Preparation for Experiential Learning: Recruiting, Constructing, and Training a “Green Team”

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Marketing educators have been calling for the addition of environmental and social issues (e.g., sustainability) to the marketing curricula for over 17 years (Anderson, 2007; Demoss & Nicholson, 2005; Galbraith & McNabb, 1999; Mintu & Lozada, 1993; Springett, 2005). Knowing that sustainability will only integrate into managerial decision making if the students who are learning about it are persuaded that it is a legitimate business issue (Thomas, 2005), it is not only incumbent upon educators to teach students about sustainable practices, but also to reorient their education to incorporate knowledge, training, and values that will guide and motivate people to pursue sustainable livelihoods and to live in a sustainable manner (Filho, 2002), so that their lives resonate with and reflect sustainability.

One of the many concerns identified by educators is the need to balance a student’s practical experience with theoretical knowledge (Herremans & Murch, 2003). Providing students the opportunity to put theory into practice through experiential learning may help with this requisite balance, as many studies demonstrate the positive effects of experiential learning on students (Hakeem, 2001; Kros, Polito, & Watson, 2004; Petrosius & Washburn, 2004; Pugsley & Clayton, 2003; Rocha, 2000). Kolb (1984) delineates experiential learning as a process by which knowledge is created through transformative experience. More specifically, the phases in this process include (a) encountering concrete experiences; (b) reflecting about these experiences; (c) conceptualizing abstractly to form generalizations about these experiences; and (d) solving problems through real-world experimentation utilizing such generalizations.

College students today have a heightened awareness of issues related to sustainability and recycling efforts. Green initiatives on college game days may be attributed to the interests and values of today’s students, and in some cases are a direct result of the efforts of students themselves. For example, students at numerous universities have voted to implement a “green fee,” in which students pay fees each semester that support campus-wide sustainability efforts. In the realm of college sport, student-athlete groups have commenced small-scale efforts demonstrating keen interest in environmental causes. At the University of Southern California and Adelphi University, student-athletes collect recyclables across campus to support philanthropic causes (“USC Soccer is Saving Lives,” 2007; “Adelphi SAAC/CHAMPS,” 2008). Recycling efforts by the University of Wisconsin women’s rowing team prompted a recycling campaign in and around Camp Randall Stadium (Banco, 2008). Clearly, many college students and student-athletes are invested in making their universities more sustainable and eco-friendly environments. Unfortunately, many of the recycling initiatives that occur in collegiate sport event settings are not strategically designed and simply consist of container placement in high traffic areas in and around event venues, supported by an event-related messaging campaign. While this approach provides green-related benefits too attractive to neglect, there has been a lack of campus and athletic department recycling efforts that implement elements of strategic student involvement that results in valuable experiential learning. Students who are committed to sustainability efforts are not only a source of funding, but also comprise a largely untapped and concerned workforce. By harnessing not only the interests of the students but also their energy, projects focusing on game day recycling can be strategically developed so that student participants can gain satisfaction, knowledge, and experience that will positively impact their personal and professional development.

Since many projects that utilize students as a volunteer workforce provide minimal training to prepare the students for their respective roles, pre-project training that is thoughtful and intentional may help to ensure effective student execution of their roles, a better personal fit to those roles, and the opportunity to build and/or reorganize schemata for better learning (Anderson, 1977). Due in large part to the training sessions that prepared them for their interactions with the research subjects, students reported enhanced knowledge, values, and behaviors regarding recycling and social marketing concepts, as well as gaining experience putting theory into practice. The positive impact of this study had a broad reach—the researchers, the university, the college athletic department, the environment, and most importantly from an educational perspective, the students, all benefitted from this work. Involving students in a way that adequately prepared them by teaching them about the theory behind decision-making, informing them of their importance in the project and providing them with the confidence and tools to interact with athletic stakeholders allowed them to experience the satisfaction of making a difference in their own community. This presentation will focus on recruiting the “Green Team” and the design and implementation of training sessions, outlining the logistics, schemata building/re-organizing, role self-selection, modeling and role playing, and reflection elements. It is intended...
that this will allow educators and future project leaders to feel more confident and be more effective in any pre-project training they choose to implement.