



A Service-Learning Project with a Local Apparel Business
Integrated into a Trend Analysis and Forecasting Class

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Since the National Community Service Trust Act of 1993, numerous national organizations that combine service and educational learning have strengthened interest in service learning (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). For example, Ernest Boyer (1994) voiced concerns that higher education should reconsider its mission to educate students for a life as responsible citizens rather than educate students merely for a career. In order to address this concern, service learning with the goal of educating students about their public responsibilities and their roles as citizens has become essential.

Studies revealed numerous benefits that service learning offers both to students and to the organizations served. They include students developing a greater awareness of social problems and students becoming eager volunteers following class community service work. Student engagement in the learning materials is also increased by the community service work. In addition, the interaction can also help students build self-confidence through their contribution to the community and makes faculty who assign the projects enjoy teaching more.

The Trend Analysis and Forecasting course that I developed and am currently teaching is offered to about eighty apparel/merchandising/retailing students at the junior/senior level at a large university in the United States. The course was designed to help students understand how trend forecasts are created and employed by various professionals in the fashion industry to improve a firm's competitiveness in the marketplace with a dual focus on both consumer and business aspects. The class is currently offered as a combination of lecture and lab components covering Lectra Kaledo program (Print, Weave, Knit, and Style). To complete this course, a short-term forecasting paper project with the application of Kaledo is required in addition to a trend presentation, a long-term forecasting paper project, and three exams. The short-term forecasting project is focused on community service with an industry-academic partnership. Students, in groups of three, forecast one apparel trend for the following year for Venus, an American apparel business, and create a trend board.

This class had the short-term forecasting project in the previous years, but it did not focus on one particular apparel business. I currently altered the project to a community-based service-learning project with an industry-academic partnership. This project was significantly enhanced this semester with the support of the Academic Engagement and Innovation Grant I received from the university. The funding supported 1) two graduate student mentors 2) awards with nine gift cards for the three best projects and 3) the expense for the company's two visits to the class. The main responsibility of the two graduate students is to work to assist/mentor students on the project. One mentor focuses on the

research and written part of the project while the other focuses on Kaledo and the trend board component of the project. They meet with students outside of class to assist the project (two meetings for each group with each mentor).

Two guest speakers from Venus visited the class at the beginning of the semester, and students learned about various aspects of the creative business including its evolution, target market, business focus, product ideas, product development, and sourcing for manufacturing.

The student report must include the following sections: first, briefly introduce Venus, and describe its target market. Second, identify and describe in detail an important socio-cultural theme (future trend) that may affect the industry. Third, describe in detail their forecast for a chosen category of apparel for Venus for a season of 2016 including color, textiles, and styles. Lastly, a trend board must be created using Kaledo, with the required components of inspiration, color palette, fabric swatches, garment styles (illustrations and flat sketches), specific season and year, the name of the trend, and the name of the company. Students are currently working on the paper and the trend board.

Written reflection is conducted after students have completed the projects. The community/industry partner's feedback is also important. Students have poster presentations toward the end of the semester, and the presentation is open to any students or faculty across campus. Two professionals from the company come to the class to serve as guest judges, selecting the top three projects for awards; however, the instructor grades the projects using a grading rubric. Post-project evaluations completed by both the students and the community partner in the previous semesters clearly demonstrate its success. The partner found that many of the projects were inspiring while students were excited and better engaged in the project with the opportunity to contribute to the community. The opportunities to interact with industry professionals and solve real-world problems motivated students and helped them acquire up-to-date information.

Since I first taught the course, I have revised the course content and projects to best meet student learning outcomes. As I mentioned earlier, this semester I could accomplish the goal to incorporate the service-learning component into the project thanks to the grant support. Students have greatly appreciated and found the graduate students' assistance outside class extremely beneficial to enhance the quality of their projects.

It is an important mission of higher education to prepare students to assume the responsibilities of citizenship. I believe that students' participation in community service has a significant effect on their personal values and future interactions with their community. Through participation in course-relevant community service, students' academic learning is also enhanced. Thus, I suggest that community service projects be integrated into a variety of classes across the disciplines.

References

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