

*Enhancing Student Learning In A Retail Center Mg't Course
By the Use of a combined Civic and Student Engagement Project*

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2008 AAEA Annual Meeting

Orlando, Florida

July 27-30, 2008

The challenge to Higher Education today is to provide a complete and rigorous educational experience to an increasingly diverse audience. To accomplish this demand for higher performance in higher education, new methods of delivery of course material must be adopted. A complete overhauling of traditional curricula such as MBA programs is underway. In a ranking of graduate programs, US News & World Report emphasized that “new” MBA program revisions are incorporating out-of-the-classroom engagement. Beyond this example, the changes in higher education are incorporating engagement strategies with communities both inside and outside of educational institutions themselves. Even in the secondary educational realm, courses in service learning are being expanded. This paper reviews the principles of student engagement and how it can be incorporated in existing courses. It is also the objective of this paper to join the concepts of civic and academic engagement by illustrating that courses themselves may be the vehicle by which students are encouraged to work in their external and internal communities. One brief example of civic engagement is the assignment of interviews of people in outside communities as part of a course. The author assigns multiple interviews of businesspeople as part of his undergraduate courses.

It is true that community engagement by academic institutions is described as occurring “under a large tent featuring a wide range of activities, stakeholders, and also dialects to describe these activities. (NSSE) Organizations can focus on service learning with students, community-based scholarship by faculty, and economic development with business partners. Any of these activities can be sponsored or promoted within institutions themselves.

Regarding economic development with business partners, most universities have offices of business development which parlay patent holdings into business startups or expansions. The author teaches an

entrepreneurship course which falls under this category of engagement. These efforts point out the need for increased collaboration among communities and academic institutions.

Principles of Student Engagement

There are two dimensions of student engagement. Research from a number of sources has shown that student engagement in campus communities such as designated learning communities can enrich the overall student learning experience and increase key indicators such as retention(Kuh,2003). Another dimension is civic engagement by students in outside communities(NCES). This aspect of engagement emphasizes a sometimes unspoken mandate given to higher educational institutions to develop good citizens who contribute to their communities. Engagement “ is recognized by involvement by students in educationally purposeful activities.. (is) ..a gateway to desired outcomes of college.” A list of “Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education(Chickering, Gamson,et al) was compiled to reflect how these good educational practices lead to college success. It is also recognized that “ student engagement is ..considered to be among the better predictors of learning and personal development.”(Kuh, 2001)

The measurement of student engagement are incorporated in scales. These are as follows:

1. Level of academic challenge
2. Active and collaborative learning
3. Student –faculty interaction
4. Enriching educational experiences
5. Supportive campus climate
6. Reading and writing
7. Quality of relationships
8. Institutional emphasis on good practices
9. Higher order thinking
10. Student-faculty interaction concerning coursework
11. Integration of diversity into coursework.

Engagement generally means how involved students are in academics, campus activities and civic(outside communities). The latter relates to the development of good citizenships characteristics as a goal of higher education. Community engagement falls in two categories: curricular engagement(service learning, scholarship associated with engagement, institutional support); outreach and partnership(shared facilities, professional development centers, scholarship associated with initiatives in engagement).(CIRCLE) The reward to the higher educational institution is the bringing together of isolated parts of a campus around engagement and the commitment to the public by engagement activities.

It is recognized that for-profit and nonprofit institutions may approach engagement differently. The movement of these for-profits into online education have supported objectives such as education on demand. However, it has been remarked that” The University of Phoenix cannot take a group of students and faculty into the community like traditional institutions. “ “Engagement is a cost center at for-profit institutions.” (Saunders&Love) Indeed, community-centered activities may well be the strength of of institutions with a strong physical presence in their respective communities. But, these for-profit institutions may attempt to reduce the extent of these activities due to their focus.

Not-for-profit institutions including public universities and, in particular, land-grant institutions may view this opportunity for engagement differently. The infusion of public monies into these institutions appears to be accompanied by a recognition that these institutions need to pay back benefits to the public. An example of this commitment was recorded at the end of the 2007 legislative session in Minnesota when a portion of the funding (5%)for the University of Minnesota was made contingent to the provision of services to entrepreneurs and the training of teachers in science and math education.

It is to this mandate that the author of the paper has directed some of his efforts in the area of course development(an entrepreneurship course for value-added rural businesses) and the selection of innovative classroom experiences such as those reported in this paper.

Retail Center Management Curriculum and Student Engagement

Students in the College of Food, Agriculture and Environmental Sciences may elect to register for ApEc 3821(Retail Center Management). This course was created in 1999 as the University of Minnesota adopted a semester format for all courses. The original market for this course was as a service course to the Dept of Horticulture which requested a course which would instruct students in the principles of retailing applied to garden centers. From its inception, the course involved aspects of retail management from textbooks such as Berman and Evans supplemented by very applied material such as “ Establishing and Operating a Garden Center-Cornell University”. As enrollment grew beyond the original student market, the course material was extended to value-added food products and ag. Input marketing. The most recent version of the class utilizes several applied supplemental materials from Iowa State(Leopold Center) and Michigan State University Innovation Centers.

As part of this curriculum, the applied nature of this course required that students be actively engaged in the monitoring of retail business initial startups or expansions. Student interview both retail and merchandise managers at different parts of the course. This engagement activity takes students into the outside community and helps to forge relationships with industry personell. Another part of the course is a group project which consists of relocating or establishing new retail business ventures. This semester the project assignments allow the students to select either the development of a satellite locations for Mickman Brothers Garden Center or to establish a new, upscale convenience store

which will compete with Trader Joe's franchises. Research has shown that each of these activities are supported by market research. Last year, the project centered on the development of a limited line food business to replace a supermarket that has closed in North St. Paul.

North St Paul Project- 2007

The specific focus of this paper is to report on the successes in terms of student engagement gained from the North St. Paul project. This project began with an inquiry by Rand Park associated with the Retail Food Center at the University of Minnesota which dealt with the possibility of involving students in a community-based retail project to replace a grocery store that has recently been closed. The possibility of incorporating this project as a component of the Retail Center Mg't course was explored during the early part of the spring semester. Once the decision to assign this project to students was made, the remainder of the case studies were replaced by weekly assignments related to this project. The city manager and a potential investor were invited to the class sessions in the middle of the semester who gave the charge to student teams. Several handouts of the possible locations and other community materials were given to each of the six student teams. These are included as attachments to this paper. Student teams made several trips to North St. Paul interview people in the community as to their willingness to support different types of food –related businesses. During the ensuing class sessions , collaboration continued with community leaders and other people. The instructor provided community demographics and economic base studies including spatial mapping exercises. Students use the Claritas database to detail the psychographic segments in North St. Paul. Interviews of consumers were undertaken by the student teams. These interviews were intercept and telephone related.

The culmination of the project was the presentation of proposals for the new business to the city manager and other community leaders during the last two weeks of class. Different proposals were made by each of the groups. One group suggested an upscale bakery with ethnic foods would serve the needs of not only North St Paul residents ,but also would attract others to the community. Other groups presented similar ideas from pharmacy to meat markets as an attractor to satisfy community needs. The instructor taped these presentations and made them available to members of the North St Paul community.

Lab Sessions Recame Work Sessions for Student Projects

In the laboratory sessions connected to ApEc 3821, the student teams met to plan the next week's activities. Groups were free to stay in class or leave to perform surveys. Initially, the students met as small groups in class. Subsequent sessions involved travel to North St.Paul and completion of student objectives. As the inquiry proceeded, the path of leadership passed between different students as the investigative needs changed. As part of the final evaluation, questions were asked relative to the leadership roles played by students. Students were asked to rate the contribution of team members. The responses were generally positive. A minimum of free riding was detected as the student teams motivated others to complete the needed tasks. The cooperation of the city of North St Paul was outstanding in that all information they compiled was made available to students as part of their deliberations. Laptop computers complete with internet access permitted work to be accomplished.

Results of the Retail Project-Student Engagement

In the final analysis, it was apparent that this activity supports objectives in the area of civic and community engagement by connecting students with community leaders as well as providing a directly – related student learning community consisting of the student teams. In the final course evaluation, students were asked to rate the value of this project. The response indicated the experience was high value to the student, including one student who was from North St. Paul. A letter from the City Manager indicated that the research by student team was invaluable in attracting a new food business (See appendix). Many of the student insights had been overlooked previously. Appendices show these evaluations. In summary, it appears that this project assisted in meeting several aspects of fulfillment of student engagement. These are in the areas of active and collaborative learning ; collaboration with both internal and external contacts; and partnership development with community partners. The results suggest the value of continuing this type of experience.

Postscript to 2008 Engagement Activities

The 2008 version of this project is progressing well. A new location for an upscale convenience store is being researched and a new satellite location for Mickman’s Garden Center is being analyzed.

References

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Appendices

Subject: Public Engagement Project Feedback
From: "Wally Wysopal" <wally.wysopal@ci.north-saint-paul.mn.us>
Date: Wed, 30 Jan 2008 14:49:16 -0600
To: <rking@umn.edu>
CC: <nefst002@umn.edu>, "Scott Duddeck" <scott.duddeck@ci.north-saint-paul.mn.us>

Dear Mr. King-

I am writing to inform you about our experience with public engagement project in Ward Nefstead's class. The project was a site analysis for a grocery store in the City of North St. Paul. The class split up in groups and each provided an analysis and recommendation. We were very pleased with the dedication the students put into the work and at the level of detail in their analysis. As a result we learned a great deal regarding the challenges for such a development. Much of this had to do with structural issues in the market. So, we are proceeding patiently. Additionally, we learned about the need to build on the existing culture and values of our community. This information came directly from the on site surveys. We still hear from residents about the student surveys that were conducted.

Although we have not been able to land a store we are much better versed in the issues at hand. We may call on you again for some help as resources for communities like ours are very limited but the need for grocery stores in small urban areas is increasing as transportation gets more expensive. Finally, I wish to convey our appreciation for Ward's the willingness to help us and to do it so quickly. We came to him via Rand Park and it was already into the semester. He saw the value in our request and supported it wholeheartedly.

If we can be of any further service to you, please let us know.
Sincerely,

Wally

Walter T. Wysopal
City Manager
2400 Margaret Street
North Saint Paul, MN 55109
651-747-2421

Keindel's Korner-North St. Paul

Location 7th Avenue E & Charles St. N., North St. Paul, MN (Ramsey County)

Total SF Approx: 50,000sf
 1st Floor: Retail (Ste 100) 7,015sf
 Retail (Ste 120 w/drive up window) 3,920sf
 Retail (Ste 110) 2,200sf
 Warehouse 1,435sf
 2nd Floor & 3rd Floors: up to 16,000sf of office space available. Minimum 800sf

Parcel Size 1.09 Acres

Usage Type/Zoning Office/Retail

Base Rent Between \$14.00-\$16.00/sf
 *\$15/sf Tenant improvement allowance

Estimated Taxes \$1.25/sf

Est. Association Dues \$2.25/sf

Parking \$8 off street spaces and plenty of on street parking

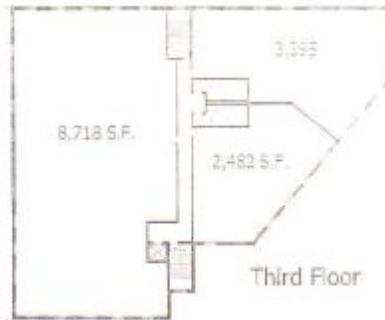
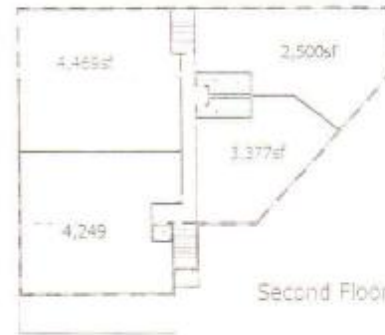
Floor to Floor Height 1st Floor-12' Floor to Floor
 2nd/3rd Floors 11' Floor to Floor

Demographics	1 Mile	3 Mile	5 Mile
Population	11,348	70,708	182,920
Employment Pop.	4,052	27,803	59,754
Avg. HH Income	\$8,425	64,331	60,411

Traffic Counts 7th Avenue 5,550
 Hwy 36 & Charles St. 39,000

Contact J. Kou Vang 651.294.3505 Or Steve Hardie 651.294.3506
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