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Abstract:

The literature on field based education programs for undergraduates is voluminous, but surprisingly unhelpful in answering the most important question of all, "What difference does it make in the lives of students?" In this presentation we have focused on this largely unanswered question, first (1) examining the goals commonly held for such field experiential approaches as cooperative education, academic internships, field components of classes, and service learning then (2) discussing evidence for impact on students and finally (3) identifying critical gaps in our knowledge of how these programs affect students.

Figure 1 provides a context for our analysis of the literature of which this presentation is a small part. Building on a matrix generated in the research committee of the National Society for Experiential Education (Moore, 1992) we are examining the types of information we have about the role of various stakeholders in field based education and the impact these programs have on them. The attached draft bibliography contains material that corresponds to all of these cells. This presentation focuses on the upper left and right cells in this matrix. Figure 2 breaks out the upper right cell containing evidence of impact of programs on student outcomes; we have broken those outcomes into 4 categories: personal growth, career development, social development, and academic/cognitive change. We have also characterized the nature of the evidence provided in the literature moving from anecdotes and simple self report e.g "I learned a lot in my internship" to more persuasive evidence including use of written assessment instruments and observations of behavior e.g. 'program participants were twice as likely to be community volunteers 10 years after participation in the service learning program.' Figures 3 and 4 represent the necessity to examine the literature in figure 2 broken out by alternative types of field experience.

Indeed, one of the most glaring gaps in the literature characterized by the Figure 1 typology is in careful investigation of the processes by which field experience should lead to attainment of the goals claimed for it. The study with the largest n merely identifies the presence or absence of an internship component in the student's curriculum. (Astin, 1993) There is a lot of program description and prescription in the literature, but almost no theory building and testing. In our discussion of goals and outcomes, this gap should be kept in mind. Clearly any careful exploration of the impact of field based programs must identify the program characteristics which make the difference; this includes such gross characteristics as contrasting internships with service learning projects, but also must include comparative studies of

alternative structures for experience. These are the processes that fall in the 4th column of the Figure 1 matrix. Indeed, where such comparisons are made, programs have been found to have quite different effects on participants. (Conrad and Hedin, 1981) These alternative experiences should also be anchored in theories about how people learn and transfer their learning to new settings.

In Table 1 we have summarized the goals identified in both the field based education literature and the higher education reform literature as a context for our examination of the student outcomes attributed to field based programs. The categories used for this review of goals parallel the outcome categories in Figure 2 and are fairly standard in the outcomes literature. (e.g. Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991; Giles et. al. 1990; Astin, 1993)

An analysis of the two sets of goals suggests a great deal of commonality; in fact, in examining the undergraduate reform literature, one is struck by the extent to which the observations are consistent with long held beliefs of experiential educators. The greater focus in the field based literature on career development results from the large number of cooperative education and specifically vocational programs that incorporate field components. The two bodies of literature diverge in the practical implications of these observations; most of the reform literature looks to changes on campus and in the classroom in pursuit of these goals whereas the field based educators see an integration of field and campus experience as the logical solutions to the lack of integration of theory and practice. (Couto and Zuberer, 1988)

In examining the rows in Table 1 it appears that personal growth and career development are somewhat lower in priority than social development and academic/cognitive change. This last is not surprising in that it includes the basic liberal arts general education goals. The social development category has grown in recent years with increased emphasis on community service, volunteerism, service-learning and now national service.

When we compare Table 2 which includes a summary of some key student outcomes with the Table 1 goals, we seem to know most about the categories that seem of least importance in the goal literature i.e. personal growth and career development, and to know the least about the categories most often identified as critical goals of field based and undergraduate education i.e. social [including citizenship] development and academic/cognitive change. This should not be overstated since our knowledge of outcomes in all of the categories is quite limited; nevertheless, one is struck by the almost complete absence of evidence about the impact of field based education on social and cognitive outcomes.

How can we explain this? There are three thoughts that come to mind:

1. Field based programs have not really focussed on social and academic/cognitive goals.

2. Research has not focussed on measuring social and academic/cognitive outcomes.

3. These goals, while important, are not real outcomes of field based education.

We argue that 1 and 2 are the most likely explanations at this point in our understanding of the field. Many programs are specifically oriented to vocational or other career preparation and have been evaluated using career development criteria. (Williams, 1991) And numerous evaluations of professional programs emphasize job placement. In liberal arts programs, field based instruction has not been embraced by faculty so that explicit attempts to link cognitive goals with field experience are often not made; in most institutions field based programs have tended to be marginal to the curriculum. (Nelson and Gore, 1979) Where service oriented programs are marginal, they may focus on social or citizenship goals, but not have the resources to systematically pursue these goals instructionally or to evaluate student attainments.
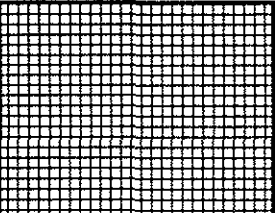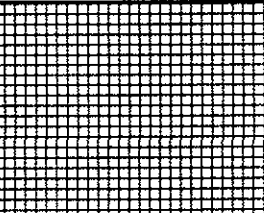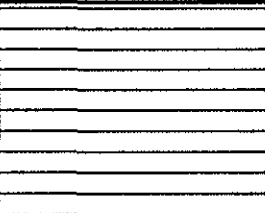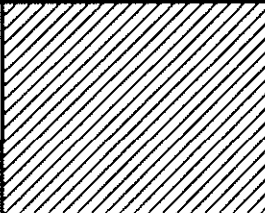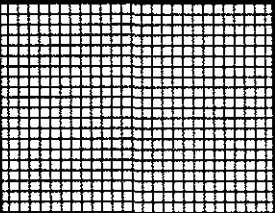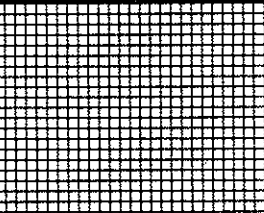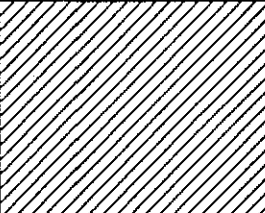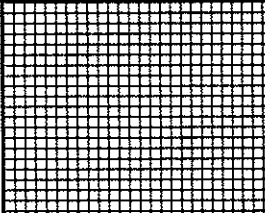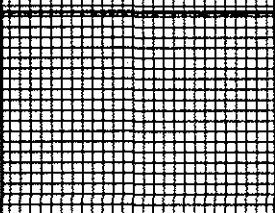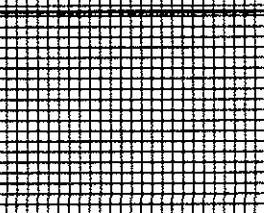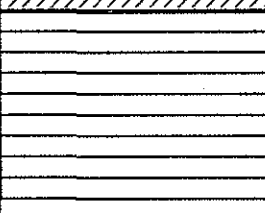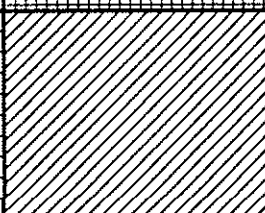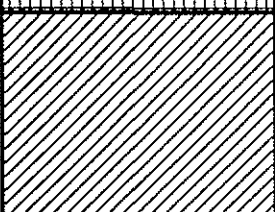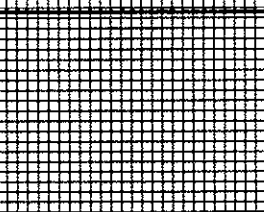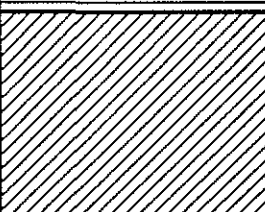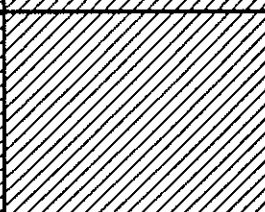
Accurate or convincing measurement of social and academic goal attainment is also a major challenge. The most significant social outcomes are behaviors manifested long after graduation; longitudinal assessments of behavior are difficult to accomplish. Cognitive skill outcomes such as critical thinking or problem solving are difficult to define and to measure. Learning and using particular substantive content poses even greater challenges. For each program and perhaps within each program, students are exposed to diverse field settings; how can we identify principles to be learned and how can we assess transfer of learning from the classroom to the field i.e. 'knowledge in use'. The definition of what is to be learned and effective measurement are critical if we are to realize the academic/cognitive goals of field based learning. (Eyler, 1993) This has meant that assessment has tended to focus on easy to measure constructs like getting a job, or on easy to gather data like student satisfaction with the experience. When assessment relies on student journals and student satisfaction it is clear why the focus is often on personal growth rather than on enhanced social behavior or on the ability to link theory with practice.

The second column in Table 2 focuses on what we need to know; it identifies these difficult to conceptualize and measure outcomes of field based learning. The list is undoubtedly incomplete, but it represents the most critical challenges for researchers interested in field based education. Unless we can demonstrate that these labor intensive programs make a difference on the attainment of the central goals of undergraduate education, it is unlikely that they will be anything but marginal to the curriculum.

Figure 1: Field Based Education Research Literature

	Goals	Description	Prescription	Processes	Outcomes
Students					
Faculty					
Institutions					
Sites					
Society					

Figure 2: Student Outcomes

	Anecdotal Impressions	Simple Self Report	Assessment Instrument	Behavior (Proximal)	Behavior (Distal)
Personal	Substantial	Substantial	Mixed	Some	
Career	Substantial	Substantial	Some	Substantial	
Social	Substantial	Substantial	Mixed	Some	
Cognitive	Some	Substantial	Some	Some	

Substantial supportive literature

Some supportive literature

Mixed results in literature

Figure 3: Outcomes of Field Based Learning: Program Type By Learning Outcome By Nature of Evidence

Figure 4: What Impact Will An Internship Program
Have On The Students' Long Term Use
Of Knowledge and Cognitive Skills?

INTERNSHIPS

BEHAV-DISTAL

COGNITIVE
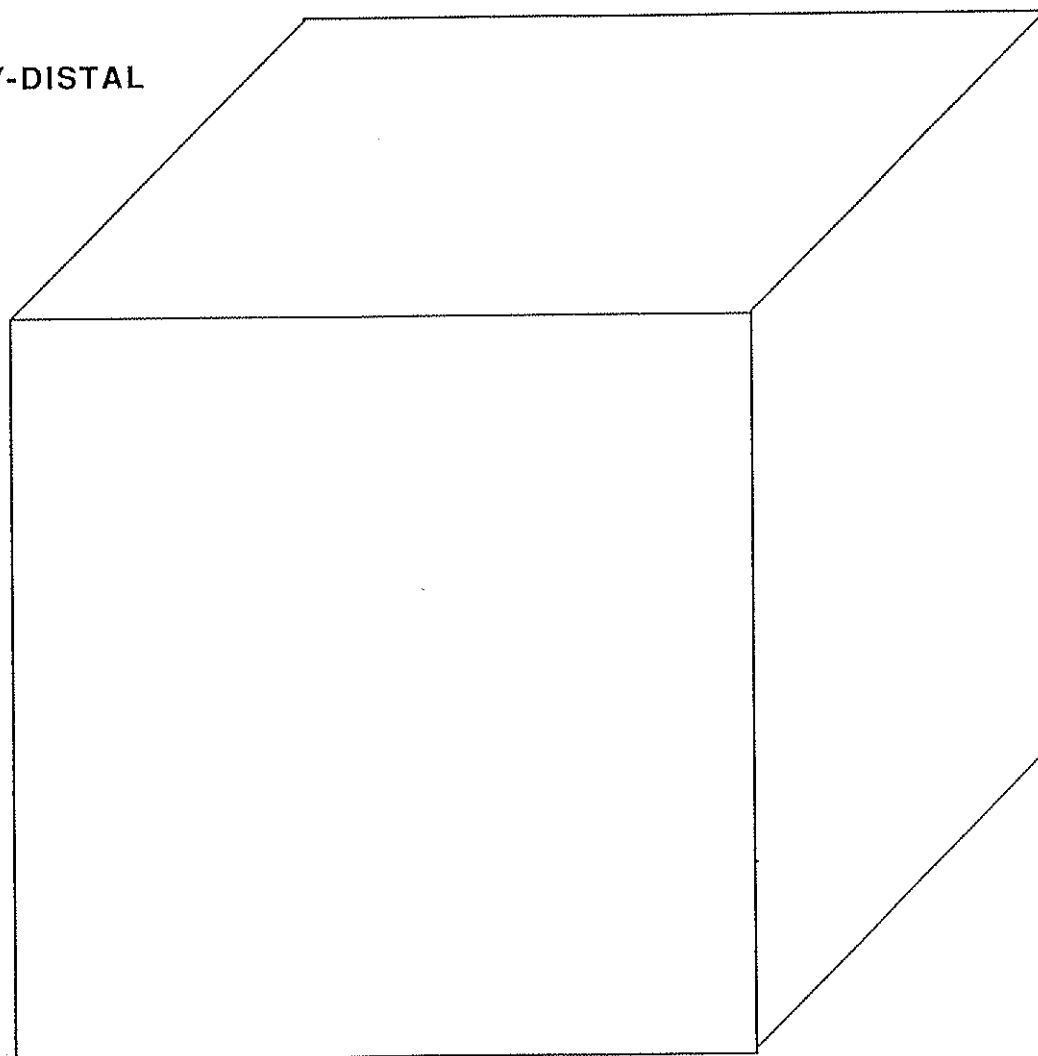
TABLE 1: Goals For Students

	Field Based Education	Undergraduate Education
Personal Growth	• Become self-directed and less passive • Develop intrinsic motivation for learning • Values development	• Link personal growth with intellectual development • Values development
Career Development	• Develop career choices • Get direct career experience • Enhanced career development	• Develop Situation Specific competence
Social Development	• Be connected to community • Involvement in human needs • Provide service to others • Develop responsible and intelligent citizens • Interpersonal and leadership skills	• Develop civic consciousness • Develop a habit of volunteer/community service • Connect college learning with the world • Citizenship/Civic Education/Civic Participation
Academic/Cognitive Change	• Integrate liberal arts and community/ public service • Empower learners • Conceptual and practical grasp of knowledge and skills • Apply knowledge in new situations • Link practice with theory • Inquiry skills	• Connect academic learning with personal lives • Increase active learning • Have connected learning • Develop applications of learning • Intellectual exploration off-campus • General education-breadth • Critical thinking skills • Enhanced language arts ability

TABLE 2: The Outcomes Of Field Based Education For Students

	What We Know*	What We Need To Know
Personal Growth	• Increased self esteem and confidence • Increased personal responsibility • Increased sense of personal efficacy • *Increased moral development*	• Commitment to continuous learning? • Personal efficacy and responsibility?
Career Development	• Active exploration of career interests • Understanding of the world of work • Specific job skills • Hiring advantage over non-interns • Greater confidence in career choice • *Increased career maturity* • *Choice of service oriented career*	• Effectiveness on the job? • An accelerated or altered career path?
Social Development	• Increased interpersonal skill • Increased tolerance/support for diversity • Report current volunteer activity • Indicate future community participation • *Increased social responsibility*	• Citizenship values like social responsibility, civic tolerance, respect for diversity? • Acquisition and expression of interpersonal & leadership skills? • Future community participation ?
Academic/Cognitive Change	• Belief internship is a positive learning experience • Better grades • Persistence to graduation • *Increasingly positive attitudes about school* • *Learning of specific subject matter* • *Learning to learn/independent learning*	• Appropriate "learning" outcomes for field based experiences? • How can we measure them? • Particular subject matter mastery? • Communication skills such as writing, oral expression? • Complex understanding or contextualized expertise? • Knowledge in use or effective transfer of learning to field/job? • Independent learning or learning-to-learn skills? • Problem solving or critical thinking? • Long term continuous learning behavior?

* Substantial support

Limited support

Mixed support

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