A Model for Global Outreach Across the Business Curriculum

Evan D. Wood
Taylor University
EvWood@tayloru.edu

Heather Y. Z. St. Peters
Indiana Tech
HeateryzStPeters@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: Higher education is under intense scrutiny to show tangible evidence of learning. At the same time, faculty faces the need to better engage today's students in the learning process beyond the traditional lecture approach. This paper presents an implemented model for integrating theoretical knowledge, practical experience, and Christian outreach within a global context. The model presented is grounded in both the call from Scripture to be "salt and light" and the literature related to experiential learning. The paper presents the integrated project model along with key issues to consider in implementation. Finally, the paper provides reflections on the model from both students and faculty.

INTRODUCTION

Much discussion regarding the changing landscape of the university classroom seems to be occurring, from the changing demographics of students to the impact of technology to the need for global engagement. At the same time, higher education is under intense scrutiny to show tangible evidence of learning. While the discussions and debates continue, faculty are faced with the need to better engage today's students in the learning process beyond the traditional lecture approach. This paper focuses on a new interdisciplinary model implemented at a small, private Christian liberal arts college in the Midwest. The model's design intends to engage today's students though the integration of theoretical knowledge, practical experience, and Christian outreach in a global context. This paper provides a brief overview of the value of experiential learning and a brief overview of a three-pronged call from Scripture. The paper then presents the integrated project model, followed by key issues to consider when implementing the model. Lastly, the paper provides reflections and observations on the model from both students and faculty.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Kolb (1984) defined experiential learning as the "process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (p. 38). For the purposes of this paper, the many facets of experiential learning, such as active learning and service learning, are treated synonymously, as the aspects discussed share the same meanings and benefits. A common belief amongst those that incorporate experiential learning into their curriculum is that students learn and retain a greater percentage of the content covered. Borg and Stranahan (2002) found that students retain a larger part of what they actively do as compared to the retention of only a fraction of what they hear. An ASHE-ERIC Research Report (as cited by Bonwell & Eison, 1991) found that students engaging in active learning techniques not only learn more but they also retain what they learn longer. This retention of learning leads to improved test performance (Hakeem, 2001; Hamer, 2000).

In a critique of the "overuse of lectures and methods that left students dependent on the information provided for them and assessment methods that rewarded regur-

gitation of facts," the Council for National Academic Awards (CNAA) suggested a move towards "learning by doing," which utilizes "games, simulations, and role plays; visits; and work experience" as a means of creating a fuller understanding of the content (Marchese & Pollack, 1993). Similarly, Zlotkowski (1996) endorsed service learning as a means of demonstrating theory while broadening student perspectives and creating links to the external environment.

Content is transferred more effectively when "people learn with understanding rather than merely memorize sets of facts" (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000, p. 55). Eyler and Giles's (as cited in Hollander & Saltmarsh, 2000) research identified the following benefits and outcomes for students participating in service learning:

> 1) a reduction of negative stereotypes and an increase in tolerance for diversity, 2) greater self-knowledge, 3) greater spiritual growth, 4) finding reward in helping others, 5) increased personal efficacy, 6) increased desire to include service to others in ones career plans, 7) increased ability to work with others, 8) increased leadership skills, 9) increased feeling of being connected to a community, and an increased connection to the college experience through closer ties to students and faculty (p. 159).

Other authors suggest the success of experiential learning results from students' increased level of involvement (Slavin, 1980; Sautter, Pratt, & Shanahan, 2000) and higher-order thinking (Bonwell & Eison, 1991). Thus, knowledge emerges from personal experience through the creation of a "frame-work for meaning," which is more efficiently encoded in the students' minds (Hopkins, 1994).

Further, experiential learning provides a means of increasing the connection between the classroom and the "real world." Students are seeking "real-life" experiences while in college. Unfortunately, many students find attending college is an "inauthentic experience to be endured until real life begins" (Hopkins, 1994). Researchers find that the integration of service learning into the undergraduate classroom is a method for improving the relevance of education while addressing community needs (Zlotkowski, 1996). Experiential learning in marketing curriculum has shown to increase the level of realism (de los Santos & Jensen, 1985). Penn (2003) found that students participating in service learning demonstrate clearer understanding of how to apply abstract concepts to "real-world" situations. With the connection to "real-life," it is not surprising that Jacobi-Gray et al. (1999) found 72

percent of students rated service learning courses as above average compared with 47 percent of students in non-service learning courses.

SCRIPTURES CALL TO BE "SALT AND LIGHT"

As Christian faculty teaching in Christian institutions, it seems imperative that Christian faith, based on Scriptural truths, is not only integrated into each business course in the curriculum but that it also drives the operation of the business program. As such, three key aspects of Scripture serve as the foundation for the integrated project model at this institution. First, it is believed that work is created and ordained by God as good and that Christians can and should worship God through their work. Second, it is believed that Christians are called to utilize their gifts and abilities for service to God, laying up treasure in heaven. Third, it is believed that Christians are called to be salt and light in a world that needs to know the hope that is only provided through Jesus Christ. The following paragraphs briefly outline the Scriptural basis for the three aspects providing the foundation for the integrated project model.

In Genesis 1:28 (NIV), God commands man to "fill the earth and subdue it," which is followed by verse 31 of chapter 1 where God looks at all he had made and calls it "very good." Then in Genesis 2:15 (NIV), Scripture states "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it." The key to these two passages is that these statements and events occur prior to the fall. Thus, God created and ordained work as something good, not as a punishment or curse resulting from the fall. Paul then talks in Colossians 3:22-24 (NIV) on how Christians should approach work:

> Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Through Paul's teaching, work and the attitude and approach to work can be seen as a sincere and important form of worship.

In Matthew 6:19-21 (NIV), Jesus is teaching and says:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

This passage seems to teach several important lessons. One lesson, in relation to the business curriculum, is that Christians should invest themselves in activities that have eternal consequence. To do that, Christians need to utilize their gifts and abilities for service to God. It is outside the bounds of this paper to discuss the myriad of ways that Scripture teaches this should take place, but it is believed that we are called to do so in each venue we operate within. The focus of the integrated project model takes one aspect of that, which is working to establish businesses whose primary purpose is to "seek and save the lost," or what are commonly referred to as business as missions organizations.

Scripture makes clear in many passages that Christians are called to be witnesses to the one true hope that is found in Jesus Christ. One such passage is Matthew 5:13-16, where Jesus is teaching and says:

You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

Christians are to be salt and light in the world. Matthew 5:13-16 is an inclusive passage, meaning that Christians are to be salt and light in every part of the world, including business courses and business careers.

The implementation of this integrated project model utilizes this brief three-pronged call from Scripture as a guide to each course and project included. All decisions are made in light of these passages. Further, students involved with these integrated projects gain practical experience in implementing this three-pronged call from Scripture in their lives. While the model itself is not derived from this Scriptural basis, this three-pronged call from Scripture provides the context and foundation for the model.

INTEGRATED PROJECT MODEL

The benefits of experiential learning seem to fit well with the need to engage today's students. The difficulty lies in the ability to implement experiential learning practices with the amount of content already required to be covered in a course. Integrating these many pressing requirements is a challenge, but Levy (1996) suggests the following:

Curriculum is more than the content of the subjects we teach. One of its goals is certainly the mastery of a specific body of knowledge. But beyond that, the subjects we focus on are means to teach our students how to observe, how to question, how to reason, how to analyze, how to plan, how to make decisions, how to communicate, and how to think (p. 28).

The proposed model, as implemented, follows Levy's exhortation and holistically integrates theoretical knowledge, practical experience, and Christian outreach within a global context. Figure 1 depicts a visual representation of the integrated project model, a multi-course, interdisciplinary project with an international client. In the model, courses from multiple business and other disciplines work together with an international client in need of business research and planning. The faculty teaching these courses work together to develop a comprehensive project, of which key aspects will be assigned for inclusion in the different courses.

Figure 1: Integrated Project Model

The projects within the integrated project model last the full academic year with six to eight courses from different disciplines, ranging from 100-level to 400-level, participating. Typically, a finance or accounting course is involved, multiple marketing and communication courses are involved, and multiple management courses are involved. On top of the various disciplines within business, courses from other fields such as social work, environmental science, English, and others are integrated into the project as well, depending on the project needs.

Once the comprehensive project is defined, the faculty divides the project into a series of key deliverables. Each participating faculty member then takes a set of those deliverables and includes that experiential work into their course(s). As part of the distribution of deliverables to the various courses, faculty must consider the level of the courses taught. A 100-level course would only work on deliverables appropriate for the students in that course, whereas a 400-level course would take on more significant deliverables requiring greater knowledge, critical thinking, and application. The deliverables of the various courses are then provided to the senior capstone course for compilation, refinement, packaging, and subsequent presentation to the international client.

As examples, a faculty member teaching a 300-level corporate finance course might have a class complete a financial analysis, while a faculty member teaching a more advanced finance class might have the class develop pro forma statements. A marketing faculty member teaching a 400-level advertising class might have the class develop a branding campaign, whereas a faculty member teaching a 200-level principles of marketing class might have the class develop a draft of a marketing plan for an upper-division course to finalize. Outside of the core business classes, a communications faculty member might have a class develop training materials, and a social work faculty member might have a class develop materials specific to the community where the client organization operates.

Practical Experience

For all the reasons and benefits previously discussed, the integrated project model involves an experiential learning project. The projects are "real" and involve students working with "real" clients. In working with these international clients, students learn to plan, organize, collaborate, and communicate in order to deliver a professional project. Further, students not only learn to collaborate with students within their own course, but they also learn to collaborate with multiple project teams comprised of students in other courses as well. This gives students experience providing key project deliverables to other teams that are relying on their work. Ultimately, the various project deliverables are finalized by the business capstone course for presentation and delivery to the client.

Christian Outreach

Each client identified by the faculty are Christian organizations desiring to reach the lost through business (e.g., business as missions). While Christian outreach can certainly be conducted outside of Christian organizations, the focus of the projects in this integrated project model relate to business as missions organizations. The selected clients are operating international organizations that desire to reach the lost through economic development activities that generate jobs and wealth. In working with these clients, students get firsthand experience in how Christian outreach can be conducted through business. More importantly, students gain personal insight into how they can utilize their gifts and abilities for Christian service.

Global Context

With the global context in which all businesses operate, it seems important for students to learn and understand how to conduct business in the global environment. That belief is why each client selected operates internationally. This gives students the opportunity to learn and experience the impact of doing business in other cultures and countries. As part of the project, students in the program have the opportunity to travel to the client's international site to interact with the client, the client's employees, and the client's customers. This aspect of the integrated project model not only gives students international exposure, but it also allows their final project to be better aligned with the people they are serving.

IMPLEMENTING THE MODEL

While this model generates excitement among the students, faculty, and other stakeholders, it requires a high degree of organization on the part of the faculty. The students' ability to critically think and problem solve "is not simply due to a generic set of 'thinking skills' or strategies but instead requires well-organized bodies of knowledge that support planning and strategic thinking" (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000). The following steps have assisted in the sound implementation of the project model.

Pre-project:
1. Identify courses and faculty that desire to participate in the integrated project model.
2. Work with participating faculty to identify an international client.
3. Work with prospective clients to ensure there is a fit with their needs, the participating courses' content, and the students' abilities.
4. Work with prospective clients to ensure there is a shared understanding of expectations among all parties.
5. Work with participating faculty to determine the project deliverables for each course, paying attention to when each course is offered and the required timing of project deliverables.
6. Integrate project deliverables into course syllabi.

During the project:
1. Identify a student in each course to serve in the role of project manager for that course. The project manager coordinates the activities required in that course to ensure the projects meets its timelines.
2. Identify a student in each course to serve in the role of liaison to other courses participating in the project. The liaison communicates with the other courses to ensure deliverables are on target and integrated.
3. Identify a student in one of the courses to serve as a "client coordinator," who will serve as the communication link between the students and the client, reducing the burden on the client and ensuring clear, consistent communication.
4. Provide appropriate oversight to the projects in each course depending on the level of course involved (e.g., 100-level courses typically require more oversight than 400-level courses).
5. Meet with participating faculty in regular intervals to ensure clear communication is maintained.
6. Ensure project deliverables are transferred to the appropriate classes from semester to semester.

Post-project:
1. Ensure a presentation is made, either in-person or digitally, to the client, providing the client the opportunity to ask questions.
2. Ensure the project deliverables are delivered to the client.
3. Debrief the participating students.
4. Debrief the participating faculty.
5. Interact with the client to provide the faculty's professional assessment of the students' work as it relates to the client's implementation of the project.
6. Identify areas for improvement on the next project.

One final item of importance to consider with the integrated project model is the time commitment of students. Jacobi-Gray et al. (1999) found that students in service-learning courses actually put more time and effort into their work than did students not in service-learning courses. While this is a benefit of the integrated project model, it is also important to ensure that a "work-life" balance is maintained for the students. The outside project work requires a great deal of time, and other coursework outlined in the syllabi need to account for this.

Gaining faculty involvement

A critical component to implementing the integrated projects is faculty support and involvement. Faculty need to be willing to take on parts of the project in their courses. Faculty also need to be willing to utilize experiential learning in the courses they teach as experiential learning requires significant faculty involvement. While this can create a challenge in many institutions, gaining faculty support and involvement was not a challenge at this institution. The faculty at this institution had a collective interest in business as missions and a shared vision of creating an atmosphere of global engagement in the business department. This made participation in the integrated projects desirable to most faculty, as it fit with their interests and passion.

Resources for experiential learning and global travel are limited at most institutions. This did create a challenge. However, faculty were able to secure some additional resourcing for their classes that participated in the integrated projects. Resourcing came in the form of funds for student research, limited travel funding, and other related materials to support their courses. This was made possible because students across multiple courses were participating, and in many instances, the same students were in multiple different classes that were participating in the project. The department chair and the faculty were able to then pool the limited resources available to use for those aspects of the project requiring funding, such as global travel.

The last incentive for faculty to participate was the opportunity to work collaboratively with other faculty in an area of their passion. This not only resulted in more work enjoyment, but it resulted in opportunities to publish and present the results of their work on the projects. Lastly, it created opportunities for faculty to seek outside grants because the projects were large enough in scale to garner interest and targeted to areas of stakeholder passions.

Overview of Completed Projects

Imagine being a student or a faculty member in the Midwest yet having an impact in places like the Morocco

or the Dominican Republic. This program has successfully completed two projects over the past two years using the integrated project model. The projects completed to this point assisted organizations in changing lives — economically and spiritually. It also changed the lives of students as they saw new ways that their unique gifting and talents could be used.

The first project worked with a missions organization based in Austin, Texas, that focuses on community and economic development in the Haitian bateyes of the Dominican Republic. Students in eight different courses spread over two semesters researched, developed, and presented a comprehensive business and marketing plan for the organization to begin importing coffee from the Dominican Republic for distribution to coffee roasters across the United States. As an example, students in the marketing research class conducted a market study to determine if a market for coffee from the Dominican Republic existed, how to reach the market, what price to set for the coffee, and how to best distribute the coffee to the market. As part of the study, students conducted a survey of nearly 1,100 coffee roasters across the United States using a list they developed themselves as part of their research. As another example, the marketing campaigns and cases course took the marketing research along with deliverables from other courses and developed a full branding campaign and messaging strategy. One final example of a course involved in the project is the production and operations management course. Students in that course studied the unique operational and logistical challenges faced by the organization. Through their study and research, the production and operations management students developed a logistics plan to handle orders and ship the products in the most cost-effective manner. In addition to the eight participating courses, a group of 14 individuals traveled to the Dominican Republic during a J-term and spent three weeks serving in direct hands-on ministry, as well as conducting research via interviews and observation. Students gathered a stock of photos and video for use in materials and developed a deeper understanding of the people they were actually serving and benefiting.

The second project involved an organization in Morocco that is developing an organic farm to grow organic fruits and vegetables for distribution to Western Europe. The organization is being started by a family desiring to reach Moroccans through business with the intention of eventually handing the business over to local ownership, all as a means of outreach. For this project, six courses spread over two semesters participated. The project started with a marketing research class that studied the

marketing communication mix of organic food producers and resellers in Western Europe. The research class identified the types of messages utilized by other organic food organizations currently competing in Western Europe, the targets of those messages, and the mediums for communicating those messages. In a strategic management course, a group of students conducted a market study of each country in Western Europe. The market study identified the size of each market, the growth potential of each market, and specifically which fruits and vegetables were most profitable in each market. The work performed by these classes served as deliverables to the other classes. Ultimately, students in the capstone course gathered all the deliverables and developed a marketing plan for the organization that included the following recommendations: 1) countries to target, 2) marketing messages to use when targeting them, 3) specific fruits and vegetables to grow during each of the four growing seasons to optimize profitability, and 4) the method of distribution for the fruits and vegetables. The students also developed a brand image for the organization with sample logo, business cards, and stationery.

Both clients commented on the value of the projects. While not all recommendations and deliverables were implemented, both clients utilized much of the work of the students. In the Dominican Republic, the client did not decide to launch a national distribution network of coffee to roasters. However, the knowledge gleaned from the extensive research did serve to help the client improve its product and operation. The client in Morocco did utilize much of the work, including distributing their product through the recommended wholesale network into Western Europe.

Observed Outcomes

The most notable observation recognized by the entire faculty is the enhanced educational experience created for the students. The faculty observed the seemingly immediate application of theories taught in the course. The direct interaction with the client provided a natural introduction to the varying communities and cultures, fostering cultural competencies that went beyond traditional course descriptions. With the projects having real implications for the clients, the students seemed to take greater ownership in both the project and the course.

One result of utilizing the integrated project is that students tended to spend greater amounts of time outside of the classroom working on the course and the project. The projects also required the students to expend greater effort in communicating with each other and with the client, which seemed to help develop their collaboration and

communication skills. As part of their communication skills development, students develop the ability to set clear expectations with each other and the client, they develop the ability to negotiate trade-offs and changes, and they gain experience communicating both good and bad news.

Finally, the faculty observed that the projects have created many opportunities and tangible outcomes for the students involved. Students begin to develop a professional network inside and outside of the university that benefits them in their career beyond graduation. Several clients have either offered students employment or have offered to serve as references for students. Students develop a portfolio of completed projects, with clear descriptions of their role in executing the project. Due to the nature of the projects and outcomes, students are able to place the experience on their resume, which has resulted in greater differentiation in the job market.

Student Feedback

As part of the work on this paper, the faculty created a student focus group to gather their views and feedback. The focus group included current students, ranging from second year students to seniors and recent graduates. The "real" nature of the projects seemed to drive many of the positive statements made by the students. For instance, the students did not see their effort as "wasted" on hypothetical work. This also created a sense of excitement amongst the students, and for some, the projects produced a "passion" for the work, making it more than "just getting a grade." As observed by the faculty, the students noted that presenting their work to the clients, and in one case to the client's board of directors, increased their confidence. Further, students noted gaining great satisfaction in seeing their work used by the clients. The students viewed the projects as helping to solidify their learning, especially since they were able to practice the application of the strategies and theories discussed in their classes and textbooks.

Students in the focus group also noted the impact the projects had on building their resumes. The alumni noted that the experiences played a major role in their ability to secure employment after graduation. Beyond the resume, they noted that the various experiences provided many points of discussion in their employment interviews, as well as opportunities to show their tangible portfolio of project work. Finally, students noted that the projects have helped them determine which careers they desire to pursue further and which careers are not desirous to them.

While the students noted many positives, several drawbacks were also noted. Some students commented that the projects were sometimes overwhelming. They sensed at times that they were "just thrown into it." The "real" nature of the projects sometimes created a sense of confusion in younger students, since the projects did not always flow smoothly in a linear process. Students commented that part of the confusion developed as the projects seemed to shift the "supervisory role" to the student groups rather than the faculty. Due to this, they tend to feel that lackadaisical students are able to blend in. Lastly, the real deadlines, with implications beyond the classroom, create a feeling in the students that the courses require additional effort. Part of this feeling is a result of the need to be adaptable and flexible to meet the changing needs and demands of the client.

FACULTY IMPLICATIONS

The faculty involved with the projects also noted several implications for themselves as faculty. The department chairman noted the increased collegiality amongst the faculty resulting from the opportunity to work together more formally as part of their varying courses. The faculty also noted that the projects have broadened their personal networks, creating further opportunities for their courses as well as opportunities for themselves. The faculty also noted that the projects created additional satisfaction with their work, as they are able to serve and impact people beyond the students in their courses.

As with the students, the faculty also noted several drawbacks. The projects create additional oversight and coordination on the parts of the faculty. While all saw this as valuable, it did add to their workload demands. The greatest concern consistently noted among the faculty was that the projects occasionally drove the course rather than the course objectives driving the project. The faculty worked to prevent this, but project deadlines can create pressure for the faculty to allow project work to push classroom activities.

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