

Experiential Learning in a Training and Development Class

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ABSTRACT

In an experiential learning project, students in a senior-level, undergraduate training and development course provided training assistance to staff groups at their own university. This article details project planning, design, and facilitation steps and describes specific implementation methods and outcomes. The benefits of positioning experiential learning components on campus are also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

There is evidence that experiential learning projects and activities can improve course-relevant skills (e.g., Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1997; Madsen & Turnbull, 2006; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Tucker, McCarthy, Hoxmeier, & Lenk, 1998). Learning in an experiential format promotes student growth and development, emphasizes practical relevance, and contextualizes student learning (Clark, 2000; Dewey, 1938; Illeris, 2007). However, one useful venue for implementing experiential learning activities in management courses, while briefly mentioned in the literature (Judge, 2006), remains under-studied – the university campus.

In the discipline of management, there are principles and concepts, such as organization strategy, training, recruiting, diversity, leadership, planning, and project management that have relevance in university settings (Papamarcos, 2005). In the current study, students for their course project in a senior-level training and development course provided training assistance to campus staff. By using the campus for the target audience, the course had the potential to peak and sustain students' engagement as they helped university employees to gain or refine their job skills. In this paper, project planning, design, and facilitation are detailed for the course project and specific implementation methods are presented for the benefit of human resource educators. Effectiveness outcomes from the course project are also discussed.

ADULT LEARNING THEORY AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Training theories, which tend to be targeted toward adult learners, emphasize the importance of practice opportunities in order to contextualize and ground learning. More specifically, key concepts in adult learning theory, known as andragogy, state that trainees' learning will be increased if they: have a "need to know;" opportunities for practice, interact with others during learning, and receive specific feedback (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1997; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Because the target audience for training in the current study was employees, who were adult learners, having students in the course learn and understand aspects of adult learning was important. Indeed, many undergraduate students upon graduation will be providing training to others in the workplace, including older workers, either through human resource training programs or as direct supervisors. Thus, introducing students in the current

study to concepts of andragogy was beneficial to them not only so they could better execute their course project but also for future training endeavors in which they will likely engage.

Experiential learning components in college courses are designed to fulfill learning needs by pairing academic rigor with practical relevance (Godfrey, Illes, & Berry, 2005). Illeris (2007) defines experiential learning as learning in which the dimensions of: a) content (i.e., knowledge, skills, abilities, understandings, and attitudes), b) incentive (i.e., emotion, feelings, motivation and volition), and c) interaction (between the learner and his environment) are involved. Training courses could be taught with lecture and hypothetical cases to cognitively tie steps of the overall corporate training process together, but such approaches lack realism, interaction, and engaged practiced. Experiential learning, in contrast, provides a clear opportunity for students to link and integrate course concepts with concrete experience, which is necessary for learning (Dewey, 1938; Kolb, 1984). The project in this study was based squarely upon experiential learning principles, as detailed later.

METHOD

This paper examines an extensive experiential project from a senior-level training and development class in an AACSB accredited business school in a mid-southern U.S., urban campus. When using experiential learning projects in a training and development course, students apply their course learning to assess, design, develop, deliver, and evaluate a training intervention to help others improve or refine their job performance. Students in the class worked in teams to provide job-relevant skills training to campus staff, specifically administrative assistants. As such, it is important for the reader to understand that training occurred at two levels with two different audiences, including: 1) the traditional students in a college course and 2) adult learners in the university, who were trained by the students. Data were collected at the beginning of the intervention to capture potential student apprehensions about this course component. Effectiveness data were also captured at the end of the intervention regarding students' perceptions of learning, along with other stakeholder observations.

Planning and Designing the Course Project

In this section, the necessary pre-semester planning with campus stakeholders is discussed. Also described is how the project is designed within the overall structure of a senior-level undergraduate training course and how it is communicated to students.

The first order of business when using one's campus as the learning venue is garnering stakeholder support. For the current study there were various groups who needed to buy in: (1) the target trainees, administrative assistants; (2) their supervisors; and, (3) other administrators. The administrative assistants were targeted as the pool of trainees because they had received little prior training attention on campus and because it was felt undergraduate students would feel most comfortable training this level of employee (vs. top administrators for example). To gain administrative buy-in, a memo (see Appendix A, memo #1) was emailed several months in advance of the course to campus administrators (i.e., supervisors, the human resource department, and the author's chair and dean). The memo provides the administrators with information about the idea of incorporating an experiential project component in the course and

solicited their buy-in. Given support by the vast majority of stakeholders, a 4:00-5:15 p.m. time slot was requested for the training course in the upcoming semester (in anticipation of delivering the sessions near the end of the trainees' workday). Thus, pre-semester communication and planning are essential with campus learning endeavors.

Because there is evidence that instructors should anticipate apprehension on the part of some student with such projects (Madsen & Turnbull, 2006), when the class commenced, the goal of applying course learning through a project was discussed with the students. At the end of the first day of class (after explaining the project) students were asked to write down any concerns they had about engaging in the project. The students' responses clustered into three areas: fear of unknown (e.g., "Not knowing exactly what to expect or what's going to happen"); concerns about the eventual trainees' attitudes ("I'm afraid these people won't take it seriously"); and lastly, three students reported no concerns ("I'm cool as a cucumber"). To reduce fears, in the next class period the students were informed of all pre-semester communications and the receptive response received from the potential trainees and supervisors.

As detailed in Table 1, the project accounted for 50% of the course grade; thus students had an adequate extrinsic incentive to perform well. Student teams were formed using a hybrid instructor-assigned and student-input approach (Allen & Burke, 2008). Team captains were chosen based on their class performance in the first several weeks of the course (e.g., quizzes, class participation); once identified, team captains then took turns randomly choosing members for their team (although other students were not present during selection). By using this approach, high performers are distributed across teams and given a voice in choosing peers who will work best on their team (e.g., based on personality, work ethic). This hybrid method of team identification ultimately was received with no reservation by any student in the class and appeared to be viewed as novel by many.

The project was broken down into logical "deliverables" consistent with the training process as taught in the course, i.e., needs assessment, course design, development of materials, delivery, and evaluation of the training. Expectations for each deliverable were outlined in the syllabus (see Table 2). In retrospect, this design decision appeared to be one of the more effective choices made for project implementation because students focused on one relevant task at a time without getting overwhelmed by the enormity of the project.

In terms of positioning the project within the overall class structure, two logical alternatives appeared to exist -- either to intertwine the class project throughout lecture content across the entire semester or to lecture early in the semester on training theory and then allocate the last half of the semester solely to the project. The later approach was chosen although, when asked at the end of the course, students appeared split on which course layout they thought would be best. The pro of the chosen approach is that the instructor is able to teach the corporate training process and adult learning theory from a broader perspective early on in the academic term without students selectively "tuning out" issues perceived as immediately irrelevant to their project. The con was that a few students felt the project portion of the course proceeded fairly swiftly. An instructor's course goals and personal preferences would likely influence the chosen approach.

Table 1
Syllabus Description of Project

Goal of Project

This course project will give you the opportunity to apply course training concepts. The target audience for the training will be campus administrative assistants and you will design, develop, and deliver an appropriate learning intervention to help improve their job performance.

Team Identification

You will work in teams on this project. We'll use an organizational process for identifying, forming, and managing the teams. First, I will identify several team captains -- based on class performance (i.e., participation, quizzes) early in the semester. Team captains will then choose team members. Each captain will randomly take turns selecting members; students will not be present when team captains choose their teams so as to avoid the "being picked last for dodgeball experience." Once teams are formed, the captain does not have to be the assigned leader; this person, or someone else, may emerge as the informal leader, or the group may work without a leader.

Grading

The project will be broken down into five deliverables (consistent with the training process). Each deliverable will be worth 10% of the total course project grade – which overall is 50% of your course grade. Each deliverable will be graded on content (see expectations for each outlined in the syllabus), accuracy of course concept application, and style/execution.

The final training session will be graded using the following specific criteria:

To what extent did the team:

- Execute the planned training session (based on their lesson plan)
- Use adult learning principles
- Deliver quality instruction
- Provide quality handouts (or job aids)
- Organize and prepare
- Demonstrate flexibility during the session (based on time available & how the session progressed)
- Answer trainee questions
- Use the time wisely

The following rating scale will be used: Excellent, Good, Satisfactory, Poor, Unacceptable

Table 2
Project Deliverables

Project Deliverables: Student teams will produce various deliverables for this project (see below). Time will be provided during class for your work although some outside of class work is definitely expected. For each deliverable a formal cover page, double-spaced, 12 point font submission is required, and impeccable grammar and spelling are expected.

#1 Needs Assessment Report

Discuss the data collection methods and sources you used to identify any KSA gaps in this employee group. Then, summarize the findings from your needs assessment (what KSA gaps exist). Comment on insights you gained related to organizational, task, and person analyses (i.e., the 3 sub-analyses). Lastly, identify any KSA deficits staff members appear to have, which your group would be most interested to train for the final deliverable. [Note: There is no guarantee of topic choice.]

#2 Learning Principles & Goals Report

Applying the attributes of good training goals (as learned in lecture), list your specific instructional goals & adult learning principles you plan to incorporate in the learning intervention. You must also include a detailed lesson plan outline (see text for example).

#3 Development of Training Materials

Submit all the training materials that you'll be using in your training (e.g., handouts, training materials, PPTs, job aids, etc).

#4 Evaluation Plan for the Training

Explain and describe how you will evaluate your training intervention to see if it's effective – i.e., what level of evaluation will you use (Level 1-4); what measures will you use (e.g., test, survey, skill demonstration), and what sources will you use (e.g., self-report, rater, supervisor). Provide a copy of each proposed measure. Explain how you plan to analyze your data. Note: You must follow-through on your evaluation plan and submit results within 1 week of your training session.

#5 Deliver Training to Campus Staff

This is the 45-minute training (learning) intervention, i.e., the execution / implementation of the above deliverables to campus staff who will voluntarily attend training sessions during their workday and our class period.

#6 Actual Effectiveness of the Training

After all teams have delivered their training interventions, evaluation data gathered across all training interventions will be discussed in class. Ideas for improvement will be examined.

Facilitating Project Phases

As with other team projects, it is important for instructors to pursue a facilitative role in an experiential learning component of a training class so one does not micro-manage or let students wonder aimlessly (Siciliano, 2001). By divvying the project up into five smaller deliverables, consistent with the step-by-step training process taught early in the semester, the project garnered serious step-by-step focus on each training phase.

A *needs analysis* report was the first project deliverable, in which teams needed to:

“Discuss the data collection methods and sources used to identify any KSA gaps in this employee group. Then, summarize the findings from your needs assessment (what KSA gaps exist). Comment on insights you gained related to organizational, task, and person analyses (i.e., the 3 sub-analyses). Lastly, identify any KSA deficits the staff appears to have that your group would be most interested to train for the final deliverable.”

Helping students gather needs analysis data during class time proved effective given students' concern with the amount of time such course projects can require (McCarthy & Tucker, 1999). Trainee supervisors were invited to visit during class time to ascertain the skills which they perceived to be in need of development in campus administrative assistants (see Appendix A, memo #2). A portion of this 30-minute meeting was used for open exchange among student teams and supervisors, but close-ended data were also gathered using wireless iClicker technology (see <http://www.iclicker.com>) in which the supervisors anonymously answered verbal questions about administrative assistants' training needs with wireless remotes. For example, supervisors were asked: “*To what extent do you feel training in [specific skill] would help campus administrative assistants at work? Select: Greatly, Somewhat, or Not at all.*” Another benefit from this session was drawing the attention of campus administrators to the project our class was engaged in.

The trainees (i.e., administrative assistants) were also invited to attend a needs analysis session during class time (see Appendix A, memo #3); they interacted with student teams both in small groups and in the larger class setting. Student teams were instructed to each bring specific, simple needs analysis questions to ask the trainees (e.g., *What skill would you like to learn more about to help you at work?*). The iClickers were also used with the administrative assistants to gather anonymous needs assessment data. This session had an ancillary benefit of familiarizing students with their ultimate training audience (i.e., in terms of their personality, motivation to learn, attitude, etc.). Overall, both supervisors and administrative assistants perceived various computer skills to be the highest need, although supervisors also perceived broader transferable skills as needed (e.g., dealing with conflict, working with difficult people).

After these sessions were complete, students were armed with multi-source needs assessment data but they were also allowed to gather other survey or interview data for their first project deliverable. The needs analysis reports were graded by the instructor and constructive feedback provided. Then, based on an in-class discussion of students' needs analysis reports, the four top training needs were identified. Each of the four teams then identified their first, second,

and third preferences for topics/skills to train. It was possible to assign each team either to their first or second preference.

The second deliverable, a *learning principles & goals report*, required fulfillment of the following task:

“Applying the attributes of good training goals (as learned in lecture & text), list your specific instructional goals & the adult learning principles you plan to incorporate in the learning intervention. You must also include a detailed lesson plan outline (see text for example).”

At this point in the project, students appeared more focused and clear about their ultimate goal because they knew their training topic. In this second deliverable, they worked in class (and outside of class) to write feasible learning goals for their 45-minute training session and to identify the specific adult learning principles that would guide their training design. A 45-minute timeframe was chosen for each training session based upon the amount of time supervisors were willing to allow their administrative assistants to attend training during paid work time. A detailed lesson plan was also required to get teams to focus on how they would wisely use the time and active training methods (e.g., hands on, role play, discussion, video, etc) to accomplish their learning goals. Again, the deliverable was graded by the instructor, feedback was given to each team, and grades were assigned.

In the third deliverable, teams had to *develop course materials* for their training session and were instructed to:

“Submit all the training materials that you’ll be using in your training (e.g., handouts, training materials, PPTs, job aids, etc).”

Turning ideas into actual training materials required discipline, focus, and real teamwork. At this stage a particular challenge for students was determining how much they could actually accomplish in a 45-minute training session. In this particular training task the more experienced students (and instructor) provided some guidance, but teams also practiced sub-sections of material during class to estimate time allotments for various sections of material. After submitting deliverable #3 and receiving the instructor’s graded and constructive feedback, teams were ready to develop their *training evaluation plan*, in which they had to:

“Explain and describe how you will evaluate your intervention to see if it’s effective – i.e., what level of evaluation will you use (Level 1-4); what measures will you use (e.g., test, survey, skill demonstration), and what sources will you use (e.g., self-report, rater, supervisor). Provide a copy of each proposed measure. Explain how you plan to analyze your data. Note: You must follow-through on your evaluation plan and submit results within 1 week of your training.”

Designing a training evaluation plan that was practical yet useful for evaluation purposes proved to be a challenging task for some student teams. While one team wanted to gather elaborate multi-source, behavioral change data, they soon realized they might not have the time

to do so effectively. However, all teams were required to include in their evaluation plan measures of Level 1 (i.e., trainee satisfaction) and Level 2 (i.e., training learning), based on Kirkpatrick's four-level model (1998) of training evaluation.

Finally, in the last project deliverable, teams professionally *delivered their training sessions*. Training session dates and times were assigned randomly to student teams; practice time was allotted during class; and assistance with photocopying was provided to defray costs to the students. Emails were sent to participants inviting them to attend each training session (see Appendix A, memo #4). Training sessions were graded by the instructor using the criteria illustrated in Table 2 (which were provided in advance to students).

Examining Project Effectiveness

Various sources of data were gathered at the end of the course once all training sessions had been delivered and graded. Measures of perceived learning are reported, along with stakeholder inputs. However, caution should be used in interpreting these findings given the extremely small sample size (i.e., N = 12 students, a condition over which the instructor had no control).

Learning

In terms of project performance data, the average student team project score, as averaged across the five project deliverables, was 89.02% (median = 90.02%; max = 92.7%; min = 82.9%). Given that prior course sections were delivered in a non-experiential format, no data are available for scientific comparison. However, the "return on expectations" for the instructor (Simpson, 2002), was sufficient. For example, from the instructor's perspective student engagement in the project was high (with the exception of one student who had medical problems); students' expressed interest in helping trainees improve their job related skills appeared moderately high; and students' actual grasp of course concepts seemed higher than the lecture-oriented method used during prior semesters.

Open-ended data about perceived learning outcomes were gathered from students at the end of the semester. Students were asked anonymously, via open-ended survey questions, to reflect upon the knowledge or skills they had felt they had gained from this project. As captured in Table 3, students (allowed to provide multiple responses) provided sixteen examples of *course-specific knowledge* – many dealing with needs assessment and training evaluation – and four examples of more *general knowledge* gained from this experience, such as delegating group work. As such, various types of course-specific knowledge seemed to have improved from using the project. In terms of skills, seven *course-specific skills* (e.g., course design, training delivery) were outlined by students as improved by the project, along with six *general skills*, most of which dealt with learning how to better work in teams. Thus, both course-specific and general skills were reported by students as improved as a result of the experience, albeit by self-reports.

Table 3
Post-Project Student Reports of Knowledge & Skills Learned from the Project*

What specific knowledge do you feel you gained in this project?

Course-Specific Knowledge [16]
“All the necessary steps to create a training session”
“How to identify a KSA gap”
“Importance to perform a needs assessment <u>first</u> ”
“How to conduct a needs assessment”
“Better understanding of training needs assessment”
“Process of needs assessment and why it’s needed”
“What type of employees need training the most”
“The overall process of developing training and why”
“How to put a training session together”
“The difficulty of finding out what is the proper way of training”
“How people react during and after training”
“How to properly evaluate training”
“Analysis procedure after training”
“Importance of pre test and post test data”
“How to conduct training and measure it”
“Better understanding of evaluation”
General Knowledge [4]
“How to delegate group work properly”
“A professional outlook”
“Almost like an internship”
“OJT!!”

*What specific skills do you feel you improved or refined in this project?**

Course-Specific Skills [7]
“How to assess training needs of a group properly”
“I gained skills in identifying target concerns”
“Designing the actual training environment”
“Preparing a training presentation step by step”
“Learning how to properly present a training session”
“Analysis of [training] data”
“Each component of the training delivery process”
General Skills [6]
“Learning how to meet deadlines more effectively”
“Working with others in order to achieve a desired outcome”
“More patience (by the end of the course) with group members”
“Critical thinking”
“Communication”
“OJT!!”

* Individual students could provide multiple statements.

Likert scale data were also gathered about each major phase of the training process to determine students' self-ratings of learning. However, given the low sample size it was decided to only report patterns in the quantitative data here. Each survey item was phrased as follows: "*My understanding of [step in the training process] improved with this project.*" The scale ranged from -3 (Strongly Disagree) to 3 (Strongly Agree), with 0 being Neutral. The strongest ratings of agreement across the items indicated the highest level of improvement in understanding for: needs assessment, development of training materials, and training delivery. While there were no disagreements with any of the statements, a couple students were neutral about their learning improvement on the topic of adult learning principles, likely indicating more emphasis could have been placed on this item in project deliverable #2. Also, students were asked to rate the following statement: "*I believe this training project produced learning outcomes superior to what traditional lecture would have produced.*" Of all statements rated with a Likert scale this item generated the highest percentage of strong agreement from students, again pointing to students' positive perceptions of learning based on the project.

Stakeholder Perceptions

Insights were also solicited about the project from the administrative assistants (i.e., the trainees), an important stakeholder in any training program (Newman & Milne, 1992). Of the twelve administrative assistants who attended at least one training session, five attended each of the training programs, of whom four provided written comments. The following are sample trainee responses¹ to the following question: "*Please provide any comments or insights – positive, negative, or neutral – regarding your experience in the campus training sessions conducted by [course number] students.*"

- "My experience with the training offered was very helpful and a learning opportunity. I really enjoyed the hands on approach."
 - "I thought the training was wonderful. The Excel training was the best part for me, b/c I learned lots of short cuts I wasn't aware of...that made things much easier when using a spread sheet. Each session had something to offer to each individual involved. I loved the test portion too! Using the 'clickers' was so much fun!"
 - "I enjoyed each of the classes; the only problem was not enough of the sessions. Each short class attempted to teach one item (task) dealing with the computer. It is all positive. The classes were short, to the point, and had been researched completely."
 - "I have been working with various software packages for 22 years and sometimes we think we know everything. However, I was able to learn several new things relating to two or three of the software packages I use on a regular basis during the training sessions."
 - "I attended all of the MADM429 training sessions. The sessions were very informative, the students were well prepared and presented the material very professional, and the subject matter was interesting and helpful in my job."
-

Based on these rich data from the trainees who attended all four training sessions, positive insights were provided about their course learning, the delivery quality, and usefulness of the job-relevant skills. Trainees' supervisors were also given an opportunity to provide their positive, negative, or neutral comments on the project. Responses included:

- “Talked with [my assistant] and he was enthusiastic about the program and noted it was quite useful and enjoyable working with the students.”
- “I think that the service learning opportunity you presented to students provided a wonderful opportunity for them to apply their skills in a ‘real-life’ scenario, and exposed them to some other issues (such as resistance from participants, etc.) that are typical challenges that must be faced in the long-term by trainers.”
- “I thought they really enjoyed the chance to even get to learn new things because their training needs are not addressed at our school as they should be. I’m sure this is probably true of most academic institutions. If we would invest in the training of our clerical staff, the result would be a more productive staff. My assistant said she did not learn anything new but that the students did a great job in teaching the class. However, she attended only one of the four training sessions. She said that the students in the future may want to direct these sessions in two parts - one basic and then one a bit more advanced.”

Based on these supervisors' comments, an opportunity for improvement in future project implementations could be lengthening the training sessions or drawing out trainees more in the needs assessment sessions to ensure their training needs are adequately captured and met.

Students' Perceived Challenges

Knowing that continuous improvements can be made in most if not all instructional interventions, and that experiential learning components have their challenges (Cyphert, 2006; Madsen & Turnbull, 2006), students were asked at the end of the semester to reflect upon the challenges they faced in the project and how the students, instructor, or campus could have minimized or helped avoid the challenges. As seen in Table 4a, the most frequently reported challenges associated with this project dealt with the amount of time and work required and working in a team, followed by the ambiguity some students experienced early on.

While most of the students reported that they could have done more to deal with their stated challenge(s) (see Table 4b), such as avoiding procrastination, adopting the right attitude, having more self-confidence, two suggestions were instructor-related. Specifically, one student stated that instructors should be specific about their expectations in such a project. Two other students took opposing views on their preferred course structure, with one liking the format used and one preferring the project be intertwined with lecture content over the course of the semester.

Tables 4a and 4b
Students' Perceived Challenges in the Project

What were the biggest challenges you faced in this project?

Time & Work Required [4]
“Very time consuming and detailed”
“It was a lot of work in such a short timeframe”
“Time frame was short between assignments due”
“Meeting deadlines”
Working with Others [4]
“Working with the group”
“Working with group members”
“Compromising with group members”
“Group member cooperation”
Ambiguity [3]
“Being unsure of what I was doing at the beginning”
“Not knowing what outcomes will arise”
“Not having specific expectations from instructor and getting a lower grade for turning in something that the professor wasn't specific about”
Unmet Expectation [1]
“Lack of attendance at our training session”
Breaking Prior Habits [1]
“Breaking from my own method of lecture instruction”
Fear of Public Speaking [1]
“Speaking in public”

*Individual students could provide multiple statements. Student responses fell into six categories as presented in the table.

How could the challenges identified have been dealt with, avoided, minimized, or controlled by you, the instructor, and / or the university?

Student Control [5]
“Working with the group was an added learning experience even though it was not a smooth process. Working in a team is expected in the work environment and so is a necessary part of this project. Therefore, group work should not be avoided, minimized, etc. Working together gave our team members the opportunity to <u>practice</u> assertive communication and better understanding of individual social styles.”
“Having the right attitude about working with people.”
“I am not sure how other than me personally overcoming them.”
“Having more confidence in myself.”
“Properly managing time without procrastinating.”
Instructor Control [3]
“The instructor should be specific in what they [sic] want.”
“The course content should be given in increments. Lecture on needs assessment and then have Deliverable #1 due. Move onto deliverable #2 etc. There was a lot of information to apply to

each deliverable and only a week or so between deliverable due dates. Just my perception.”
“I think that there isn’t really a way to avoid anything especially being the first time. I remember you were talking about how this class was designed with the test and then the deliverables. Now that I’m just about done I think that the way you have it designed is perfect.”

Miscellaneous

“My overall assessment of this project is that it was a great realistic learning experience. Each part of the project reflects a realistic work situation in a HR training/business setting. Examples: Working with real life trainees, assessing real training needs, working with and as a team, meeting deadlines, delivering and evaluating a real training session, etc.”

*Individual students could provide multiple statements.

Instructor Reflection

Some refinements to this project are possible based upon the overall experience and data. First, small but important refinements have been made to each of the project deliverables’ description in the course syllabus (which have also been captured in this paper) so that expectations are clearer. Second, additional time (about one more week) should be allocated to the project to give students more time to work on and submit each deliverable. Third, the training sessions should likely be 75 minutes long rather than 45 so that a few more skills can be taught to trainees.

Other than design-tweaking, one of the underlying post-project concerns, similarly expressed by a student at the end of the semester (see Table 4a), was the lower-than-expected trainee turnout across the sessions. While about 14 campus supervisors communicated (in writing) their support for the initiative upfront, only 7 to 10 trainees attended each session. Informal investigations revealed that a couple trainees did not believe they had time or that they could benefit from the sessions provided (although they had participated in needs analysis), and a few supervisors never seriously engaged themselves or their assistants in the project (for unknown reasons). As with any training initiative in an organizational setting, authentic supervisory support is a critical influence of trainee attitudes (Lim & Morris, 2006; Tracey, Tannenbaum, & Kavanagh, 1995). Thus, gauging attitudinal and behavioral support of this project from campus supervisors before the term begins is important for trainee attendance and engagement.

Finally, using the campus setting is highly recommended as the learning venue for instructional endeavors in a training and development class. Not only does the instructor and students’ own university benefit, but the convenience factor for students and the instructor is apparent. Costs are minimal and on-campus face-to-face communications, which are critical in pre-project planning, are easy to accomplish. However, significant instructor effort is required to ensure success for the students, trainees, and the university.

CONCLUSION

This article provides HRM (human resource management) educators much-needed design and implementation ideas from which to incorporate an experiential project on their own

campus. Not only do students benefit from this type of experiential learning, but campus constituents do as well (Judge, 2006). As with any study, there are limitations. Even though a small sample size allowed the instructor to stay on top of class morale and to support the learning process, a small sample size limits the generalizability of the results of this study. Also, the study primarily reports perceived intervention outcomes and did not use a control group. While replication of the study is needed, perhaps using a pre/post experimental comparison group design, the paper provides HRM instructors with a project design, specific implementation ideas, syllabus verbiage, sample communications with stakeholders, and initial evidence of what worked well and how things could be improved. Of future interest would be a process for estimating the value of the direct and indirect benefits provided to others in this and other experiential learning interventions.

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Appendix A – Email Communications with Stakeholders

Memo #1 - Determine Campus Support

To: Campus Administrators

From: Instructor

RE: Input on Training Opportunity for Campus Staff

I am writing to determine campus administrators' thoughts on an idea I have for organizing my upcoming training and development course, such that the campus could receive some benefit. I would like to involve campus staff as a pool of potential trainees for whom my students would design, develop, and deliver short, job-relevant training sessions. The training sessions would be short (e.g., 45 minutes), scheduled during the workday, and depending upon my class size, there will likely be about 4 sessions that campus staff would be invited to voluntarily attend (although I hope you'd encourage their participation). The project would also entail my students contacting you via email/phone/face-to-face to quickly and concisely gather relevant data about current training needs of campus staff (so my students know what type of training to provide). I cannot, of course, guarantee instruction quality since the students would be applying concepts learned in our training course, although please know a significant portion of their grade would be tied to their performance on this large task.

Please hit reply and let me know if you would support such an instructional initiative. I thank you in advance for your time.

Memo #2 – Invite Supervisors to Needs Assessment Session

To: Campus Administrators

From: Instructor

RE: Follow-up on Training Opportunities for Campus Staff

Thank you for your overwhelming support to implement a service-learning project for the benefit of campus staff in my training and development course. I appreciate your involvement and ask that you please talk with your administrative assistant about this unique opportunity since they will be invited to voluntarily participate in the training sessions my students design and deliver.

At this point, on [date, time] you are invited to visit my training class and give your inputs about the training needs of campus staff. As a supervisor, you are in a great position to understand our employees' knowledge and skills deficits. For now, please know the brief training sessions are scheduled to be held at the end of the semester. Thanks again for your support.

Memo #3 – Educate Trainees about Experiential Learning & Needs Assessment

To: Campus Staff

From: Instructor

RE: Training Opportunities for Campus Staff

By now your supervisor has likely discussed a unique and exciting training opportunity for campus staff that my training and development students will provide later this semester. As part of their course learning, they will design and deliver brief training sessions to campus employees. To help students prepare, you will need to attend a brief needs assessment session by visiting our class on [date, time] where students will inquire about the job-relevant knowledge and skills you would like to learn. We will continue to keep you updated as this course project unfolds throughout the semester. Thanks for your involvement and support!

Memo #4 – Announce Training Session to Trainees & their Supervisors

To: Campus Staff & their Supervisors

From: Instructor

RE: Training Session -- [Date, Time, Topic]

Please mark your calendars for [date, time]! My training and development students, based on popular demand, will be conducting a training session on “Simple How To’s for Sorting Data in Excel.” Knowing how to sort data can help you arrange lists of data in useful and meaningful ways. The brief, job-relevant session will specifically focus on sorting data, using:

- The ascending and descending buttons on the excel task bar.
- The drop down menu to sort multiple criteria.
- The auto filter function to sort multiple columns.

Helpful pre-requisite skills that can aid you in this session are:

- The ability to use a mouse to point and click on data,
- Prior use of excel (e.g., to create list of data),
- Knowing how to enter data into a spreadsheet, and
- Knowledge of the excel task bar and various buttons.

Please confirm your participation by hitting reply. Refreshments will be provided.