Service-Learning in a Public Relations Campaign Class: How Contingency Management Supports Positive Outcomes

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This paper examines how applying a contingency management approach to service-learning projects in public relations courses can illustrate effective pedagogy. First the authors examine Drake's (2000) four components of service-learning and why public relations courses are a natural fit for this form of teaching, as using a contingency approach ranging from accommodation to advocacy is one approach to the practice of PR itself. Next the "reality" of service-learning is discussed, with observations drawn from other scholars and the authors' own experiences that provide insight on how applying a contingency approach can enhance learning outcomes.

Keywords: Contingency management, service-learning, public relations, mass communication.

After teaching service-learning classes for several years, we have discovered when students and clients pose questions to us about the quality and quantity of work, or what kind of learning will take place, the only appropriate response is, "It depends." This response is akin to the Contingency Theory of Organizational Communication, which stresses that the appropriateness of any given motivational methodology and management communication is contingent on the situation (Shockley-Zalabak, 2012). When it comes to organizing and motivating student teams and their service-learning projects, one size does not fit all. Indeed, why should it? Cancel, Cameron, Sallot, and Mitrook (1997) argue for a contingency approach, based on a continuum from advocacy to accommodation, to the practice of public relations itself. This paper demonstrates the appropriateness of applying a contingency approach to the management of a capstone public relations service-learning class and to the relationship between the class and one of its clients, a nonprofit hospital.

As Butin (2010) asserts, "There is no one thing called service-learning" (p. xiii). Butin says by:

> acknowledging the multiple, divergent, and often contradictory modes by which we do service-learning in higher education, what we can truly say is that there is no singular, unitary or obvious model by which service-learning is or should be done. This move—of undercutting the surety of our practices—lays bare that the theory of service-learning is actually a set of theories contingent on the embodied and experiential character of the service-learning experience. (p. xiii)

We believe professors who recognize that the success or failure of service-learning is contingent upon how they respond to the numerous factors beyond their control, should be able to sleep better at night than their counterparts who do not recognize or practice a contingency approach. Students may or may not learn the skills they want while performing a service to a client. A project may or may not successfully reach its goals. It depends.

This paper makes the case that applying a contingency management approach to service-learning classes helps ensure that, even if a project's goals are not reached for whatever reason (students and clients fail to communicate well; goals and objectives are unrealistic, etc.), students can still learn a great deal about themselves, their motivations, and agency/client relationships.

Appropriateness of Service-Learning to Public Relations Pedagogy

When John Dewey first published *Democracy and Education* in 1916, knitting together the value of experience to learning, the field of public relations as an academic discipline was not yet recognized. Today, the appropriateness of public relations courses for service-learning projects has been well documented (Oster-Aaland, Sellnow, Nelson, & Pearson, 2004; Patterson, 2004; Witmer, Silverman, & Gaschen, 2008). A 2002 study by Panici and Laksy found public relations courses were among the most likely to include service-learning (as cited in Werder & Strand, 2011).

A 2006 Commission on Public Relations Education report spelled out the need for pre-professional practice (Turk, 2006). While both service-learning and internships can meet this need, Allison (2008) says the processes involved in service-learning—team interaction and productivity, working in tandem with the community partner, establishing measurable PR objectives and strategies—gives service-learning certain advantages. Service-learning allows students to exercise time management, negotiate tasks, and engage in persuasive communication and group accountabilities, all of which are vital competencies for PR practice.

As Gleason and Violette (2012) point out:

> There is much about the practice of public relations that is subjective. In fact, this is a common critique. However, this is far from a limitation, nor does it mean that everyone's opinion is equal. What makes a given public relations practitioner an effective counselor is the scholarship, expertise, and most important, experience to provide wise counsel to his or her clients. (p. 280)

Many scholars believe the public relations field has an edge in providing leadership in service-learning based on the discipline's emphasis on improving relationships among individuals and between organizations and their publics, including community relations (Muturi, An, & Mwangi, 2013).

Wood (2011) agrees with this natural fit:

> Public relations students must develop a service mentality to be good professionals, and, regardless of who employs them, public relations practitioners must learn how to meet the needs of clients. Service-learning helps students channel many of their natural instincts for helping others into productive work for the community. (p. 139)

Our experience is that clients, in general, recognize the unique contribution public relations can provide to an organization. "Our mission as health educators is to educate the community about health risk factors," one client said. "We know how to give seminars. We don't know the best way to create awareness about an event and to promote it among various media and audiences."

Along with meeting the needs of a client, PR students must learn to negotiate the expectations and demands of a client's publics. As argued by Cancel, Mitrook, and Cameron (1999), a number of factors influence the PR practitioner's practice of situating his or her organization's response to publics. Depending upon these factors, practitioners may be more advocative, backing and supporting the organization and its actions; or more accommodative, compromising and taking corrective action. Service-learning gives PR students direct experience with this sometimes-delicate balance as students attempt to situate their organization along the continuum of accommodation (Cancel et al., 1997).

Gleason and Violette (2012) support the notion that public relations practice is highly contextual. Unlike some disciplines, public relations practice is based on a relatively small number of general principles and practices. As Gleason and Violette (2012) explain, "it is the very generalizability of these principles that enables practitioners to apply them in a wide range of contexts in the service of a nearly endless variety of clients. The content may vary, but the process itself does not" (p. 280).

Gleason and Violette (2012) posit public relations campaign classes serving as a senior-level capstone class are particularly well-suited for service-learning according to the 10 standards in Honnet-Porter and Poulsen's often-cited report "Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning" (1989). According to these standards, a well-structured campaigns class ought to be able to (a) engage people in responsible and challenging actions for the common good; (b) provide structured opportunities for people to reflect critically on their experience; (c) articulate clear goals; (d) allow for those with needs to define those needs; (e) clarify responsibilities; (f) match service providers and service needs; (g) expect genuine commitment from all sides; (h) include training, supervision, and evaluation to meet goals; (i) ensure flexible and appropriate time commitments; and (j) commit to participation by and with a diverse population (Gleason & Violette, 2012, p. 282).

Finally, as Allison (2008) writes, a campaigns class serving as a capstone course that involves service-learning, "helps students synthesize knowledge and gain a critical 'skills set' in the key areas of research, problem analysis, strategic planning, audience segmentation, communication and messaging and measurable evaluation" (p. 50).

Contingency Theory and Public Relations

In 1997, Cancel et. al argued the need for the Contingency Theory of Accommodation for the practice of public relations. They reasoned that, "the practice of public relations is too complex, too fluid, and impinged by far too many variables" to fit the practice into a one-size-fits-all model (p. 32). Their newer approach proposed a contingency continuum for formulating public relations stances that range from advocacy to accommodation. The authors insisted that a public relations response had to be dependent upon numerous factors and specific conditions relative to the organization.

Since arguing for the contingency approach, researchers have identified and examined more than 80 variables impacting public relations decisions (Cancel et. al, 1997; Cancel et. al, 1999; Cameron, Cropp & Reber, 2000). Others have applied the contingency approach to public relations scenarios. Mitrook, Parish, and Seltzer demonstrated the movement along the contingency continuum in terms of the organization's approach toward its publics in a case study of the Orlando Magic's PR efforts for a new arena (2008). Prior to that, in 2001, Zhang, Qui, and Cameron applied the theory to the dispute between the U.S. and China over the collision of a U.S. Navy plane with a Chinese jet. They demonstrated how this case confirmed several of the variables that contingency theory identified as impacting the U.S. government's position on the matter. Applying the contingency approach in a different setting, Xie (2017) added to the body of work on contingency theory by applying it to a study of an international nonprofit, pointing out that most previous studies featured only "for-profit, American corporations" (p. 106). Our study adds to this application of contingency theory to the nonprofit sector, focusing on a public university as the setting for public relations consulting to a public hospital. In the context of managing organizations, Lawrence and Lorsch (as cited in Shockley-Zalabak, 2009, p. 79) defined contingency theory as "internal organizational operations contingent or dependent on external environmental needs and individual needs." In this paper, we argue that a contingency approach also can be applied to the management of a public relations campaigns class in a university setting.

Four Components of Service-Learning Applied to Public Relations Pedagogy

While public relations and service-learning certainly have strong potential to be well-suited for each other, success depends on many factors, some of which require a contingency-minded approach. To explore this idea, Drake's four components of service-learning—meaningful service to the community, a clear connection between course objectives and service activities, structured opportunities for reflection, and education for citizenship—offer a guide for how to build a public relations campaigns capstone course that recognizes the need for adapting to unforeseen challenges.

Drake's first component: Meaningful service to the community

In every community across America, much is needed to improve the lives of countless citizens who rank among the less fortunate. Typically, nonprofit organizations attempt to meet these needs. And typically, as Canada (2001) points out, many small and local nonprofits have neither the resources nor the personnel to perform the kind of research and planning necessary to implement effective communication campaigns.

Thus, the idea of assisting nonprofits in meaningful community service was a role the mass communication faculty at our institution, the University of North Carolina at Pembroke, embraced. For several years, we had worked with a regional hospital to help conduct educational outreach programs. We found that health care organizations such as a local or regional hospital offer good opportunities for public relations campaigns classes. First, most counties across America have at least one hospital. Second, most hospitals are nonprofit with limited resources, and thus receptive to student-generated assistance. Third, as Bowland, Hines-Martin, Edward, and Haleem (2015) point out:

> Federal agencies, such as the National Institutes of Health, have prioritized community-based research and increasingly moved toward funding studies that are both sustainable and make strong commitments to the dissemination of findings. Universities are being challenged to find ways to increase opportunities that provide mutual benefits for the university and community, with an emphasis on making lasting contributions to health care. (p. 20)

Our healthcare client needed help implementing community health education programs and asked our PR Campaigns class for assistance. The class is structured as an agency model, giving the students a 15-week immersion experience into the joys and tribulations of serving a client as a public relations agency.

The importance of proper orientation cannot be overemphasized. While this step may seem intuitive, a survey among public relations teachers who teach service-learning classes showed only 41.3% indicated that students "sometimes" receive an orientation or training program at their assigned community partner. Of those that reported some form of orientation, only 12% said the orientation took more than two hours (Witmer et al., 2008).

In our case, the client at first asked if our students could attend the same orientation sessions their non-clinical new employees receive. We quickly realized such a lengthy orientation would be implausible, placing the class in its first quandary requiring a contingency-minded approach. We were faced with accommodating our client and advocating for the students' needs. With coursework, jobs, and other commitments, the students could not reasonably attend the lengthy employee orientation.

In response, we considered a number of variables on the accommodation continuum, (Cancel et al., 1999) including management style (our own and of the hospital staff we work with), relationship characteristics, the feasibility of honoring the request, and the impact of our predisposition to altruism to accommodate the client. We wondered, were we more accommodating because the client was a nonprofit? That question is worth exploring beyond this paper, but we recognized that our client and the work the hospital does in the community is ever-present in the class's decision making. In the end, we settled on a modified four-hour orientation during which students received instruction on HIPAA regulations, professional conduct, and dress codes. At the completion of the orientation, our students received the same nametags with photo ID that every other employee received, signaling the value of students to the organization.

Drake's second component: Connecting learning objectives with activities

In considering learning objectives for a capstone class, it is useful to consider Ramaley's (2013) belief that an undergraduate education should foster two types of knowledge: (a) "broad and integrative knowledge pursued throughout the undergraduate years in ways that allow for integration across fields and application to real-world problems relevant to the student's interests," and (b) "specialized knowledge that demonstrates depth of knowledge in a chosen field as well as integrative skills and methods drawn from multiple fields and disciplines" (pp. 104-105).

Accordingly, the objectives of a public relations campaigns service-learning course, as in other disciplines, appear to be multiple. Some of the objectives appear relatively easy to reach; others are not.

For example, an easy-to-reach objective would be to give students an experience that allows them to practice and refine their skills. A more complex objective would be to give students an experience that increases their understanding of citizenship and an appreciation of how their discipline interrelates with other disciplines to create a better and more sensible world.

For certain, our students interact with people who are differently educated when they meet with clients. These interactions provide important learning opportunities. In the case of our regional healthcare provider, students may plan events with registered dietitians, exercise physiologists, health services administrators, nurses, editors, and journalists. Interacting with success requires students to practice theories of communication, psychology, and human behavior.

Indeed, as Wickersham (2015) points out, while the relationship between community partners and the academic institution is usually reciprocal, with students usually providing valuable service, community partners always provide educational opportunities. This fact, Wickersham adds, is why we in academia seek out partnerships in the first place.

Another important element of the interaction between our community client and our students is that partners want students to "consider the legacy of the partnership" (Tinkler, Tinkler, Hausman, and Tufo-Strouse, 2014, p. 141). From a public relations standpoint, this element speaks to the concept of building long-term relationships by focusing on activities that build trust. Indeed, ways to leave a legacy of trust is a critical component of PR pedagogy. As Strand (2014) points out, the field of public relations has long been at the forefront of assessing relationship outcomes. Such outcomes are enhanced when dialogic discourse occurs between publics and the organization, and in our case, between the client and campaigns class as well. The students are putting The Contingency Theory of Accommodation into practice on several levels. As students serving as PR practitioners during the class, they must determine the client's location along the continuum. Will they be closer to pure advocacy, pure accommodation, or somewhere in between? The students must also situate themselves along this continuum as individuals. When the client required the class to get flu vaccinations one semester, something never requested previously, the students had to decide how accommodating they would be. Some students struggled to balance the needs of the client to curb the spread of illnesses with their own personal beliefs. This real-world setting and its opportunities to practice dialogic discourse is one reason we value service-learning.

Part of the dialogic discourse that builds a legacy of trust involves practicing ethical behavior. Students confront ethical decisions and see how trust can be eroded with broken promises and missed deadlines. They have to consider how puffery in communication materials can undermine an ethical stance. Students learn that trust-building is not only a process between the client and the students. It is also a process between the client and the client's publics. In this regard, students must learn that they have a responsibility to avoid actions that could lead to public mistrust, including the use of exaggeration, deception, conflict of interests, and other unethical actions (Allison, 2008).

As an example of this, we were initially impressed one day when students proposed a clever slogan for their campaign. The students had even already printed out the slogan's design into its final form. Probing further, we discovered the slogan was a variant of one already being used by another company. When we asked students if they had contacted the company for permission, the students stated their erroneous belief that it is a printer's responsibility to check copyrights. The students were cavalier, saying, "If it wasn't okay for us to use it, the printer wouldn't have printed it."

This incident presented a learning opportunity to educate the students of their responsibility to follow copyright law and contact the company for permission or come up with a different slogan.

Drake's third component: Structured opportunities for reflection.

At our university, reflection takes place in the form of two exercises, one administered by the instructor and the other administered by the Office of Community and Civic Engagement. At the start of each semester, we ask students to write down what they know about public relations campaigns. Then at the end of the semester, the students read their original responses, write new ones, and reflect on changes, if any. In nearly all cases, the responses indicate learning has occurred. A few favorite comments from students include:

> "I learned that a campaign plan is not set in stone. It can change as easily as the wind blows or when a client changes his or her mind."
>
> "You learn that what a client wants is not necessarily the best option."
>
> "Working together as a team has taught me a lot about time management and teamwork."
>
> "In the beginning, I had no clue what a PR campaign was all about. When I hear the word 'campaign,' I think about trying to sway the opinion of people, and in a way, I guess our campaign could have done just that. I hope we were able to convince people to believe that a healthy lifestyle is important and should be something they strive to achieve. It was important that we used our events to 'show' people rather than just 'tell' people about healthy living."
>
> "I originally thought that this class would be about working with an organization to plan a big event. What I soon found out was that in a public relations campaign, you have to assume the identity of the company you represent. We weren't just coming up with ideas to pass along to a third party, but instead we were that party."

On an aggregate level, the university's Office for Community and Civic Engagement follows IRB protocols to survey students in all service-learning classes at the end of every academic year. This survey is designed to gauge the effectiveness of our service-learning educational programs.

An online, anonymous survey instrument using a five-point Likert Scale asks students to indicate their level of agreement with a series of statements related to the overall effectiveness of the service-learning project. These areas focused on:

- Connection between project and course material.
- Connection with future career goals.
- Enhancement of course learning objectives.
- Adequate training from faculty member and community partner site.
- Changes in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors in relation to diversity and civic engagement (Jacobs, 2016, p. 3).

In the most recent survey (2015- 2016), public relations majors comprised 13% of all respondents. Other respondent departments and majors were Business (8%), Education (38%), Natural Sciences (13%), Nursing (4%), Social Sciences (21%), and Undecided Majors (3%) (Jacobs, 2016, p. 5). The recent survey, like the year before, shows that while all students involved in service-learning at UNC Pembroke generally see benefits and are satisfied with the outcomes, public relations students are generally more satisfied with their service-learning experience than other departments. Why this is true is not clear, and the answer would require further study. We believe, however, that the client's ability to meet regularly with the class and to be a mentor played a major part.

In the 2014-2015 survey, approximately 90% of students from both public relations and other disciplines agreed with the statement, "I can make a difference in the community" (Jacobs, 2015, p. 8). In the 2015-2016 survey, 100% of PR students agreed, compared to 86% of students from other disciplines (Jacobs, 2016, p. 9). This response serves to support the notion that service-learning is an effective tool for enhancing a sense of responsible citizenship, as will be discussed in the following section

Drake's fourth component: Education for citizenship

Drake's fourth component—education for citizenship—has the potential to turn hands-on learning into transformative pedagogy that may have a lasting impact, not only on the individual, but also for society (Drake, 2000).

Public relations is a discipline that seeks to make an impact on the organization it serves and society in general. Though enhancing one's skills is a critical component of service-learning, a community-based learning partnership is at risk if students achieve their learning outcomes, but no impact is made on the community (Tryon, Slaughter, & Ross, 2015).

The notion of citizenship is one of the four benefits of service-learning that Werder and Strand (2011) assessed in a study of PR service-learning classes nationwide. Their study notes that although PR students perceive less experiential gain in citizenship than the other benefits, some appreciation of citizenship does occur, especially and not surprisingly among those who worked in nonprofit organizations as compared to those who worked for corporations. Werder and Strand (2011) conclude,
"This 'deficiency' in learning outcomes for the course may be overcome through more frequent class discussions related to how work on strategic communication campaigns builds citizenship. . . as well as more instructional emphasis on the role of public relations in society" (p. 483).

Werder and Strand's (2011) findings mirror another study in which students rank the career-enhancing benefits of service-learning such as "possible career connections" higher than the citizenship-enhancing attributes such as "a sense of social responsibility" (Oster-Aaland et al., 2004).

These findings lead to a larger question of how to define success and failure in public relations service-learning classes. Learning outcomes are clearly important, but how is impact in the community adequately assessed so that both learning and impact are considered as proper goals for public relations classes?

Applying the Contingency Theory to Foster Success

Drake's four components of service-learning and how a public relations campaigns class supports each one sounds good "on paper." The reality, however, is that asking students to practice the RPIE process of conducting a PR campaign in four stages—research, planning, implementation and evaluation—with a real client in a 15-week semester can either be enjoyable and rewarding or one filled with tribulation. It depends.

As noted earlier, the theory of contingency management teaches that management effectiveness is contingent, or dependent, upon the interplay between the application of management behaviors and specific situations (Shockley-Zalabak, 2012). In other words, how we manage a service-learning class one semester may be entirely different the following semester depending on client needs. In addition, different students with different behaviors means different group behaviors will emerge as well. As argued by Cancel et al. (1997), the practice of public relations cannot always be placed into a box that delineates the one correct way to handle a situation. It stands to reason that the management of a public relations campaigns class would also benefit from a contingency management approach. The students in the class enact a contingency approach during the semester in relation to their client and their client's publics, such as when they discover the need to revise the original tactics and strategies. As the flu shot example illustrates, it makes sense to extend this approach of public relations practice to the management of a public relations class.

Having a contingency mindset might also be called "having a backup plan." Such an approach allows plans and ideas to change quickly as necessary when one finds many assumptions are present. Oftentimes, first-time teachers of service-learning meeting new clients may be forced to make many assumptions about roles and responsibilities, time commitments, and motivations, not only among students, but with the client as well.

This was certainly the case when the first author began teaching PR campaigns as a service-learning course. The following discussion lists some of the assumptions made early on and the realities discovered after actually working with students and clients. The realities and lessons learned, coupled with the observations of others, support the efficacy of adopting a contingency approach to service-learning.

1. Assumption: Clients will give us necessary funding to conduct a campaign.

Reality: It depends on the client. Our healthcare client gave us the money we needed. Other clients do not always have a budget set aside for brochures, flyers, and other promotional materials.

Lessons learned & recommendations: Either find a client with monetary resources that can support the project, or secure resources in advance (internal grants, external grants, department coffers) for cash-strapped nonprofits. If you are a state-supported institution, you might find, as we did, that state funds for service-learning cannot be used to incentivize people to attend your client's event, e.g., cannot be used for food or to buy door prizes.

2. Assumption: Clients and teams will communicate regularly so both sides will know the expectations of the other. Along with this, clients will be available when our students need them.

Reality: Depending on the client, this assumption can be true or false. Before we partnered with our regional healthcare provider, we had other clients, and it was obvious with some that they simply had too many other obligations to make us high on their priority list, resulting in communication breakdowns between the client and the team. A contingency mindset sees this as an opportunity to teach students how to overcome frustrations and to assert their needs with the client, an important part of the dialogic discourse and advocacy/accommodation continuum previously discussed. As stated, honing client relationship skills is an important goal of a service-learning public relations class.

> Wood (2011) observes that:
> This is difficult for students who find that public relations is only one of many functions a client must manage, so the student's job is to make this function easier for the client. Students are initially miffed when their clients do not respond to their calls and emails with the same care and promptness they have become accustomed to receiving from their professors. Clients are busy people, and public relations is often not on the top of their "to-do" lists. (p. 142)

For clients such as our regional healthcare provider, who devote adequate time to the class, the ability to communicate clearly helps motivate students and produces a very rewarding experience. For example, one challenge in motivating PR students whose client wants an event planned and executed is the students' lack of comprehension of what such an event looks like. What, exactly is expected? This challenge can be overcome by bringing the students to an actual event similar to the one needed. For example, our healthcare client brought our students to a health education event they were holding at a national retail chain store. The students observed the staff interacting with and teaching the public about healthy diet options and taking blood pressures. Following that observation, the students felt motivated and able to replicate the event.

A significant communication issue arises for regional universities such as ours where many students are commuters and have part-time jobs. Because of this, the ability of team members to find common meeting times outside the class period is a problem that can stifle teamwork, motivation and ultimately, the success of the campaign. We advise team leaders to practice contingency management in this context. Team leaders must ask themselves how flexible they will be and how much they can accommodate team members. Pure accommodation, in a management sense, could potentially hurt the team if accommodating each member means the team does not meet enough. Additionally, as Mitchell (2009) points out, students need immediate feedback on their plans, strategies, press releases, and other materials from the instructor and client. They need regular meetings, feedback, and check-ins.

Technology can help solve this problem. Our teams have had success using Google Docs and Group Me. The students appreciate that we do not join them on Group Me, which makes sense if our purpose is to empower them to solve their own problems as much as possible.

Lessons learned & recommendations: With some clients, solving communication issues can exhaust students by taking a large portion of their time. This can be prevented if the client designates one point of contact for the team, and makes sure that person has enough time to devote to the campaign. We had one nonprofit client who told us students could contact the board chair if the director was not available. This sounded acceptable until we discovered the board chair and the director were not communicating well, and the students felt they had two bosses who were giving them mixed signals.

With new clients, the instructor and client should meet before the first class to discuss the means, methods, and expectations for communication among all parties. In the first class meeting with the students, the following questions could be discussed and agreed upon: how often and under what circumstances should communication take place? What technology will be used: texting, calling, email, Google Docs, Facebook Group, Dropbox, etc.?

Because timely and clear communication is vital to campaign success, a client who is accessible to the students when needed is worth keeping. Establishing a long-term relationship with such a client that carries over from semester to semester will create a more beneficial experience for the instructor and the students.

3. Assumption: One semester gives enough time for students to find their own clients, to perform adequate research (including the IRB process), to write a comprehensive communication plan, to implement the plan, and to evaluate the results.

Reality: We gave our students and ourselves too much credit in thinking it would be relatively easy and stress-free for us to apply classroom learning in real-life situations.

Lessons learned & recommendations: If you want your students to feel proud of their accomplishments and professionalism, then teach them doing one project exceptionally well is better than doing several projects half well. A semester does not allow enough time to do a good job of performing a large-scale project that requires IRB research and also to write the plan, implement it, and evaluate it. Therefore, choose either to (a) accept the fact that IRB research may not be feasible or, (b) devote one semester to research (IRB and secondary research) and to writing the plan. Devote a second semester to implementation and evaluation.

Others support the notion of a two-semester capstone class. Bergstrom and Bullis (1999) write about the integration of research and service-learning in a mass communication curriculum: “the institutionalization of service-learning in communication research and the early success of class projects have led to a surprising and exciting enhancement of the students’ research experience and the service they provide to the community” (p. 29).

In Bergstrom and Bullis’s example, students first worked with a nonprofit organization to conduct a needs-assessment survey as these related to fundraising messages and public relations. The following term, students in a public relations class used the research to plan a public relations campaign while students in a corporate video class used the research to produce a video for the organization. As a result, students were able to offer agency research services during one term and assistance in implementing the research findings in subsequent terms, thus providing a more comprehensive and lasting service to the community.

Texter and Smith (1999) outline two distinct approaches for service-learning in a campaigns class. One approach emphasizes the strategic planning process and the other focuses on specific events or communication needs. They suggest the instructor select only one approach for each semester.

These studies support the idea of performing research and planning in one semester followed by implementation and evaluation the next. An alternative approach that may accomplish the same result is to offer the campaigns class as two eight-week classes during the semester—the first 8 weeks devoted to research and planning, and the second eight weeks devoted to implementation and evaluation. In this case, students receive six hours of credit instead of three with reasonable time to perform the RPIE process in a more professional manner.

4. Assumption: If our students read the textbook and listen carefully to professor lectures they will be able to perform the research and planning stages well.

Reality: It depends on the quality of the teams. Regardless of great textbooks and outstanding lectures, some teams will still turn in work that needs a lot of revision.

Lessons learned & recommendations: Be realistic about the amount of time needed to ensure students are producing high quality work.

5. Assumption: Campaign goals and objectives will definitely be met.

Reality: This assumption is true only if the campaign is a critically important component of the client’s operational plan. If that is the case, interpersonal and group behavioral problems that accompany high stress levels will likely occur. Furthermore, unless every one of the students in the class are exceptionally bright, talented, and motivated, which is rarely the case, the instructor will likely feel the need to perform the student's work to "get it right." In such a situation, the students are not learning; rather, the professor is doing.

Lessons learned & recommendations: Work with the client to choose a campaign that is not critical to the client's overall success, i.e., if students fail to meet the campaign's goals and objectives, no great harm comes to the client. Reaching agreement with the client that such a campaign is relatively low-risk helps build trust and can avoid weakening a relationship if the campaign is less than stellar. Typically, we will plan a community health education event and set attendance goals. If attendance is less than the goal, the students can evaluate why their goal was not met and make recommendations for the future without seriously affecting the client's operations.

This recommendation allows instructors to adapt a mentoring style to facilitate active learning. As Allison (2008) says, instructors may feel a sense of tension between controlling course direction and empowering students and client to "self-direct the learning process" (p. 56). Choosing a lower-risk campaign eases this tension, and if campaign objectives are not reached, students nevertheless may learn a great deal. They can still earn decent marks in the class if it is evident they learned from their mistakes.

6. Assumption: Team leaders will naturally arise who take their responsibilities seriously, report any problems to the professor, and be able to solve interpersonal conflicts within their groups so that team productivity remains high.

Reality: Some teams have strong, capable leaders, and some do not. Some team captains have a commanding presence appreciated and respected by the other members, and some do not. Sometimes a team leader will take the position reluctantly because no one else will. Even though the students are seniors who studied leadership and conflict resolution in organizational communication classes, they may allow interpersonal conflicts to go unresolved. Such conflicts may require the instructor's intervention. Expect that natural born leaders will be rare.

Lessons learned & recommendations: Every semester, we find challenge and enjoyment thanks to the diverse behaviors that exist among the teams. Despite challenges, the team structure is beneficial because working in groups provides for "maximum task efficiency and effectiveness" (Shockley-Zalabak, 2012, p. 186). The unique behavior of each team requires a contingency management style, both on the part of the team leader and the instructor. Some teams encounter very few problems—they get along with each other effortlessly and exhibit positive teamwork. This may be in part due to the team's recognition that doing well on a PR campaign for class benefits them individually with semester grades, and also in terms of gaining work experience and making potential job connections. As Shockley-Zalabak (2012) states:

> Generally speaking, we are more comfortable in groups when the group goals and our individual goals are compatible. When our personal needs are met, we are more likely to attempt to meet the needs of others and to exhibit cohesive behavior within the group. The more positive we feel about our personal communication competencies, the better able we are to work in groups successfully. (pp. 199-200)

Students in such groups meet their deadlines and communicate well with the client. With such teams, minimal supervision is required.

Other teams have interpersonal conflicts, which can be expressed overtly or in passive-aggressive behavior. They do not communicate well. They miss deadlines, and they do not seem to care very much. With these teams, the instructor must be a micro-manager.

Still other teams may have chosen the wrong team leader. A contingency approach with these teams would assess the team leader's abilities and be prepared to change team captains midstream, if necessary.

7. Assumption: Students will appreciate the opportunity of working in a team and performing work for a real client. Accordingly, they will be naturally motivated to work hard.

Reality: Students may or may not appreciate this opportunity of working with a real client that can give them resume-building experience. Some will be fully engaged and appreciate the experience, and some will not. Those who are fully engaged will find the experience meaningful and rewarding.

Students who are unmotivated may not be lazy. Such students may prefer courses that progress predictably and neatly. They can become unsettled by a service-learning course that requires fluid thinking and a contingency mindset. If that happens, such students may become withdrawn and lose motivation (Wood, 2011).

Lessons learned & recommendations: The issue of student motivation is complex. One study concludes that students who have prior volunteer experience and have reflected on that experience are more motivated to embrace service-learning and to have a positive experience. These students appreciate a professor who facilitates reflection and discussion rather than one who primarily lectures. As such, the students' cognitive abilities and reasoning skills are stronger than students who have had no prior volunteer experience (Stelljes, 2008).

Further, as Muturi et al. (2013) point out, Maslow's hierarchy of human needs emphasizes egoism in which people are motivated by unmet needs. A study by Astin and Sax recorded that 67% of students who participated in volunteer activities did so "to feel personal satisfaction" (as cited in Muturi et al., 2013).

These studies lead us to conclude that requiring students to perform community service in lower level courses and/or an internship prior to the campaigns class may improve overall student motivation.

Many public relations students are extroverts who enjoy belonging to clubs or sororities and fraternities. We observed that students who have volunteered to serve as officers in such organizations usually enjoy service-learning teamwork and eagerly assume leadership of the campaigns team more than their counterparts who do not participate in extracurricular activities.

8. Assumption: Students will be more motivated if they find their own cause and client.

Reality: This assumption makes intuitive sense. As Wood (2011) points out, "that's the thing all professionals are striving for – to advocate for something they can believe in" (p. 144). Accordingly, during the first author's initial year of teaching service-learning, students were asked to find their own client with a cause that interested them. It was quickly evident that such a process takes too much valuable time, and students do not have the experience to assess the likelihood of a successful relationship.

Lessons learned & recommendations: We find it is more efficient and effective for our Office of Community and Civic Engagement to provide us with potential clients. Having experienced episodes of client-student misunderstandings, lack of communication, indecision, and bureaucratic malaise, we are in a better position than students to screen and judge whether the organization and its needs will be a good fit for the class.

9. Assumption: Teaching a service-learning class takes about as much time as any other class.

Reality: This assumption can be true or false. It depends on the client, the motivation of the students, the complexity of the campaign, and the ability of the instructor to become comfortable with contingency management practices and results.

Lessons learned and recommendations: A study of public relations faculty teaching service-learning found time management to be one of the biggest challenges reported. One respondent called service-learning "an enormous time suck" (Witmer et al., 2008, p. 19). We have seen this when the class has unmotivated students, or a less-than-ideal community partner who expects more than is possible from student work in 10-15 weeks, or does not have time to meet with the students as needed.

But here is another reason service-learning can be a "time-suck." Since most small, nonprofit clients do not have a PR staff, they often expect too high a level of public relations expertise from students. "That scares students half to death—to realize that they actually know more than the people they're working for, and they don't expect that" (Witmer et al., 2008, p. 22). As a result, the students may demand a lot of guidance time from the instructor.

Rogers and Andrews (2015) report many directors of nonprofit agencies who have neither a public relations background nor the resources to hire an agency are oftentimes unsure of what they need or want. In these instances, the instructor will necessarily take much more time to facilitate communication and assume a more active role as counsel. In contrast, students working with a client who is clear about needs would be more able to complete a market analysis and assessment with minimal direction from the instructor.

Finally, a service-learning class requires time for the instructor, as well as the students, to reflect on personal experiences and feelings. For example, was the relationship between the client and the instructor productive and helpful to all parties? How much advocating on behalf of the students to the client did the instructor need to perform? Did the contingency management approach produce a successful learning outcome? In what ways and how? On the continuum of advocacy versus accommodation, did the instructor accommodate the students' needs sufficiently and advocate for them at the expense of the client? Or vice versa?

Developing a teaching position with a contingency management approach to service-learning can produce successful outcomes that evolve over time, as missteps or miscalculations are accounted for with redesigned strategies. Our experience is that it often takes several semesters of trial and error to become adept and comfortable at compromising with clients to find an appropriate response when seeking to advocate or accommodate on behalf of the client to students or on behalf of the students to the client.

Because of the likelihood of experiencing such problems, some scholars argue if service-learning classes such as a public relations campaigns class are to be sustainable, university administrators are going to need to play a big role in rewarding it. These scholars suggest that such reward options could include a course release, and heavier weight for promotion and tenure (Muturi et al., 2013; Witmer et al., 2008).

Limitations and Areas for Further Study

This article pulls insights from a PR campaigns course at one small public university in the Southeastern United States. Further studies of applying contingency management to campaigns courses at larger universities with varying class sizes may yield different insights and results. Additionally, this campaigns course works primarily with a nonprofit hospital client. Would such an approach work equally as well with a for-profit client where altruism may be a missing factor?

Looking forward, we see one area ripe for further study, namely citizenship development. PR courses and campaigns may not forefront society's needs as much as the client's. What readings, activities, and programs might bolster the civic function of PR? We saw from student reflections that this is an area in need of attention and study. Given that the university's Office of Community and Civic Engagement assesses citizenship development, we believe it could be beneficial to provide instruction and then to ask PR students to reflect on how a PR campaign informs their ideas about citizenship and cultural awareness.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the applicability of service-learning to public relations pedagogy, particularly as it applies to a PR campaigns capstone class. Using Drake's four components of service-learning, the literature strongly demonstrates a campaigns class is a logical and natural fit for service-learning.

Numerous scholars, however, point to the inherent challenges associated with such an endeavor. For example, finding the right kind of client – one who has the resources and time to devote to the students and who has an appropriate "low-risk" project—is not easy and is often a matter of timing and luck. Likewise, having teams that naturally communicate well together and in which all members are motivated to work hard will sometimes happen and sometimes not.

Those instructors who conduct their classes based on a contingency management approach—one in which an adaptable mindset can generate appropriate, unique responses to different, uncontrollable situations—should realize more successful outcomes than those who do not. Such a mindset may lead one to conclude that opportunities exist to strengthen the pedagogy for service-learning public relations campaigns classes—allowing more time for the RPIE process by making the course two semesters or two 8-weeks classes, for example. Finally, if PR students are to realize the advantages of a liberal arts education as opposed to a trade school, then instructors must place as much emphasis on citizenship and social justice as they do on skills development.

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