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## Community Service Projects Integrated into Product Innovation and Management Class

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Keywords: community, innovation, product, service

Since the National Community Service Trust Act of 1993, interest in service learning has been strengthened by the work of numerous national organizations that combine service and educational learning (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). For example, in Ernest Boyer's article "Creating the new American college" (1994), he showed concerns that higher education should reconsider its mission to educate students for a life as responsible citizens rather than educate students only for a career. In order to address his concern, service learning with the goal of educating students about their public responsibilities and their roles as citizens has become essential.

Studies revealed numerous benefits that service learning offers both to students and to the organizations that they served. They include students developing a greater awareness of social problems and students becoming eager volunteers following class community service work (Herzberg, 1994). Student engagement in the learning materials is also increased by the community service work. In addition, the interaction can also help students build self-confidence through their contribution to the community.

The Product Innovation and Management course that I developed and am currently teaching is offered to fourteen retail, merchandising, and product development students at the Master's level at a southeastern university in the United States. The current class is designed as a combination of lecture on the process of new products management and lab components covering Lectra Kaledo. To complete this course, two paper projects with the application of Kaledo are required in addition to quizzes and small in-class assignments. Both projects are focused on community service, requiring students to create new products for local organizations.

The purpose of the first project was to identify and develop a successful new product for an e-commerce small business BevShots. BevShots sells innovative products including fashion items and wrapped canvases. The owner was invited to the class as a guest speaker in the beginning of the semester to speak about various aspects of his creative business, including its target market, product ideas, product development, and sourcing for manufacturing.

Students were required to integrate numerous concepts covered in the class into their report. The report had to include the following sections: first, briefly introduce BevShots in the introduction. Second, identify and describe in detail an innovative product proposed for BevShots. Third, describe the target market for the new product. Fourth, discuss the strategic elements of product development for the business including the product innovation charter, new product portfolio, and new products process. Fifth, in the conclusion, justify why and how the new product proposed for development will contribute to the success of the business. Additionally, provide designs of the new product. Kaledo was required to create the design.

Students wrote conceptual papers and created various products such as beach cover-ups, bikinis, scarves, men's ties, leggings, socks, pillows, comforters, sofas, tote bags, and umbrellas.

The owner of the business visited the class to judge the finished projects. Each student presented their paper and the new product developed. The owner critiqued each of the student projects, and the top three products were selected based on the judging, then three awards with BevShots gift cards were presented. Post-project evaluations were completed by both the students and the community partner, demonstrating its success. The partner found that many of the products were successful while students were better engaged in the project with the opportunity to contribute to the community. With the permissions of the students, several of the most successful products such as beach cover-ups and swimsuits were adopted as new product ideas by the owner.

The purpose of the second project, consisting of two students per group, was to create new products for Ten Thousand Villages. The non-profit, fair trade organization Ten Thousand Villages' designers and buyers collaborate with artisans in more than thirty-eight Third World countries to combine the traditional skills of the artisans with the popular colors and styles in the North American markets. The company also encourages artisans to use sustainable practices.

A board member was invited to the class before students began the project to introduce the organization with their missions and practices. For the project, students were required to include the following sections in the reports: first, identify and describe an innovative collection of textile and/or apparel products that will fit into Ten Thousand Villages' unique business practice, considering manufacturers. Explain why the products proposed is innovative compared to current products. Second, design four to five items for the collection using Kaledo, and describe strategic materials, design, and manufacturing process. Third, describe the contribution of the new products to the business as well as their fit into the business practices. Since social responsibility and sustainability are the focus of the organization, include the new product's contributions to the triple bottom line such as social, environmental, and economic benefits.

Students are currently working on woven, knitted, or printed textile or/and apparel products. Several guest judges from the Board of Ten Thousand Villages are invited to class for students' presentations during the final exam week to critique and present three awards for the top three projects.

It is an important mission of higher education to prepare students to assume responsibilities of citizenship. I believe that students' participation in community service has a significant effect on their personal values and future interactions with their community. Through participation in course-relevant community service, students' academic learning is also enhanced. Thus, I suggest that community service projects be integrated into a variety of classes across the disciplines, and I hope that this paper will inspire other instructors to use innovative service learning projects in their classes.

#### References

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