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THE COMMUNITY AS OUR CLASSROOM: STUDENT FEEDBACK ON COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING EXERCISES

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Business faculty have often shied away from “service learning” activities, commenting on “what’s serving soup in a kitchen have to do with (fill in the blank course topic)?” The reaction is understandable: if faculty do not see the connection between activities students are asked to do and the course material then the students certainly won’t see it. Given the myriad of experiential educational options available to educators to enhance the classroom environment professors do not have to feel locked in to one pedagogical method or another. In the classes examined in this study, faculty and staff of a college in the Western states have chosen Community-Based Learning activities as a way to help students not only connect what they are learning in the textbook with “real life,” but also to allow them time to reflect on themes of justice, equity, and ethics. This study examines the effectiveness of the Community-Based Learning to provide greater understanding of how it is implemented at one university, and to contribute to the body of knowledge to provide faculty interested in pursuing similar experiential learning opportunities. This paper discusses the Community-Based Learning model followed in the classroom as well as how the learning experience is operationalized. The paper then reveals results of a two semester survey with regard to what students gain from the experience, the benefits they derive and advice other educators can use to implement similar projects in their own classrooms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The terms Service Learning (SL) and Community-Based Learning (CBL) are frequently debated, both in regard to name and meaning (Furco, 1996, p. 9; Eyler & Giles, 1999, p. 3; Mooney & Edwards, 2001, 181; Crews, 2002, p. vii). Service Learning Centers can vary dramatically from

college to college, each with its own strengths, staff constraints, and resources. For purposes of this paper, the definition of terms describes how they are used at the university studied. It is not the intent of this study to propose definitive conceptualizations of SL and CBL, but rather to be clear in understanding curricular inclusion and student development as studied by the authors.

Comparison of Experiential Learning Activities

	Community Service	Academic Learning	Education for Justice
Volunteerism	Yes	Not Required	Not Required
Internship	Yes	Yes	Not Required
Service Learning (Can also include Client-based projects.)	Yes	Yes	Yes
Community-Based Learning	No, but community experience	Yes	Yes

(Cope, D., Regional presentation, National Society for Experiential Learning, May 2006)

Standing within Catholic and Jesuit traditions, SL and CBL at the university studied are specific in terms of their intended outcomes and principle focus. With SL and CBL, the goal therefore, is not simply to experience and gain a deeper understanding of the voices of the marginalized in society, but rather are aligned to the university’s mission to learn about and gain the tools through which the inequitable systems and structures of society can be challenged and changed. They also serve to connect the dots between what the students are learning in the classroom and what is happening in the community.

Service Learning, at the authors’ university, is different from Community-Based Learning. Typically, Service Learning

refers to getting students out of the classroom and into the community to achieve established learning goals by leveraging community assets to meet expressed community needs. Courses that integrate SL also offer opportunities for reflection and critical analysis in the classroom. This reflection may result in further activities either on or off-campus. Specifically, SL at the authors’ university manifests itself off campus in four different ways:

- Direct Service Placements – students work directly with community members in need so as to develop relationships and gain a deeper understanding of the individual and systemic reasons for these needs.

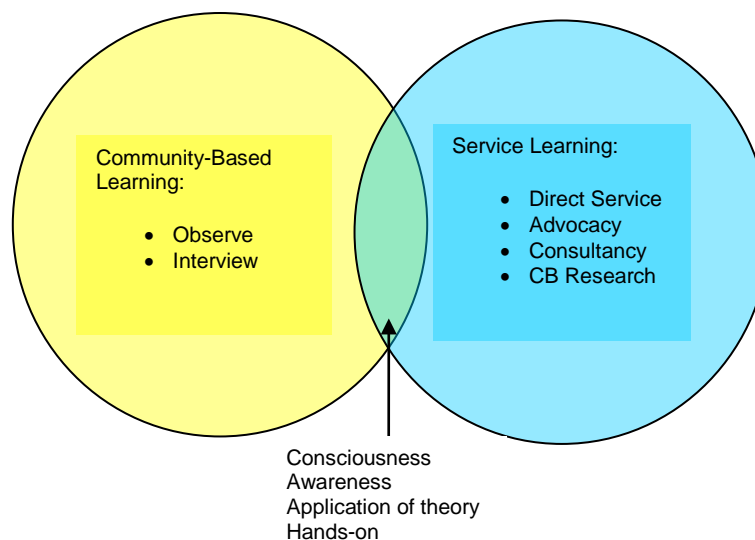
Structured class reflection is a deep part of this process.
Example: College students mentor/tutor children at risk of gang involvement.

- Community-Based Research – students serve as researchers for agencies that need assistance with activities such as evaluation, or needs assessment. Example: College chemistry students test soil, water, and emissions in a largely immigrant neighborhood to examine issues of environmental racism.
- Organizational Consultancy – students serve as consultants to community agencies, building

organizational capacity through meeting needs such as information technology, strategic planning, marketing, volunteer management, or grant writing. An example: Client-based service learning projects fall within this category.

- Advocacy –students examine social inequities, either locally or globally. Then, based upon these studies, students take action to become allies of marginalized populations. Example: students visit with local legislators to share their concerns about homelessness and to collaborate to seek a community solution.

Comparison between Community-Based Learning and Service Learning

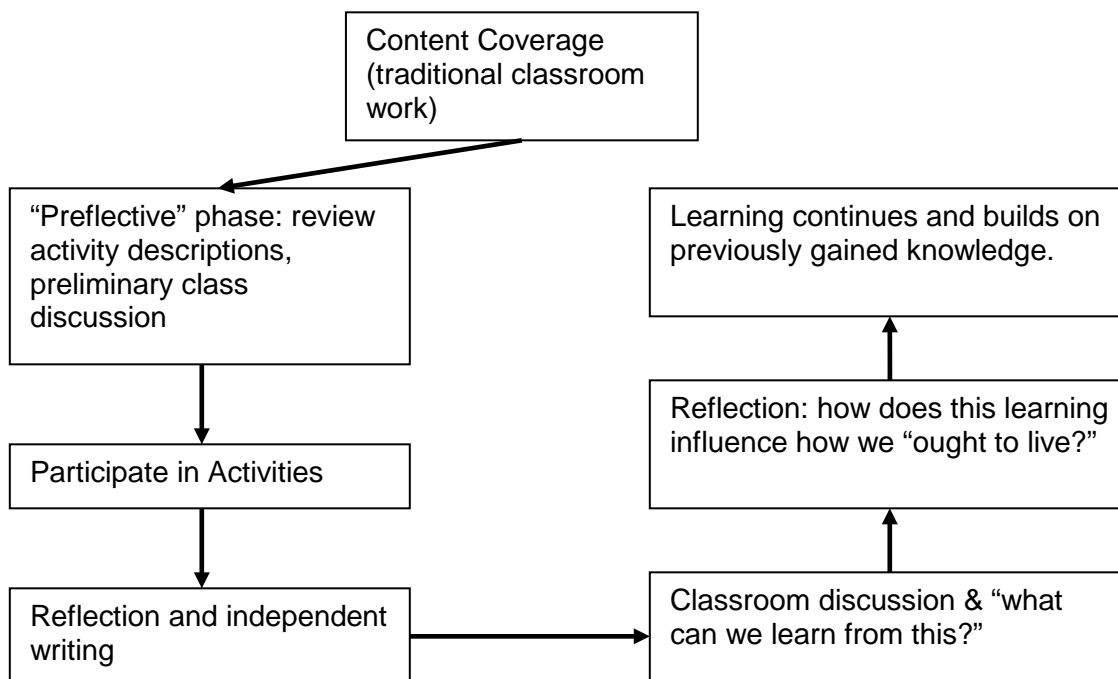


The term Community-Based Learning refers to education that incorporates experiential assignments intended to ground student learning in the context and content of what they encounter in particular community settings. This type of education aims to intensify student learning in a particular content area. These assignments generally focus around conducting observations, interviews, or surveys in the local community and then reflecting deeply on their process and outcome. Shor (1994) refers to it as a type of:

... empowering education ... (CBL) ... adapts the subject matter and learning process to the students so as to develop critical dimensions missing from their knowledge and speech ... to marry critical

thought to everyday life by examining daily themes, social issues, and academic lore (p. 44).

CBL assignments, in conjunction with appropriate reflection prior to undertaking the activities, or what some researchers call “preflective” and reflective questioning, strive to transform the consciousness of student, fellow learners, and faculty alike, encouraging learners to first undergo self transformation before they step out to ‘change the world.’ Properly implemented, CBL allows for introspection, self-awareness, and personal responsibility, impacting learners’ beliefs, attitudes, and ultimately, behaviors. Dewey (1963) stated reflective components are key to this process, as “understand[ing] the significance of what we see, hear, and touch” is vital to learning (p. 68).

Descriptive Community-Based Learning Model

Rather than the sometimes self-commending attitude that more charity-based service learning can at times evoke in students, CBL directly impels students to explore and perhaps challenge elements of the dominant culture that they might otherwise take for granted, while also perceiving their own complex location within systems of power and privilege. This type of learning does not so much offer a service to the community which is why staff and faculty at the authors' university do not choose to use the term service learning; the 'service' to community in CBL comes through raising the social consciousness of the learner, hence hopefully changing the way that s/he engages in the world for the better.

When faculty are interested in engaging learning outside of the classroom, whether SL or CBL is more appropriate always depends upon the faculty's specific learning goals as well as the particular commitment the faculty is able to make to the community. Student experience in the community, level of maturity, and year in school are also important to consider when making this decision. Whereas SL opportunities generally offer more of an opportunity to build relationship and to focus on one topic in-depth, CBL assignments are more ideal for survey-type or introductory level courses that aim to provide students with a greater breadth of topics and that aim to develop creative, critical, and socially justice-focused thinking. CBL exercises also provide a strong foundation for students who may later undertake more in-depth SL projects in future classes (Mooney & Edwards, 2001, p. 190).

This type of learning is not neutral and does indeed carry with it a bent toward a social justice education for the whole person. Just as Jakubowski (2003) claims involvement as the most effective strategy she's seen "for engaging students in a process of teaching and learning about diversity and social justice" (p. 24) so do we, in the Jesuit tradition, agree. Through merging cognitive, experiential, and effective learning in SL and CBL, universities and colleges can recognize:

Tomorrow's "whole person" cannot be whole without an educated awareness of society and culture with which to contribute socially, generously, in the real world. Tomorrow's whole person must have, in brief, a well-educated solidarity ... When the heart is touched by direct experience, the mind may be challenged to change. Personal involvement with innocent suffering, with the injustice others suffer, is the catalyst for solidarity which then gives rise to intellectual inquiry and moral reflection (Kolvenbach, 2000, p. 8).

Student Perceptions/Concepts/Self-Efficacy

Kolb (1984) states that learning is the process of creating knowledge from experience and is based on six principles:

Learning is a process, not an outcome; derives from experience; requires an individual to resolve dialectically opposed demands; is holistic and

integrative; requires interplay between a person and environment; and results in knowledge creation (p. 25-38).

The literature revealed that self-concept, the perception one has of him/herself, was a foundation for learning. Shavelson and Bolus (1982) stated that achievement was correlated to self-concept. Three characteristics of self-concept and achievement were also supported: self-ascribed epistemic authority, a person's perception of his or her knowledge in a specific topic (Ellis & Kruglanski, 1992); self-efficacy, a measure of self-perception, the belief that one has the ability and/or skills to complete a task (Erikson, 2003); and outcome expectancy, that completing a given activity will take a person one step closer to their desired outcome (Stone & Bailey, 2007).

Ellis and Kruglanski further stated that a person's self-ascribed epistemic authority influences that person's success relative to experiential activities. For example, the higher one's self-ascribed authority, the better one responded to the experiential learning activities. Further, Ellis and Kruglanski stated that positive affirmation and coaching contributed to a person's self efficacy, including when a person demonstrated mastery of certain types of tasks, observing the modeled behavior of other successful individuals and hearing from others, preferably persons in authority (ie: the professor or instructor). A case could be made that equally educational would be observation of unsuccessful individuals to learn from the execution of their ideas and plans to those concepts are identified and not replicated in one's own efforts.

As self-efficacy is heavily influenced and developed through one's personal experience, the design and implementation of Community-Based Learning projects may be foundational for a person's career as a driver of one's determination to succeed, and coloring one's hopes for future results. For example, if a student believes he or she has the ability to write a marketing plan (self-ascribed authority) and has seen how others write marketing plans and has been told by a trusted professor that he or she has the talent to be a great marketer (self-efficacy) certainly the student will perceive that they have the ability to be successful in the final marketing class assignment (outcome expectancy.)

Assessment

Eastman and Allen (1999) defined assessment as "any regular and systematic process by which a program faculty designs, implements, and uses valid data gathering techniques for determining program effectiveness and making decisions about program conduct and improvement" (p. 7). At the micro-level, assessment determines if a student has learned, and to what degree he or she has mastered, specific knowledge and skills. At a mid-level, assessment evaluates the faculty member and the choices he or she has made in designing the course to accomplish course

objectives and goals, including their use of experiential learning. At the macro-level, assessment evaluates if a business school or marketing program is meeting the recommendations of such governing bodies as AACSB to not only reinforce program content knowledge but to find ways of actively engaging the student in his or her own learning journey/experience.

The movement to outcomes assessment has pressured faculty to measure if learning is taking place and what learning has been accomplished.

Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive learning is recognized as a foundation for the sequence of knowledge acquisition (Bloom, 1956). It moves through a series of levels of learning from recall, to comprehension, application, analysis, and synthesis before finally reaching evaluation. The historic definition of learning as rote memorization, the classroom of yesteryear (and still found today) with an instructor centered lecture as the sole source of information limits itself to the lowest level of Bloom's Taxonomy. The modern, more instructional paradigm proposes that learning be active and student centered. Hernandez (2002), states this methodology shifts not only the responsibility for the source of information from being solely the instructor's responsibility to the students, it expands the scope of learning from a whole host of sources, one of whom is the instructor. This migration from passive to active learning environments further supports the move to a more "experientially based" classroom.

Standards, guidelines, and recommendations of the Association of Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) further support this line of progression through its accreditation requirements that encourage faculty to find new ways of engaging students to be actively involved in their own learning, as opposed to seeing learning that is something that is done "to" them. Further the AACSB (2003) states: "Faculty members should find such approaches that are suited to their subject matter and should adopt active learning methodologies" (p.52).

While information may be provided in a classroom lecture, true learning follows the public relations adage, "Perception is reality." Barnett and Bascher (2005) contend that while a student's interpretation of what they have learned may be quite different from that of the instructor's, it is no less important, and can provide insight into the student's learning process. A student's perception of not only what has been learned, but the relevance, importance and improvement in self-efficacy/outcome expectancy can drastically color his or her interpretation of whether real learning and growth has taken place.

Young, Klemz, and Murphy (2003) noted there are many ways to measure the accomplishment of learning outcomes. However, they defined learning performance as the "students' self-assessment of their overall knowledge gained, their skills and abilities developed, and the effort they expended in a particular class relative to other classes." (p. 131) With regard to this study, learning performance will

be operationalized through benefits, skills, career preparation, and marketing content reinforcement, measured in 5-point scales, anchored by strongly disagree and strongly agree, which is a modification of a performance scale used by Young, Klemz and Murphy.

WORKING TOGETHER: FACULTY & STAFF

A partnership between the faculty member in the classroom and the service learning staff is critical to the success of such an endeavor. The partnership can be a creative collaboration, springboarding a number of ideas, access to resources, and connections to community resources that any individual working independently would not develop. Being able to provide students a myriad of activity choices – accommodating those who may be campus-bound, time-hampered, or vehicle challenged – allows students to “own” their experiences, and yet at the same time not be at a disadvantage to those who may have more resources than others.

To be successful, faculty and staff share ideas regarding objectives, activities, key themes to highlight, and how the activity will be placed in the curriculum.

The process typically involves:

- Conceptualization/Creation: Activities such as meeting with faculty/staff, researching options, creating options, and setting goals
- Implementation: Completing the activities
- Reflection: Connecting the dots and critical analysis of the activities, “What does this mean to me?”
- Evaluation of the project. Staff typically survey students to assess the strengths of the effort and to determine how to improve the project for subsequent courses.

Classroom Operations

Over the course of the 15-week semester, students were asked to complete one CBL exercise from five of six unit areas that directly correlated to themes presented in their textbook. A variety of CBL options were available in each of the six areas, giving students a breadth of opportunities from which to choose in order to focus their learning. Copies of the CBL activity lists were provided in both the syllabus at the beginning of the semester and the instructor’s WebCT online classroom. For instance the focus of one of the six themes, Making Marketing Value Decisions, encouraged students to choose from exercises such as exploring the marketing of smoking and the effect of local smoking ban in restaurants and bars, researching a local socially or environmentally conscious product-oriented organization, or examining one’s own relationship toward consumerism through tracing one’s own consumptive activities over a two-week period.

Students were expected to reflect through dialog and writing on these exercises and to bring their learning into class discussions on a regular basis. Analytical reflection was vital to the success of this process because, as Mooney and Edwards (2001) and others stress, “the greater prevalence of structured reflection in service learning makes students more likely to apply critical thinking, synthesize information from classroom and community settings, and examine structural/institutional antecedents of social issues ...” (Eyler & Giles, 1999, p. 188).

METHODOLOGY

A survey tool was developed to determine what benefits, if any, students perceived to derive from the CBL activities. CBL projects were developed and included for the Marketing Management, Services Marketing, and Principles of Marketing classes. The survey was pre-tested for one semester and then was implemented for the 2006-2007, and 2007-2008 school years. The survey was comprised of 50 items, including questions about the project’s overall benefits, the skills students felt they developed as a result of the projects, career preparation benefits, and marketing content reinforced by the project. In addition to demographic data, students also answered a series of questions about paid work experience, volunteer work, and unpaid but career-related experience. For each section of questions, students rated their agreement/disagreement with a series of statements on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) with 3 being “neutral.” Students were also given an opportunity in most sections to provide open-ended feedback/commentary about the experience.

RESULTS

Reliability

Cronbach’s Alpha was used to determine the internal consistency of the survey instrument. The Cronbach’s Alpha result was .961, thus determining the survey instrument was reliable.

Demographics

The group was almost evenly split between males (45.9%) and females (36.6%), with the remainder choosing not to answer. With regards to ethnic diversity, the surveyed group was representative of the school’s student body in terms of ethnicity. According to school records 19% of the student body is of an ethnicity other than White/Caucasian. For the study, 2.9% self-identified as African American, 14.6% as Hispanic, 3.4% as Asian, 4.9% as “Other” and the remainder choosing not to answer the question. With regard to year in school, 35.1% of the students identified themselves as seniors, 46.8% as juniors, 4.4% as sophomores, and 2.9% did not answer the question. Students

wrote in their majors, thus allowing for multiple answers. Not surprisingly, the largest representations were marketing majors, representing 40%. Other significant groups were 12% communication arts majors and 12% double majors in marketing and management.

Work experience was high in this group of students.

- 73.2% of students responded they are or have been employed.
- While the average employment is 29 months, 18% reported a work history of more than 4 years.
- The range for number of hours worked is astonishing: 5-50 hours weekly; the class average much more in line with expectations (22 hours weekly).
- 21% of students reported working 30 or more hours weekly.
- 45.9% of replied the have worked in a non-paid situation such as an internship or volunteer experience.
- The average length of tenure in non-paid employment is significantly shorter, 9.6 months. However, 8.7% of the students report having worked in such positions for more than 24 months, and 3 % for more than 48 months. The range for number of hours worked is quite wide, 1-50 hours weekly with an average of 5.76, much as one might expect in an internship situation, for instance. However, 6% report working more than 20 hours weekly in such unpaid situations.
- 49.8% of students reported they have completed academic projects that have contributed to their skill sets.

The CBL project's purpose is to assist students to observe/identify and apply marketing theory in the community. The activity can also engage students in self-understanding/awareness, career exploration, and enhancing translatable skills as writing, research, and critical thinking skills that are important to any industry or career field the student may choose.

A t-test was performed to compare the means between the various independent variables (gender, work experience, volunteer experience and previous academic experiential activities) to determine if there were differences in how the two groups perceived general benefits, how each group improved their skills, career preparation or marketing content. For each combination of variables, no statistically significant differences were found.

Hypotheses

This study tested four hypotheses. Hypothesis 1 posed students in different marketing courses would experience the community based learning projects differently and therefore

have different benefits. MANOVA was conducted to determine the differences between students in each class to support or reject the hypothesis.

Principles of marketing students seemed to respond more strongly to the community based learning activities more so than Services Marketing students, and particularly more strongly than Marketing Management students. Overall, Principles of Marketing students rated the various benefits statements more highly than their Marketing Management and Services Marketing counterparts. However a few statements statistically were significantly different:

- Principles students enjoyed completing the community based learning activities more so than their marketing management counterparts.
- Principles students felt the assignment would influence their career choices more so than either of the other groups of students.
- Principles students felt the activities helped them move towards a more complete self marketing effort than the other groups of students.
- Principles students more strongly recommended using the community based learning activities in future classes than their marketing management counterparts.

Therefore, hypothesis 1 was partially supported. Principles students seemed to experience more benefits than their marketing management counterparts, and somewhat more so than their services marketing counterparts.

Hypothesis 2 posited that there would be differences in the skill enhancements from the community based learning activities in the different marketing courses. There were only slight differences in how the three groups of students rated how the community based learning activities helped them improve their career skill sets. Therefore hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Hypothesis 3 posed that there would be differences between students in different marketing courses and their level of career preparation through the community based project. While overall, principles of marketing students seemed to rate the various career preparation benefits more strongly than their other class colleagues, only one statement, "I felt more confident in my knowledge of marketing as a result of completing the project" was statistically different than the marketing management students. Therefore hypothesis 3 was only partially supported.

Hypothesis 4 stated that there would be differences between students in different marketing courses and their level of marketing content reinforcement through the community based learning projects. Hypothesis 3 results seemed to foreshadow the results found in hypothesis 4. In numerous cases principles of marketing students stated they perceived that they learned key marketing concepts through the community based learning activity more strongly than

their marketing management counterparts and often more strongly than their services marketing counterparts.

In summary, the hypotheses tested were benefits, skills, career preparation, and marketing content. As shown in the

Hypothesis Results table, the marketing hypothesis was supported, the benefits and skills hypotheses were partially supported, and the skills hypothesis was not supported.

Marketing Content Course Comparison between Principles Students and Other Classes

Concept	Marketing Management	Services Marketing
Pricing	√	
Place	√	
Promotions	√	√
Segmentation	√	
Strategy	√	√
IMC	√	
Marketing's Role in the Organization	√	
Marketing's Relationship with Other Departments	√	
Ethical Issues in Marketing	√	√

Hypotheses Results

Hypothesis	Dependent Variable	Results
1	Benefits	Partially Supported
2	Skills	Not Supported
3	Career Preparation	Partially Supported
4	Marketing Content	Supported

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS FOR CLASSROOM PRACTICE

It is the belief of the authors that no experiential education activity should be taken on lightly. Some considerations for implementing such activities include:

- **Choose wisely.** Community based learning activities seem to be better for introductory courses or in specialized classes where there might not be a completing activity. The research shows that CBLs are particularly good for reinforcing content in the principles marketing class. (Use other types of experiential activities to reinforce career related skills or for career preparation.)
- **Start planning early.** If a faculty member is considering teaming with their university's Service Learning coordinators, it is highly recommended to start earlier rather than later. Be open with expectations, how the project will fit into the class and what time will be given to the effort both in terms of preparation as well as implementing in the classroom.

- **Make the activity reflect faculty and student interests.** Recommendations for activities that readers can find in books or at the authors' course website are merely examples. Faculty should create activities that are meaningful for both themselves and the students. Exude ownership by integrating the activities throughout the entire curriculum and daily discussion.
- **Explain that experiential learning isn't "more" it's just different.** Some students may feel like the CBL activities are just "one more thing" to do in their already over-scheduled lives. Faculty will need to stress that the CBLs are merely a different way to learn, not a way to make life more difficult for the student. Faculty must also understand that the CBL may be asking students to stretch beyond their comfort zone of "knowing how to get their A."
- **Consider implementing Community-Based learning projects in certain classes:** research results demonstrate that CBL activities seem to work best in introductory classes (such as Principles of Marketing) and in specialized subject matter courses (such as Services Marketing) where there is no other "dominating" capstone project to overshadow its presence in the course curriculum.

- **Draw clear connections between the activities, the course, and the students' lives.** In the busy classroom, it is all too easy to just collect the reflection papers about that unit's CBL activity and just "keep moving." Faculty should attempt to resist this urge and take time to encourage students to open up about their observations, no matter how simple they might initially seem. This portion of the project is less about "lecturing" and more about "facilitation."
- **Listen to feedback and be willing to revise activities.** Maybe an activity doesn't work or students don't 'get' it so the directions need to be changed; or a video from the library is no longer available. Seek such input throughout the term to keep the list of activities fresh and relevant.

SUMMARY

In summary, this study investigated what students gain from a Community-Based Learning experience. The study was conducted over two semesters from students enrolled in Marketing Management, Services Marketing, and Principles of Marketing classes at a private, Jesuit university. The survey was pre-tested for one semester and then was implemented for the 2006-2007, and 2007-2008 school years. Students in those classes completed a 50-question survey. Data from the survey tested four hypotheses: 1. Students in different marketing courses would experience the Community-Based Learning project differently and therefore would have different benefits; 2. There would be differences in the skill enhancements from the project activities than other marketing courses; 3. There would be differences between students in different marketing courses and their level of career preparation through the project; and, 4. That there would be differences between students in

different marketing courses and their level of marketing content reinforcement through the project. Hypothesis 4, marketing content, was supported; hypotheses 1 and 3, benefits and career preparation respectively, were partially supported; and, hypothesis 2, skills, was not supported.

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