

## A Service Learning Project in Public Speaking

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The public speaking class offered at Fort Valley State University is a course that is deeply embedded in the core curriculum. It is responsible for introducing students to a number of areas of intellectual inquiry and is used to help them speak effectively, use technology appropriately, recognize and demonstrate purposeful thinking, recognize inconsistencies in logic, and experience volunteerism and demonstrate community leadership. This is quite a tall order for one course to fulfill!

As a new professor at Fort Valley State University, I was somewhat daunted by my task. How was I going to have enough time to address all of these concerns in a semester course? What types of learning activities could I design and what kinds of teaching strategies could I adopt that would allow me to use my time wisely and fulfill the above mentioned criteria set out for the course. I knew that I would have to include elements of several of the areas of intellectual inquiry in a single assignment in order to "get it all in" and in order to show the interdependent nature of all of those areas.

What I devised was a group project that included the use of technology and the concept of service to the community. The project was a small group exercise designed to introduce students to the dynamics of small group interaction and the oral presentation of a report. The groups were each asked to choose an organization to report on. I encouraged the groups to choose local (campus or community) organizations that could benefit from their presentation. Each group was asked to consider the following five aspects of the organization: purpose, goals, membership, organizational structure, and the activities that the organization sponsors or in which it participates. The final product, which consisted of a PowerPoint presentation and a written oral report, could then be given to the organization to use as a recruitment tool or a presentational tool.

In presenting this assignment to my students, I had to do a number of things. Since I had already taught the students how to present an informative speech, I had to review the principles of informative speaking and remind them that, although they were working in groups, they would all have to speak as part of the presentation. Each person would be presenting a part of a larger informative presentation. So I started with a review of informative speaking principles. The gathering of the information from the organizations was crucial here. The students had to contact the organizations in order to do research on them. This also provided the initial contact between the students and the organizations.

The second task was to introduce the students to

group dynamics. It was necessary to teach a unit on how groups function. I stressed in this unit the responsibility of group members to the larger unit. We discussed various group roles, dynamics, and conflicts, all in preparation for working in the groups. Although much of the work on the composition of the written report would be conducted in class, much work was also needed outside of the classroom. Students used class time to organize their efforts outside the class. They had to set times to work in the Model Technology Classroom to work on their PowerPoint presentations and had to schedule time when members could meet with the organization on which they were reporting.

My third task was the presentation of PowerPoint technology. Luckily, Fort Valley State has a new Model Technology Classroom with professional support. The professional support staff member, Dr. Bourne, was available to conduct a workshop during our class time. I had also taken the PowerPoint workshop with Dr. Bourne myself earlier in the semester, so that I would be able to assist my students in constructing their presentations.

There were certain things that I learned along the way that need to be attended to in conducting the assignment. First, sufficient time must be given to allow students to research their organizations, gather information, and construct the PowerPoint presentations. Second, I had to constantly remind the students of the ultimate goal of the presentation. Although the PowerPoint technology needed to be adequately utilized, the point of the assignment was not about simple mastery of the technology. The point of the assignment was to do a presentation that included presentational graphics useful to an organization. I asked the students to view the technology as just another visual aid, a powerful visual aid, to be sure, but not the only part of the presentation that needed attention. The public presentation of the written report was to be supported by the technology.

The students ended up with presentations that were delivered for a great variety of organizations. A sampling of organizations that student groups presented reports on are the local chapter of the NAACP, the campus Habitat for Humanity, ROTC, several fraternities and sororities, Focal Point (a women's health care provider), and the Fort Valley State University Alumni Association. Note that when the groups chose an organization that was national in scope, they were encouraged to work with the local chapter of the organization.

What this assignment yielded for me as an instructor was a chance to include several different assignments in

one. I was able to teach small group dynamics, informative speaking skills, the use of technology, and service-learning approaches to education. By including the service-learning component, I also was able to deepen the learning that occurred. As one definition of service-learning states: "Service-Learning is a connection of theory and practice that puts concepts into concrete form and provides a context for understanding abstract matter. This provides an opportunity to test and refine theories as well as to introduce new theories" (Brevard Community College, *The Power*).

The presentation of the organizational reports took the students outside the hypothetical world of the classroom and put them in the real world of organizations and workplaces. Once the idea of using public speaking in a more concrete way was introduced, students were able to appreciate how the skills they had been learning in the classroom were applicable in the real world. This also led to a number of other benefits. They were able to see the relevancy of their education to the real world. They became empowered as learners, teachers, achievers and leaders. They were also encouraged to become a part of their community.<sup>1</sup>

I found this exercise to be successful in my public speaking class and can envision similar exercises that could be of use in a variety of course offerings where connections with the community would be of mutual benefit. My only regret with the assignment is that we could not schedule the presentations of the reports for the groups for which they were intended. Instead, they were done in class and then later given to the groups for their own use.

In the final analysis, I found the assignment exciting and invigorating. Although there were many variables to handle, it was worth the effort. Students also reported that the assignment was their favorite of the semester. They also seemed to take the assignment more seriously than previous ones. Their presentations took on a more professional air and their delivery skills were more polished and better organized than previously.

I would highly recommend trying an assignment like this one in a variety of courses. The benefits are surely worth the time and effort.

<sup>1</sup> *These benefits are also listed on the csf.colorado site on the Internet under the title, "Benefits of Service Learning."*

## **Enhancing Teaching Effectiveness Through Role Reversal and Team Teaching**

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The education industry is currently experiencing greater cultural and educational diversity, which requires significant changes in the way business schools conduct business. The traditional method of instruction focuses on lectures and teacher evaluation of class performance. It does not take under consideration the inclusion of faculty-student teams. Students as well as faculty could participate in all levels of teaching a course.

Coker and Griffith (1994) criticized the traditional method of instruction in the United States. According to them, the traditional classroom system is too outdated in a changing environment. They observe that "significant changes are needed to meet the needs of greater cultural and educational diversity." In this new environment there ought to be an implementation of collaborative endeavor on the part of instructors. Attempts have to be made to explicitly show the interrelationship between business courses and how role reversal and team teaching can enhance teaching effectiveness.

At Pomona College (1999) faculty and students enjoy collaborative teaching and learning opportunities

in many classroom, laboratory and field settings. The collaboration among students and faculty is informal and spontaneous. Professors at Pomona College invite students to participate with the professor at all levels of teaching a course, including planning, leading class discussion, presenting new material in the class, providing written evaluation of student work, and evaluating with the instructor all aspects of the course as it proceeds. Students who have participated report that the experience is "enormously rewarding and illuminating."

The objective of my teaching method is to show how the use of faculty and student teams in teaching preparation and delivery can promote increased learning for students and professors. In the search for a medium of instruction, I have adopted Chickering and Gamson's (1987) objectives of good practice in undergraduate education. The objectives are encouraging contacts between students and faculty, developing reciprocity and cooperation among students using active learning techniques, giving prompt feedback, communicating high