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Enterprising assessment: how journalism and PR students work with voluntary sector organisations in intermediate and honours level modules.

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Abstract:

Students following degrees in journalism and Public Relations are adapting to a multi-platform, multi-skilled professional environment in association with a number of charitable and voluntary sector organisations.

In both second and third years, they are working individually or in groups to apply theory to practice in “real-life” situations, gaining valuable professional experience and enhancing their own personal development. They are applying entrepreneurial and enterprise skills, mainly in the non-for-profit sector where such skills – along with a talent for creativity – are essential in the competition for funding and public donation.

Key words: enterprise, undergraduates, journalism, public relations, vocational

Learning by doing: contextualising business and enterprise

This paper explores enterprise and assessment in relation to a number of modules delivered by the Journalism and Media subject area to students on courses across the campus. The modules are:

AIC2213 Magazine design and production
AIC2501 Public Relations Practice and Management
AIC2505 Media Relations Management
AHC3002 Media Practical Project.

Students taking these modules are following a number of degree pathways including Public Relations, Journalism, Event Management, Sports Marketing and PR, Advertising and Media Relations, and Business and Journalism.

What is meant by enterprise activity in the educational context? First Partnership, **a not-for-profit Education Business Partnership who supply and deliver educational support to schools and colleges through a variety of creative programmes which bring business and education together, state that enterprise should focus on developing skills attitudes and knowledge in three areas:**

- Enterprise capability – innovation, creativity, risk management, risk taking, a ‘can-do’ attitude and a drive to make things happen
- Financial literacy – the ability to manage one’s own finances and to become questioning and informed consumers of financial services
- Business and economic understanding – the ability to understand the business context

Their philosophy encourages active student engagement, the approach of “learning by doing”, providing a real business context to support teaching and learning, support corporate

social responsibility, inform education about the requirements and expectations of business, and help students become aware of the skills, career opportunities, attitudes and sectors relevant to a business. (firstpartnership.com)

In teaching undergraduates on degree programmes, of course, it is essential that the academic content is not diminished by the requirements for personal development and vocational readiness: we do not offer training courses. According to Kneale (2004):

Being enterprising involves being proactive, developmental, creative, making things happen and generating ideas in any and every part of life. It is about grasping opportunities and influencing change. Innovating through generating new ideas is an integral part of academic life and as such can be seen as integral to any curriculum. Enterprise learning involves letting staff and students use their potential for creativity and innovation as part of a degree, and to make explicit how the related skills can be used throughout their working, social and sporting lives.

It is interesting that Kneale includes “social and sporting lives”, reinforcing the original notion of a “universal” education.

And according to Banks, Raffo, Lovatt and O’Connor (2000), in most cases effective business learning for cultural entrepreneurs was achieved through working out problems as they arose, through the everyday routine operation and organisation of the business and, particularly, through making mistakes. “As could be expected, these experiences were formative.”

In examining the factors that seem to help cultural entrepreneurs learn and then develop their business practice, our evidence clearly points to... the opportunity of working out how to do business in the context of solving real business problems that face individuals, and then reflecting on these solutions – what in shorthand might be referred to as learning by doing and making mistakes. (Banks et al, 2000)

Importantly in the context of enterprise informing teaching and learning, their studies demonstrated that entrepreneurship is not just about acquiring technical creative and business skills,

..but it is also about the process of developing appropriate social and cultural capital (Coleman 1997; Bourdieu 1984) that comes about by being embedded in the networks of community of practice. In other words, that it is about the acquisition of a particular set of knowledges, understandings and behaviours which allows the person to operate in the cultural field with a certain expertise. But this social and cultural capital is not just about the formal knowledge transmitted by education and training, it is about a way of acting, a way of understanding and a way of conceiving one’s self-identity. (Banks et al, 2000)

Developing students’ business practice

There are some relevant examples of work undertaken by students for AIC2213 Magazine design and production. Their brief is to create a proposal for a new publication which they believe has commercial potential, based on their own market research, as well as providing a platform for quality journalism and design skills.(Appendix i). The module sits alongside the more academic content of Media Business, Media Technology, Journalism Principles etc. The students work in groups, assigning roles according to the relative expertise of each individual – editor, designer, advertising, finance and so on. What we do not teach, and what they have to learn and develop for themselves, through experience and contact with professional practitioners, are the basics of marketing, advertising, budgeting, and as we

shall see, there is valuable cross-campus collaboration and co-operation in the assessment and feedback process here.

Each group devises a business plan based on responses from potential advertisers; if this were a real proposal, would you be prepared to buy space? Likewise, the budget has to be based on estimates from printing companies, given the requirements of pagination, paper size and weight, frequency, distribution and so on. The students prepare a dummy version comprising at least eight pages, to include both editorial and advertising, and a front cover. It is interesting to note that very few groups submit the required minimum; the module tends to generate a high degree of enthusiasm, as well as competitiveness based on previous years' offerings. For example, one group produced a 68 page, A5 glossy magazine and had a number of copies printed commercially.

They are assisted by guest sessions with journalists, designers, publishers and printers, some of whom join a "Dragons' Den" style panel for the final presentation, and it is here that we are grateful for the input of colleagues in the Business School with whom we have an informal partnership. They volunteer their services each year because they are so impressed by the enterprise, creativity and enthusiasm of the students. They are infectious qualities.

Bridging the gap between learning and professional practice

The skills learned here are developed in the final year Practical Project when the students have to find an outside client for whom they create a "product". These might include a training video, a magazine, a PR campaign, a series of newsletters, a strategic publicity plan etc. Three recent examples illustrate the progression from putative to actual projects:

- Two students produced a magazine for the Forget Me Not Trust, sold advertising to cover the cost of printing and publishing 10,000 copies, and organised a launch party at the Galpharm stadium where a charity auction raised more than £1000 for the Trust. The students developed skills in journalism and magazine production and event management. They subsequently shared the national Xcel awards Student of the Year prize in the creative, media and arts category.
- A student who worked for the Calder Valley Youth Theatre to promote their production of West Side Story. While this is an amateur group, the total cost of the production was more than £15,000 so it was essential that ticket sales were maximised. The student designed publicity posters, wrote regular articles for three local newspapers, and designed the show programme, for which she sold more than £500 worth of advertising. The four performances averaged 98% seat capacity.
- A student who organised an awareness-raising event for the British Heart Foundation, targeting an identified group of publics, and raising funds for the BHF at the same time. She used her own skill as a cheer-leader to organise an event for school-children, who do not traditionally identify with the BHF. She hired Gomersall Town Hall, promoted the event among a number of schools, promoted the event in the local media, arranged for her own CRB check, and staged a successful day for some 60 young people and their teachers. The activity stressed the need for exercise, the material was all BHF branded, and sponsorship has so far brought in more than £800 for the charity.

In each case, students were meeting the requirements of summative assessment, bridging the gap between learning and professional practice, and winning accolades from professional practitioners, while developing entrepreneurial and enterprise skills. They are also developing impressive professional and portfolios, which enhance their CVs. The students listed above, since graduating, have had the following successes:

- a) both gained places on the magazine journalism MA course in Leeds;

b) has two paid internships in PR, including working for two months with the Yorkshire Agricultural Society, staffing the press desk at the Great Yorkshire Show
c) was appointed lead volunteer in charge of recruitment by the BHF, and subsequently a post in event management with Hilton Hotels.

External collaboration: exchanging expertise and experience

In the PR subject area, groups of second year students (AIC 2501 and AIC 2505, Appendix ii) were originally asked to devise publicity campaigns as an academic exercise. Now they deliver their campaign proposals to representatives from external agencies who subsequently develop those strategies in their own organisations. In recent years these have included the Laura Crane Trust, the RSPB, and the Lawrence Batley Theatre.

This year we developed our collaboration with the national road safety charity, Brake, and groups of students devised media strategies for the Too Young to Die campaign, aimed at 16-25 year old road users. An incentive was that those students who could raise a minimum of £100 for the charity could have their campaigns entered for a national competition. In fact, three out of six groups did engage with the fund-raising, and two of them have just been “highly commended” runners-up.

The process works particularly well with voluntary sector organisations who cannot afford professional help with publicity and marketing, but whose expertise provides a mutually beneficial experience. In addition, what the students learn, and bring back, from their opportunities serves to enhance the tutor’s knowledge base. Even those who are still part time practitioners in a professional field struggle to maintain pace with technological or other changes in the field, and students who practise entrepreneurial skills in a real situation can then disseminate their own experience among the class.

The benefits when students are involved with outside agencies are highlighted by Oliver et al: “they identified the people they encountered and the problems that arose in that situation as requiring the new solutions to be created, or existing ones to be adapted; it was also suggested that personal style could be expressed in such situations in a way that was not always possible within the formal educational component of the course” (Oliver et al, 2006/49)

We encourage the students to consider themselves trainee professionals during class sessions, operating the seminars as, perhaps, a public relations agency or a magazine editorial office. This has an impact on attendance, engagement and performance. Some students rise to the challenge sooner than others. One group of first years formed their own PR agency (Raw Sunshine) for which they devised a brand logo and website, and found a client, the Alopecia Society, for whom they organised an awareness campaign. They created an event, Bad Hair Day, with the support of the model, Gail Porter, and had considerable media coverage including a 15 minute discussion on GMTV.

Conclusions

The impact on the students is manifest in both their effort (rewarded by consistently high marks) and in their feedback, where they often comment positively on the practical nature of the work, the challenges to which they rise, the involvement with outside agencies, and the contributions of professional practitioners. However, there have been comments from other tutors that some students put in too much effort on these modules, at the expense of their engagement with others.

Further, from a teaching and learning perspective, the experiences constantly add value to the content of the modules, which develop and improve year on year. They also enable students to develop their creativity, a feature which cannot be taught but which can be encouraged. This was the subject of a previous T&L paper, see Appendix iii.

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Appendices

Appendix i

Learning outcomes for AIC2213 Magazine Design and production

Knowledge and understanding

1. appreciate quality issues in design for publication
2. understand the economics and practices of text design and production
3. understand the nature of organisation and ownership within the magazine publishing industry
4. understand market analysis, and readership and advertising patterns;
5. understand the nature of page and document design

Abilities

6. create text materials using advanced DTP packages
7. create, plan and cost the production of a magazine
8. work with a group to present a proposal for a new publication.
9. express ideas cogently and coherently in writing and in presentation

Appendix ii

Learning outcomes for AIC2503 Strategic Media Relations (new module which combines and updates AIC2501 and AIC2505):

Knowledge and Understanding

1. source advice and information on PR issues and media planning
2. appreciate the importance of using proven techniques;
3. understand major aspects of the PR functions and related quality criteria, particularly in determining and maintaining an organisation's reputation;

Appendix iii:

Summary of: Teaching Creativity

September 2008

Rationale

It is well accepted within the University that we have some excellent examples of good practice of learning, teaching and assessment but that we do not celebrate or disseminate or share practice as much as we should. The assessment methods of this module are a prime example of this, and should be both shown off internally and externally and also properly evaluated and disseminated to other departments/Schools to further enhance the quality of teaching and learning.

As 50% of the assessment on a core module in both the Public Relations degree (MHM) and the Fashion & Media degree (ADA), the students have to run a PR Campaign for a town or area of a city, and create a portfolio of material for this including the following items: press releases, feature article, event management, a press pack for journalists. This assessment has had very positive outcomes:

- The students have produced some outstanding and very creative portfolios, which far exceeded expectations.
- The students have been really enthusiastic about undertaking this work, and as a result have put a great deal of time, care and effort into their portfolios.
- It embeds effective employability and transferable skills into the curriculum.
- It appeals to a wide variety of learning styles and needs.
- Similarly it allows students to develop and showcase their varying talents and is not just based on writing skills.
- The module therefore appeals to the non-traditional student cohort like international and mature students, so encourages and welcomes widening participation.

Student satisfaction

The research conducted by Clare Jenkins and Eileen Jones confirmed the students' general enthusiasm for this assignment. The following points were made by the students who were interviewed:

- Increased confidence in dealing with people and projects
- Made good contacts in the profession
- Opportunity to learn from mistakes
- Good career preparation
- Breakdown into component parts made the project more manageable than a long essay
- Practical application: "You can read as much as you want about the subject but you learn a lot more when you are out there doing it for yourself"

Room for improvement?

There were several suggestions made by the students and these are listed below, along with the author's initial response.

- *Work placements of at least two weeks would be beneficial.*

Students are encouraged to take every opportunity for work experience, but it would be unwieldy to build this as an essential requirement into the module. However, there is an increasing argument for adapting the PR course as a whole, to include an optional third year work placement, and this needs to be discussed by the course committee.

- *Formative group work would help preparation for this assignment.*

A good suggestion, and one that will be adopted this year.

- *There is an imbalance in the assessment marks.*

Yes, it has been acknowledged that the press pack is a far more substantial part of the project and marking has been adjusted accordingly

- *Prizes for the best ones*

Yes, why not?

- *The work could be displayed to show other students, and on open days.*

Indeed, it is. Part of the funding application was for a display case in the foyer of the JM building and I understand this is still pending. At the moment, items are stored in the Newsroom (JM2/03) and are exhibited regularly. A poster showing photographs, and outlining the rationale of the assessment, was produced for the T&L conference, and has also been supplied to the Creativity Café.

- *We need more time, and individual tuition, to help develop this project.*

True. The classes are large, and there is a wide range of abilities within each. Unfortunately we are all teaching extra hours this year, and facing extra administrative demands, so the opportunities for individual help have actually decreased. This is an important student satisfaction issue and needs to be addressed.

Conclusion

The report clarified and documented the student satisfaction with and enthusiasm for this piece of assessed work. It has now been incorporated in a very similar format into the second year media relations module, AIC2505, although it has proved time-consuming to explain the intricacies of the component parts to other staff, particularly PTHP who have not taught or assessed in this way before.

It is clear that the assessment addresses issues relating to different learning styles, and the difficulties sometimes posed by widening participation; many of the respondents were pleased to be assessed on something other than their writing skills. It also clearly encourages creativity, though I would argue that this is a concept which cannot be taught, only encouraged.

It would be a real tribute to the efforts made by the students if we could have a permanent display area for their work. The poster prepared for the T&L conference is now on display in the JM corridor.

A report on the project was published in Behind the Spin

<http://www.behindthespin.com/news/punch-and-judy-approach-to-creative-media-relations>, June 2008.