UM Excellence in Teaching: Teaching Practice – Service-Learning Teaching

Dr. Donn James Tilson
Associate Professor – Public Relations
School of Communication

Service-Learning Teaching

- Taking the classroom into the world, and bringing the world into the classroom
- Engaging students in “active learning” and “cooperative learning” in service of community and university
- Prepares students professionally for challenges ahead, fosters greater sense of civic responsibility

Service-Learning Teaching

- Practical and valuable approach to teaching
- Student work can be evaluated/graded in a manageable, measurable, fair manner
- Integrates academic material with application to real-life situations
- Reinforces learning in the process
- Appreciated by students and clients

Finding Project Clients

- Partnering with higher-education institutions
- Working with UM’s Butler Volunteer Services Center, Smith-Tucker Student Involvement Center
- Working with faculty’s “home base”
- Contacting United Way

Project Clients & Courses

- Best to work with only 1 client per class
- My classroom clients have ranged from YMCA to Special Olympics to Red Cross and UM Student Government to UM Libraries to Alumni Association
- Classes have ranged from skills-based to more theoretical courses and from undergraduate to graduate level

Structuring Coursework

- Include project on syllabus as a course requirement
- Project should constitute a specific percentage of overall course grade
- Divide project grade into subcomponents
- Establish project “due date” on syllabus according to client assignment deadline
Structuring Coursework

- Project will constitute 40% of overall course grade
- Project subcomponents:
  1. Individual component (20%)
  2. Project written report (10%)
  3. Individual/team oral presentation (5%)
  4. Team evaluation of student (5%)

- Individual component represents the quantity/quality of student’s work (graded on creativity, composition, completeness)
- Project written report summarizes the student’s efforts, contribution to overall project, critiques individual/team effort
- Individual/team presentation (graded on organization, content, delivery, etc.)

- Team evaluation of student’s performance uses a variety of criteria (ie. accuracy of work, attendance, etc.)
- Project summary sheet notes grade for each subcomponent, project total score, and includes room for comments
- Summary sheet is returned with student’s project written report

- Teams can be organized by project subgroup (ie. employees, general public) or by function (research, planning, etc.)
- Maximum of 5 students per team
- Assign students to teams based on familiarity with abilities, interests, work experience
- Team selects its “coordinator”

- Client should present project at start of semester, re-visit 2-3 times later, be available to answer student questions
- Provide several “Team Day” classes for groups to meet during semester
- Teams should make periodic in-class reports on progress
- Use mid-term evaluation form to assess

- Each team prepares a binder of all project materials for client, instructor and presents binder on last day of class prior to presentation
- Team divides up binder/presentation assignments
- Students submit team evaluation, written report (w/samples of individual work), and self-evaluation on last day of class
Service-Learning Results

- Projects with skills-based objectives provide easily measurable components to evaluate progress
- Projects for theoretical courses can include objectives that require students to demonstrate competencies in subject knowledge, research of course literature, etc. in their written report, weekly journals

Service-Learning Results

- “Rock the Vote” UM Student Government elections campaign (freshmen-level PR course) – Spring 1999 and Spring 2000
- UM-Iron Arrow Hurricanes Heritage Campaign (senior-level public relations course) – Fall 2004, Spring & Fall 2005
- VACC Camp (senior-level public relations course) – Spring 2000

Service-Learning Results

- Client appreciation and recognition
  1. South Florida Sudden Infant Death Syndrome Chapter
  2. Miami-based Little Acorns
  3. Miami-Chapter Little Brothers Friends of the Elderly

Service-Learning Results

- Projects provide research material for faculty
- Refereed conference papers – ie. Annual Conference of the American College Personnel Association
- Scholarly publications – ie. journal of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication PR Division

Final Thoughts

- Properly structured and directed service-learning projects can enhance teaching and promote learning
- Projects can further develop variety of student skills – problem-solving, oral & written communication, technical and managerial, social & consensus building

Final Thoughts

- Most important, service-learning can instill a sense of commitment to service of the community
- Developing students into professionals who value civic involvement ultimately may be a teacher’s greatest contribution not only to education but to society
Hurricanes Heritage Campaign
“Alumni Group” – Spring 2005

Bridget Dadd
Jessica Cohen
Patricia Elizee
Ricki Tabatchnick

Situational Analysis.
- Built on Fall 2004 initial launch of campaign
- Primary focus → UM alumni

Our Target.
- University of Miami Alumni/Alumni Association
- Donna Arbide

SWOT Analysis. strengths...
- Work of Fall 2004 campaign
- Donna Arbide
- Ability to “piggyback”
- Target has been prepped already
- An amazing group 😊

SWOT Analysis. Weaknesses...
- Finances
- Professionally-created collateral
- Wide range of alumni

SWOT Analysis. Opportunities...
- Target constantly growing/refreshing
- Media opportunities
- Famous alumni
- Groundbreaking of museum
SWOT Analysis.
Threats...

- Overlapping donation requests
- Information overload from UM
- Some simply not interested

Research Design.

- Work of Fall 2004 campaign
- ID alumni communication channels
Conclusions from research:
  - adapt brochure for Alumni Association
  - speak at AA board meeting
  - feature stories in Miami Magazine and @Miami

The Goal.

- To inform alumni of the University of Miami of the Hurricanes Heritage Campaign’s mission of preserving the history of the University through the collection of memorabilia.

Our Objectives.

- To create Alumni Association communication device for use through the Summer 2005 mailings.
- To inform Alumni board of directors at spring meeting in April 2005.
- To raise awareness of effort to preserve University history through Fall 2005.

Communication.

Objective #1 – Created brochure, fact sheet
Objective #2 – Wrote article for @miami, the Alumni Association’s e-newsletter
Objective #3 – Made presentation at Alumni Association board of directors Spring meeting

Evaluation.

Objective #1 – Created communication device
Objective #2 – Increased awareness with alumni board members
Objective #3 – Continued to raise awareness w/materials through Fall 2005
Recommendations.

- Additional contacts within Alumni Association
- Greater support throughout Alumni Association and University staff
- More open lines of communication between groups (weekly leader meetings)