical information they need, assess who their target audiences are and what key messages must be communicated, what actions the company must take and how they can evaluate whether they have been successful. Additionally, this project pushes students to think through the crisis management life cycle encountered previously in their text (Wilcox, Cameron & Reber, 2015; pp. 285-287).

This is an engaging project with which to end the semester. At this point, students have gotten to know one another quite well, so they tackle their assigned crises with the high spirits of a relatively bonded group. Despite the fact that no stringent requirements are placed on the amount of background research that students must accomplish, they typically take it upon themselves to dig up as much information as they can through websites, news articles, social media and collateral materials like news releases. One student neatly summed up the draw to this kind of communication scenario while investigating a particularly involved case with the statement, "This is better than a Korean drama!" This project ups the ante by showing the real-life stress – and resolutions – that can be found in PR in a relatable and hopefully empathetic manner.

## DISCUSSION AND LIMITATIONS

After teaching a total of six sections of this uniquely positioned course over the span of three summers, it could be argued that the hands-on projects are the glue that hold the other class elements together. The team case study presentation and discussion gives students public speaking and discussion facilitation experience. The individual quizzes test comprehension and retention of material; speaker questions prepare students to engage with guest lecturers and the individual "crisis watch" journals encourage them to track a real-world PR issue of their choosing. The completion of a media kit or an interview paper individually or with a partner promotes critical thinking and application of core concepts. And of course, the individually-earned merit and punctuality points encourage professional comportment.

But in conjunction with the other class elements, the ongoing series of team projects promotes the crystallization of textbook knowledge with the added advantage of a hands-on approach to real-world scenarios. Given the time limitations coupled with the introductory nature of the course, the projects provide students with a realistic outlet for the application of textbook knowledge at an advanced level suitable for their age group and academic standing.

As the need to maintain equality in the presentation of both course sections over the summer sessions was vital, it was not possible to create a control group (a class section without active learning assignments) which might have provided comparative quantitative data through which to analyze whether statistically significant benefits of such active learning projects in the classroom exist. However, student feedback on course evaluations suggested that the projects were successful in achieving their objectives of fostering an active learning environment, appealing to the millennial generation and providing students with autonomy, teamwork experience and real-world applications of the concepts. The following statements are taken verbatim from the instructor's summer 2015 course evaluations:

- I feel that the group projects were particularly useful because they helped me to understand and apply the concepts learned in class better.
- We learnt to apply real world skills of PR rather than sit back and read the textbook. We learnt really practical things, rather than the regurgitation of academic material.
- The assignments were very hands on. Allowed us to find insight on PR related matters and work on PR projects. And they were very fun to work on as well.
- Many of the assignments were application based and that really helped me to understand how to apply these theories to real life situations.

This qualitative feedback from students, in response to the evaluation prompt "Please comment on the elements of the course you found particularly effective" provide support for the claim that such assignments are positively received by students.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The assignment analyses and appendix explain that these activities were born of inspiration from sometimes single-line suggestions in the instructor's manual. Intensive research and planning were necessary to form the finished assignment concept from that seed of inspiration. Advance preparation, the creation of a plan and willingness to deviate from that plan when necessary, and striking a balance between clear guidelines and student autonomy were critical components of this endeavor and helped make this particular course element successful for three consecutive years. Future studies might include a pre- and post-test of concept mastery in order to further assess the efficacy of active-learning projects such as those described here.

As discussed, this class structure is a decidedly unique one, but this conceptualization of the team activities and their rationale could be useful to instructors of varied classes regardless of size or type. While team projects are certainly not a novel idea, the explication of these particular activities might serve other instructors of similar courses as an indication of ways in which an introductory course can be given a real-world edge. They might also be useful for advanced-level courses which are limited by a shortened or concentrated semester or some other time constraint which would render real-world collaboration unrealistic. This may also serve as a useful case reference for those who are teaching unusually large discussion or writing courses of any discipline.

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## APPENDIX A

## PROJECTS DEVELOPED FOR A CONCENTRATED PUBLIC RELATIONS COURSE[1]

Each of these handouts are posted on the class portal website in a folder designated for each project with any necessary accompanying materials. Additionally, one copy is printed for each team. The back of the handout will typically include an outline table to help students organize their team discussion. Each project handout also concludes with the following list of requirements (the page limit varies by assignment):

*When you turn in your final project, please be sure to have the following things:*

- A typed 2-3 page paper written by your group. A cover page is NOT necessary, but your names should be at the top. Please include your 8-digit person numbers, class section and team number.
- Each group member's individual notes – these can be handwritten. Just staple them to the back of your assignment.
- This drafting page or any notes you made as a group as you discussed and wrote the paper.

### PROJECT #1 PR ETHICS AROUND THE WORLD

Your group has randomly selected Code of Ethics statements from two PR associations of the world. You will be working first as individuals and then as a group to compare and contrast these statements.

First, as individuals, read the statements and come up with a list of three ways they are similar and three ways in which they are different. Save these notes to include with your final submission.

Your task as a group is to thoroughly read and discuss these statements together. Then, compose a 2-3 page paper (double spaced, standard margins, 12-point font) discussing the similarities and differences. Please dedicate equal space to the similarities as you do the differences.

Remember, the goal is not to decide which country's statement is "the best" or "wins" over the other. Rather, you should objectively consider each document's strengths, weaknesses, overarching similarities and particular differences. Consider why these similarities and differences might exist. Is there anything that both statements lack?
Please understand that some of these statements have been translated from their native language into English using translating software.

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[1] Those wishing to use these handouts and project ideas are welcomed to do so. Please credit the author of this manuscript as well as the authors of the textbook referenced within the article.

Don't be too harsh on grammar! If wording in any particular area is too difficult to understand, please disregard it.

Feel free to use the chart on the back of this page as a drafting page to jot down your initial discussion as a group.

**PROJECT #2 IABC GOLD QUILL WINNERS: WHAT WOULD YOU DO?**

Your group has chosen an IABC Gold Quill Award Winner case study. You will be working first as individuals and then as a group to determine how YOU would address the issue at hand.

First, as individuals, read the first section of the case study ("Need/ Opportunity"). Please do not read any further at this time. Considering the situation described in the case study, record a few notes about how YOU would handle the situation. Save these notes to include with your final submission.

Your first task as a group is to thoroughly read and discuss this first section ("Need/Opportunity") of the case study together. Using the notes you took as individuals, discuss how YOU would handle the situation, if your group were the PR firm called in to construct a solution or solve a given situation. Use the table on the back of this sheet to take detailed notes as you discuss this case together. You should consider the following:

- Who are the intended audiences that should be addressed?
- What are the main goals or objectives of this campaign?
- What solution would you come up with that would meet the goals/objectives?
- How would you measure your results (how would you know if your plan was successful or not)?
- What challenges do you think you might encounter?

Your second task as a group is to read and discuss the rest of the case study together. Compare and contrast your plan with the one detailed in the case study.

Compose a 2-3 page paper (double spaced, standard margins, 12-point font) discussing the similarities and differences between your plan and the firm's plan. Please dedicate equal space to the similarities as you do the differences. Objectively consider each plan's strengths, weaknesses, overarching similarities and particular differences. Consider why these similarities and differences might exist. Is there anything that both plans fail to take into account?

**PROJECT #3 ANALYSIS OF THE PERSUADERS**

As a class, we will be watching a portion of a PBS documentary entitled *The Persuaders*. You will be working first as individuals and then as a group to analyze the controversial themes addressed in this program.

First, take notes as you watch the show on anything that stands out. In particular, please consider the following questions:

1. Playwright Arthur Miller said in an interview that "our culture now is advertising." How would you define the changing character of the society you live in? And, if you agree with Miller, then what impact is this having on us?
2. Since many messages are increasingly trying to move us to act and make choices on an emotional level, how can we move about in this world with a degree of self-awareness as to what's happening?
3. Where are we headed? What are your thoughts on how far the techniques of persuasion might go?
4. Song Airlines, the new airline depicted in this program, actually folded after only 3 years of service. John Moore of the blog "Brand Autopsy" writes, "You cannot create a brand before you create a business. The business creates a brand." Do you feel that effective, persuasive public relations efforts could have enabled Song to survive? If so, how? How could PR and advertising/branding have worked together?

Your task as a group is to discuss these questions and one another's answers to these questions together. Do you agree on any one point as a group? Where do you disagree? You may use the back of this page for notes. Incorporate your answers to these questions into a well-constructed 2 page paper (TWO PAGES!). You should still have an introduction and conclusion.

**PROJECT #4 ANALYSIS OF ONLINE NEWS ROOMS**

Your group has just selected the names of two top-100 Fortune 500 companies. Your objective will be to find the companies' official websites and analyze the online news rooms. Bear in mind this PRWeek quote: *"An online pressroom is the media's front door to the company."*

Your first task as an individual is to jot down your initial impressions about the newsroom. This is the time to record your "gut reaction" to the online newsroom. Crowded? Clean? Overstimulating? Lackluster? Empty? Fun? Creative? Boring?

Your task as a group is to compare and contrast these two newsrooms. According to our text, a good online newsroom should have AT LEAST the following:

1. Current and archived news releases
2. The names, phone numbers and direct email addresses of

public relations contacts
3. Photographs
4. Product information
5. An opportunity for journalists to sign up for a daily RSS feed if they regularly cover that particular company or industry

How well do your two companies' news rooms measure up? Do they have the five items above? What are they missing? What extra features do they have? How easy were the newsrooms to access? Were they easy to navigate? How are they similar and different? How might the nature of the specific companies or industries whose newsrooms you're analyzing affect the feeling or content of their newsrooms? You may use the table on the back of this page as a starting point to compile your group notes. However, don't feel limited to what's in the table. Feel free to add additional details.

Compose a 2 page paper (double spaced, standard margins, 12-point font) covering your analysis. Be sure to dedicate equal space to each newsroom.

**PROJECT #5 PR NIGHTMARES**

Your group has just randomly been given one PR nightmare "ripped from the headlines," as they say. These cases are taken directly from The Holmes Report, a great resource to read news, developments and updates about the field of public relations. Imagine that this crisis is well underway, and you are the lucky PR firm that the corporation has called in. So you're new to the situation – and you've got to start from scratch.

Read the first paragraph, above the bold line. Your task as an individual is to brainstorm a list of questions that you would ask the corporation leaders. Consider what information you need before you can formulate a plan. Don't read any further.

Next, as a group, do some digging. Investigate what really happened in this case. Once you have more details on the situation, brainstorm how you would suggest the corporation handle the situation. Compose an outline for a strategic conflict management plan. Consider what you have learned about corporations (Ch 17) and crisis management (Ch 10). You're basically jumping in at the Strategic Phase. The charts on the back of this page from Chapter 10 might help guide your thinking.

Finally, read the "Analysis" and "Lessons Learned" sections from the handout. Assess your plan and how the corporation handled the situation. Analyze the strengths and weaknesses of each.

Compose a 2 page paper (double spaced, standard margins, 12-point font) detailing your plan and your comparison and contrast between your plan and the actual one.

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