

Visionary Public Relations Coursework: Leveraging Service Learning in Public Relations Courses to Spur Economic Development through the Arts, Travel, and Tourism

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Abstract

Scholarship on service learning demonstrates a variety of benefits to students, faculty, universities, and surrounding communities. While literature in public relations education offers strong examples of community benefits pertaining to civic engagement, community service promotion, and fulfillment of the needs of local governments and nonprofit organizations, scholarship is just beginning to address the potential long-term benefits for economic development. Literature in business and economics education offers some indication of the potential value of service learning to economic development in communities. This article offers an account of the use of service learning in a senior internship and two public relations courses as part of a collaborative project to promote a community partnership, a visionary arts venue, and the community that stands to benefit from its success. The article discusses the project development, execution of courses, and subsequent early indicators of economic impact.

Keywords: service learning, nonprofit, internship, community, economic impact

Editorial Record: Original draft submitted to JPRES December 21, 2018. Revision submitted April 22, 2019. Manuscript accepted for publication May 24, 2019. First published online August 17, 2019.

Service learning is a common approach to teaching in the public relations curriculum, particularly in capstone and management courses. The benefits of service learning to students are clear: direct application of practice, grounding theory and principles of best practice in the real world, and a wide variety of essential skills in communication that employers now prioritize in entry-level employees (Muturi, An, & Mwangi, 2013; Werder & Strand, 2011). The value of service learning to communities is also a growing, well-established body of literature within the context of public relations (Rogers & Andrews, 2015), as well as across disciplines (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996).

One key potential area of impact is on economic development within communities. A body of literature in business pedagogy demonstrates the value of using service-learning projects in the classroom of inner city (Desplaces, Steinberg, Coleman, & Kenworthy-U'Ren, 2006) and rural communities (Frazier, Niehm, & Stoel, 2012) in economic struggle, as well as for study abroad programs (Dato-On & Al-Charaak, 2013). That said, the current literature in public relations education (e.g., Fraustino, Pressgrove, & Colistra, 2019) is just beginning to examine the potential of service-learning projects to provide economic benefit to communities through nonprofit, public sector, or small business means. Public relations is a management function and plays a central role in organizational decision-making (J. E. Grunig & L. A. Grunig, 2008). As such, it stands that providing students with an opportunity to strengthen experience in economic development would have long-term benefits to the students and the organizations they represent.

This article offers a report on the conduct of a multi-term service-learning project across multiple public relations courses. The project's initial aim was to promote a new arts and culture venue managed by the university, which grew to include recommendations and materials for helping the community adapt to a travel and tourism economy that

supported those coming to visit the new venue, as well as promotion of the region surrounding the venue. The initial success of the first course projects provided students with the means to expand on the initial recommendations for the community to include execution of travel and tourism promotion to support local venues in a subsequent public relations management course, as well as an individual public relations internship focused on executing grant writing work and daily management of the community's marketing and promotion of the venue. The net result was that the students' work served to set up the subsequent efforts in economic development that continues to take place today. To gain insight on the economic impact of the community transition and potential value of student project work after the project's completion, the author conducted an analysis of statewide and local economic data, along with open interviews with the local chamber of commerce to assess the impact of the project on the community. Early returns are positive, suggesting value of service-learning work to support community economic development initiatives.

Literature Review

Since Sigmon (1979) introduced the term *service-learning*, the pedagogical practice has been defined by what students do to better understand theory and best principles of practice through structured reflection. Bringle and Hatcher (1996) defined service learning in the following way:

A course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of the course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. (p. 112)

Often, service learning is identified as a process of development for

creating knowledge where students are given opportunities to transform the information they receive from their experience and make sense of it within the theoretical framework of their academic course material (Kuban, O'Malley, & Florea, 2014). Eyler and Giles (1999) noted that service learning is an evolving form of pedagogy connected back to John Dewey's (1998/1933, 1938) calls for direct experience in the field that cultivates well-rounded citizens.

The body of literature exploring benefits of service learning to students, faculty, and communities is well-documented across disciplines, including public relations pedagogy. Service learning became a broadly accepted part of public relations education in the 1990s (Bourland-Davis & Fall, 1997; Daugherty, 2003). Most commonly, service learning is used in campaign or capstone courses (Aldoory & Wrigley, 1999; Allison, 2008; Kinnick, 1999; Rogers & Andrews, 2015; Werder & Strand, 2011), and typically includes a client component (Benigni, Cheng, & Cameron, 2004).

Given public relations' connection to business, particularly as it relates to corporate communications and community relations in this case (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006), the potential to execute service-learning projects associated with economic development initiatives is viable. Moreover, there is room for exploration in scholarship on the impact of service learning in public relations.

Value of Service Learning to Public Relations Faculty and Students

The public relations literature offers insight to the perceived benefits of service learning among students. Wandel (2005) found that 84% of students surveyed reported a strong preference for service-learning courses to traditional lecture learning, and that 90% of those responding believed they had learned more from the service-learning course than alternative course designs. Civic and social efficacy among students was also a point of emphasis. Of the students responding, 37% of those who

responded planned to continue their service work beyond the class project. Bollinger (2004) identified increased student understanding and successful application of principles in group, organizational, and interpersonal communication, as well as improved public speaking acumen with the use of service-learning course components. Wilson (2012) found value in service learning for public relations students' critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. The most significant impact came in students' increased ability to identify new information needed for creative thinking to support problem-solving. She notes creative thinking and problem solving are of particular value to those interested in entering a dynamic, challenging field like public relations.

Numerous researchers indicate the benefits of service learning. Allison (2008) found common themes around the value of service learning, including motivation for better performance, critical thinking improvement, and exposure to the value of civic engagement. Toncar, Reid, Burns, Anderson, and Nguyen (2006) identified perceived benefit for students' practical skills, interpersonal skills, sense of personal responsibility, and citizenship. Witmer, Silverman, and Gashen (2009) cited several benefits to public relations students, including application of theory and principles of best practice to real-world settings, teamwork experience for students, opportunities for client interaction, and the ability to enhance civic responsibility.

Public relations literature on service learning also explores holistic assessment of student learning. Werder and Strand (2011) developed and tested a model for assessing student achievement across multiple dimensions, including practical skills, interpersonal skills, personal responsibility, and citizenship. The model also included discipline-specific technical, creative, and research skills. Skills found of greatest value to students in this study included creative expression, design, writing/editing, strategic planning, group-work dynamics, client relations, and both

quantitative and qualitative research. These skills proved key in evaluating quality of student performance and project output.

Muturi et al. (2013) found that public relations students reported a high level of motivation from service-learning projects, viewing them as an opportunity to learn about the real world. The authors identified a key motivating factor for students to engage in service learning could be the “desire to move away from hypothetical classroom situations and into a real-world setting as the site for education” (Muturi et al., 2013, p. 400).

Research shows the service-learning experience is rewarding for faculty members as well. The public relations literature offers a body of evidence supporting the benefits of service learning to the faculty who adopt it, particularly in the areas of the pedagogical approach involved in service learning (Bollinger, 2004), a demonstration of faculty service on the tenure track (Fall & Bourland-Davis, 2004), and a more-engaged classroom (Rentner, 2011; Wandel, 2005). With benefits to public relations students and faculty discussed, the author will now address challenges and limitations of service-learning pedagogy.

Challenges and Limitations of Service Learning

Scholarship in public relations pedagogy does identify limitations in service learning and suggests some practical considerations before adoption of the practice in the classroom. Aldoory and Wrigley (1999) raised concerns about discrepancies between client-partner expectations and students’ ability to deliver a finished product that meets client-partner needs. Rogers and Andrews (2015) identified a lack of scholarship on the communication needs of local nonprofits and what they believe constitutes ideal service-learning relationships. Through focus group interviews, the authors confirmed public relations faculty assumptions that partners need a stronger education in the practice of public relations and the public relations process. It is clear that public relations educators need to establish a role in educating nonprofit partners about the discipline in

order to manage client expectations of student groups. Witmer et al. (2009) found that instructors perceived a failure of university administrators to manage perceived risks of both students and community organizations that comprise a client partnership. Among the challenges noted with clients were unpredictability, occasional unprofessionalism, a vast time commitment, and the nebulous role service-learning projects might play in the tenure and promotion process. Witmer et al. (2009) noted that the findings raised more questions than were answered.

Emergent strategic communication scholarship identified some students' concerns with service-learning course projects, particularly in the area of senior capstone courses. Fraustino et al. (2019) identified several student concerns about time management, instructor and client expectations of student travel to communities, unrealistic instructor expectations of students, and a shaky sense of self-efficacy with the project. In reflection on the class experience, immediate perceived student concerns about time commitments were mitigated by how personally rewarding they found the class project experience. A consistent comment from students, however, was the potential for the capstone course project to dominate their focus and attention to the detriment of other courses. This finding drew parallels with Witmer et al.'s (2009) concerns about the potential negative impact of wide institutionalization of service learning. Another key finding was student fears about the "parachute effect," where the class dropped in on the communities and worked toward providing assistance and recommendations; however, there was no guarantee that the communities would keep the work going over the long term on the heels of a short-term engagement with the class.

Fraustino et al. (2019) cited the need for managing expectations, the need for being mindful of the potential of service at the expense of learning, and the need for community assessment going into the partnership. The authors expressed concern about the viability of service-

learning impact on communities in single capstone projects, noting that the only means of managing the potential for a parachute effect was for the client or professor to see the preliminary work of students to its conclusion. The authors noted that many of the benefits of service learning stand but that scholarship should address concerns and how to limit concerns through performing stewardship (Waters, 2009) and closing the gap between partner expectations and student output (Rogers & Andrews, 2015). The focus will now shift to a discussion about the potential impact of service learning on economic development.

Service Learning in Economic Development and Other Subfields

Literature on the teaching and learning of public relations has established the benefits and challenges of service learning. Scholarship in public relations pedagogy offers clear examples of the benefits of service learning to corporate communication (Clark, 1999), development (Kelly, 1991; McKinnon, Longan, & Handy, 2012), public health (Rentner, 2011), and a variety of public sector (Rothberg, Brais, & Freitag, 2016) and charitable nonprofit programs (Bollinger, 2004). These examples establish the practical benefits to communities collaborating with university programs that employ service learning. Public relations literature focusing on economic development is still in its infancy.

Fraustino et al. (2019) analyzed a service-learning project that tested a place-based branding model for promoting economic development in communities experiencing downturn. As part of two senior capstone projects, students engaged in research, development, and strategy designed to rebrand each community. Students acknowledged that the project would help them grow professionally, specifically on practical skills, interpersonal skills, career development, and personal responsibility. Through post-class surveys, students confirmed that many of the initially established desired skills to develop were met, including technical skills, teamwork skills, and client relations. The authors cited enhanced

motivation among students to perform exceptional work, particularly on dimensions of professional development and community engagement. Students reflected on the experience and expressed that the service-learning campaign project left them with a sense of accomplishment, a valuable test of knowledge, and a resume builder. The authors also cited benefits to civic and community engagement. Scholarship in the teaching of economics, marketing, and management offers additional examples of the value of service learning and experiential learning to entrepreneurship and economic development for students, faculty, and the institution.

Historical and Economic Background on Marion County and Pasaquan

Outside of a small town in the southeast, a visionary artist named Eddie O. Martin was born in 1908 and returned home to care for the property after his mother's death in 1957. From 1957 until his death in 1986, Martin transformed his home into a folk art center called Pasaquan (Patterson, 1987). For some in Marion County, he was a peculiar neighbor, who produced admirable work and put unemployed or underemployed members of the community to work on the grounds. For others, he was a threat to their way of life, rumored to engage in drug dealing, homosexuality, and other forms of behavior outside of the socially acceptable behavior of residents in the rural Southeast of the 1950s (Patterson, 1987). His apparent suicide in 1986 left Pasaquan largely unattended, with the exception of a few men and women who formed the Pasaquan Preservation Society.

Over time, Pasaquan fell into disrepair, and the Pasaquan Preservation Society engaged in the process of seeking support to rehabilitate the property and the artwork for the purposes of public exhibition. After years of petition, and 28 years of relative neglect at the venue, the Kohler Foundation responded and offered to facilitate the rehabilitation of Pasaquan in 2014. At the end of the process, the Kohler

Foundation identified a local university as the appropriate caretakers for the future maintenance and stewardship of Pasaquan after its rehabilitation completion in October 2016.

This opportunity brought with it challenges for the university and work for the community to prepare for the takeover. To sustain Pasaquan, the university needed a means to promote the venue that could capture the interest of a global audience over time, the community needed to develop a plan for supporting the venue and a broader appeal for travel and tourism, and the previously split community needed to unify behind a reinvigorated visionary art venue created by a mercurial former member of its community.

The process of working toward these goals provided students enrolled in two public relations courses and their instructor with the unique opportunity to cultivate relationships with local businesses, a city government, the state's travel and tourism marketing team, and the university's Pasaquan director. The experience created a means for public relations students to gain valuable experience in arts management, as well as arts and entertainment promotion.

The partnership between the venue and university came at perhaps the most opportune time for Marion County and the neighboring small town. The county and town have endured an economic downturn that began with the migration away from production plants in the region and hit its lowest points in the economic collapse of 2008. Unemployment figures at the time for Marion County stood at 11.2% (United States Department of Labor, 2018). With a minor rebound and the presence of a livestock processing plant, the employment numbers rebounded to 7.0% in May 2015 (United States Department of Labor, 2018). The town and county suffered another setback as the livestock processing plant closed its facility that May, and unemployment rose to 9.4% within a month (United States Department of Labor, 2018).

Seeing the potential of Pasaquan and understanding the need for other economic opportunities, the Marion County Chamber of Commerce approached the state's Department of Economic Development about bringing in a team to assess the potential for adapting the town, Marion County, and Pasaquan into a travel and tourism economy. Over the fall semester of 2014, the state economic development team visited all regional venues and held town halls with citizens to gather information and to offer a set of recommendations to the town about approaching revitalization, building mutually beneficial partnerships, and adjusting the town mindset to art and cultural promotion. The finished product was a 115-page report that detailed the resources available to Marion County, effective models for a travel and tourism economy, and community-specific recommendations for updating storefronts, sidewalks, and the types of business and infrastructure they would need to develop as the new economy began to grow over the next 5 to 10 years (Georgia Department of Economic Development, 2014). One of the chief recommendations was to make full use of the new partnership with the university and its various departments to achieve mutual benefit that would help improve Marion County and the town's prospects, while enhancing the university's town-gown profile.

Research Questions

On the basis of the aforementioned literature on service learning and its value to the community and students, the researcher posed the following research questions:

RQ1: What constitutes the process of developing and executing a multi-semester public relations service-learning project?

RQ2: To what extent do the community partners make use of the resources provided by students in public relations courses?

On the basis of the aforementioned literature documenting the potential benefits of service-learning projects, the researcher posed the following

research questions:

RQ3: What evidence of economic impact on Marion County and Pasaquan can be identified since completion of the multi-semester public relations service-learning project?

RQ4: What benefits did the service-learning project provide for students engaged in the project?

Method

To answer the research questions, the researcher performed a mixed-methods case study analysis (Yin, 2014) for two reasons. First, the need to offer a clear breakdown of course development, execution, and impact required a comprehensive approach that documented each step in the process. Second, the timing of discovery of the influence and impact of students' projects after course completion when reported by the local chamber of commerce limited the researcher to consider the project and its impact through a review of materials. To promote clarity, the discussion of methods employed is broken into two sections. Each is discussed below and will permit the reader to review the findings in a sequential flow.

Documenting Course Research, Design, Execution, and Partner Adoption

As a first phase of the discussion, the researcher explained the project and its results. The researcher began with a discussion of the process of conducting course background research, course designs, students' execution, and clients' use of students' work. The researcher explained the course research and design through the use of logged notes collected during the background research and course development phases of the course projects. The researcher also reviewed completed project work and student peer evaluations of other group members to assess the overall effectiveness of groups. This triangulation of differing forms of data will enable readers at other academic institutions to consider how they might adopt some of the more successful practices into their own programs. To explain the client-partners' use of student materials, the

researcher performed a qualitative review of all marketing materials, news content relating to the community and Pasaquan, as well as venue websites in the two years since the project's completion. In addition, the researcher interviewed the Marion County Chamber of Commerce president to track the students' work in both courses, as well as in the senior internship. To assess student benefit, the researcher's assessment incorporated the content review of course project products, as well as a report on the work of a graduate who participated in the project in both courses and the senior internship. To identify the larger body of student engagement across the university, the researcher reviewed archived counts of student engagement collected by the Pasaquan's site director, who documented the information for the purposes of fundraising efforts for Pasaquan.

Documenting Economic Impact

After the project completion with Pasaquan in fall 2016, the researcher decided to revisit the venue in fall 2017 to assess the progress of student recommendations with the Marion County Chamber of Commerce president. To perform the analysis, the researcher interviewed the chamber president for a report on community progress since the partnership's inception in May 2014 and obtained economic data from January 2014 through January 2018 from the United States Department of Labor's Unemployment Statistics and performed a simple comparative analysis to track the community's progression, paying specific attention to the period from 2014 through 2018, to assess the progression of Pasaquan's revitalization, opening, and the continued development and revitalization of local venues in Marion County and the town. The interview consisted of one 60-minute session, and consisted of open-ended questions focusing on progress in economic revitalization, the relationship of the county with Pasaquan, and how the students' work influenced the efforts of the Chamber of Commerce as it progressed in its community revitalization efforts. The researcher performed his own transcription, and

utilized Nvivo to conduct coding and thematic analysis of the interview, utilizing a grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) in an effort to allow for emergent themes in the analysis. The findings report will begin with the development of the client partnership before progressing to the instructor's course design, discussing campaign execution and assessment, reviewing of client adoption of student materials, and ending with an analysis of preliminary economic impact.

Findings

Instructor Relationship Cultivation and Research

Shortly after the partnership announcement with Pasaquan in summer 2014, the Department of Art tasked one of its professors with the role of director of Pasaquan. Among the first challenges he had to address was making Pasaquan self-sustaining. To do so, he would need to cultivate revenue and donor partnerships that could help keep the maintenance and promotion of the venue viable. To achieve this end, he began brokering partnerships with faculty, the community leadership, and the state travel and tourism board. In short, the director was engaged in relationship management.

To earn the support of university faculty, the director of Pasaquan brought university faculty out to the venue for a social event and a tour of facilities to garner ideas for added value. Faculty in the sciences and other social science disciplines brainstormed and contributed valuable ideas for retreat meetings, conferences, and lab observations of the nature surrounding the venue. The public relations professor conversely identified the need for economic development in the community, the need to effectively brand and promote Pasaquan, and the need to revitalize the brand for Marion County, all while garnering the buy-in of the town. With this in mind, the public relations professor brokered a relationship with Pasaquan's director and worked with him to cultivate an active role with the Marion County Chamber of Commerce, a seat on the university's

Pasaquan advisory committee, and a consulting partnership with the state's Department of Economic Development's Travel and Tourism Promotion team. The instructor's participation in these roles allowed him to develop contextual knowledge and collect information of value to course design. The role with the chamber indeed helped the public relations professor build a contextual knowledge of the community and its economic challenges. The seat on the Pasaquan advisory committee helped the instructor learn about both the resource and creative challenges the art venue had to address prior to takeover by the university. Finally, the partnership with the state's Department of Economic Development opened the door for research data in travel and tourism that his students would find invaluable as they tried to design and pitch a campaign. It also enabled the instructor to bring the state economic development team to the public relations classroom to present guest lectures on specific strategies and tactics for effective travel and tourism public relations work, as well as opening a line of dialog with the students to seek advice and input throughout both courses.

Over the subsequent six months, the instructor made bi-weekly trips to various functions at Pasaquan to strengthen relationships, expand on his partnerships, and to collect data to build a strong course design that would yield service-learning projects that could have tangible impact on Marion County, the town, and Pasaquan. With a sense of the need for effective partnership cultivation established, as well as the lead time for data collection established, the article will now cover the design of the courses so that the reader will understand how the projects, partnership, and products were meant to advance the relationship and enhance student skill sets.

Course Designs

The instructor spread the client work across two courses: a fall public relations campaigns course and a spring public relations

management course. Students in each of the courses and the senior internship were instructed to use best practices in public relations through effective application of RACE PR (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2006), ROPES PR (Kelly, 2001), and the four models of public relations communication (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

The fall campaigns course used a competitive pitch format (Rentner, 2011) modified to an internal class model (McCullough, 2018). This involved six student teams engaging in three separate competitions on behalf of three separate clients. The student teams were pre-assigned to work together on the basis of balance of public relations coursework experience, media production coursework experience, and media writing acumen. The goal of the pre-assignment was to maximize competitive balance, while providing students with experience in working in a professional environment akin to those where they might be hired. The three teams that won each of the three pitch competitions earned an A on the course project while receiving thorough, constructive feedback. Those that lost the pitch were subject to full evaluation by the instructor (see Table 1 below).

Table 1: Competitive Team Assignments by Client Partner Need

<u>Client Partner</u>	<u>Team 1</u>	<u>Team 2</u>
Community Relations	20/20 PR	<i>Peachbelt Grassroots PR</i>
Community Marketing & PR	<i>Kindred 5</i>	Brevity
Pasquan Marketing & PR	Champion PR	<i>Craft PR</i>

The purpose of adopting a competitive evaluation model was to encourage a higher quality of strategic planning and material development in support of each team’s proposed campaign (McCullough, 2018). Even

in losing a pitch, with the exception of one team earning a poor grade due to poor research, planning, and production, the other five teams earned a B or above on the final course project. To assist each of the three clients in selecting a winning pitch, the instructor brought in four public relations practitioners from the community to offer constructive feedback on each team's product and pitch, as well as an informed perspective to relatively uninitiated clients.

Two four-member student teams worked with Marion County on community relations work meant to help the community acclimate to supporting an emerging travel and tourism economy, as well as growth in support for the once-controversial Pasaquan. Two five-member student groups worked on travel and tourism public relations intended to help develop a larger brand for the county and town, support materials to use in promoting the town and region, and a larger strategy meant to bring visitors into town and to push more capital into the community. Their client was the director of the travel and tourism office of the state's Department of Economic Development. Finally, two five-member student groups worked with Pasaquan's director on cultivating a brand identity consistent with the venue, developing marketing materials, and creating an effective promotional strategy for Pasaquan.

Communication and effective client relations were an essential aspect of course performance. Students met each of the three clients at the outset of the project, were required to meet frequently with their client and instructor as teams throughout the term, and were encouraged to maintain open communication to achieve the best results. This line of communication included encouraging students to discuss prospective plans for pitches and execution in advance of roll-out to ensure the product was in line with their client's expectations and needs. The instructor also worked with each client to bring every student to Pasaquan and the community to collect preliminary data and to gain a more immersive

perspective on the project and each of its elements. This step helped students in providing a more representative finished product that their client could more immediately employ in practice.

The initial client conversations set the baseline for student teams to identify preliminary areas of focus for research prior to developing a strategy. The research work included interviews with the clients, their respective staff, and local community members to better understand the local context they needed to attend to in their work. For the students assigned to Pasaquan and Marion County, students built upon this by reviewing current promotion approaches of similar arts and travel and tourism venues, both nationally and within the state. In support of student efforts, the state's travel and tourism office also provided materials on the larger travel and tourism strategy to students to inform their strategy and align it with the existing body of promotions in place. For students engaged in the community relations effort, the professor provided supplemental reading on community relations from Center, Jackson, Smith, and Stansberry (2014), including case studies involving community relations strategy, to aid students in establishing a contextual baseline for community relations work.

At the completion of the fall course, each of the winning bids was collected and held for the spring public relations management course, in which a team of seven students worked with the Marion County Chamber of Commerce President as a client to adopt the best of each winning project in executing a campaign that helped market Pasaquan, Marion County, and the neighboring town. The reduction from three clients to one reflected an anticipated consolidation of interaction once the preliminary work with Pasaquan and the state's travel and tourism office were complete. The move to one seven-student team kept the group of students involved in the fall campaigns course engaged with the efforts in the subsequent spring management course, preserving institutional

memory and reducing lag in cultivating contextual knowledge. To ensure continuity in work, the instructor provided all collected winning strategies as a resource tool to students to engage in a preliminary review of strategy, prior to execution. This enabled students to meet with the client and adapt the strategy to updated client needs and student skills. The client took the community relations strategies at the end of the fall course and the refined work in the spring management course and implemented the finished product in the Chamber of Commerce.

While not part of the initial plan, the development and implementation of promotional materials prompted a student from Marion County in both courses to take on a senior internship course in Marion County's Chamber of Commerce where the student implemented the refined version of the strategy with the client. The intern spent the final four months of her program of study working closely with the Chamber of Commerce in developing a new public relations strategy and executing on the initial stages of promoting Pasaquan and helping to continue bringing in new businesses and infrastructure to support the new travel and tourism economy, including grant writing to support community revitalization initiatives to enhance the profile and presence of the town. The following section will highlight the extent to which the clients made use of student work in meeting local needs.

Quality of Student Products: Sometimes When You Lose, You Win

In reviewing the projects and considering the ultimate adoption of student materials, it was clear the client used both winning (Craft PR) and losing teams' (Champion PR) materials and strategies. In reviewing the Pasaquan teams' projects, one team offered strong graphic design and manuals for standards and practice, prompting the Art Department to adopt many of their designs in the logos for the venue's marketing materials. The Art Department, however, believed the losing team actually cultivated a much stronger perspective on Pasaquan's identity, the concept of visionary

art, and the perspective of potential visitors to the venue. Thus, much of the research and messaging used in promotional literature and the venue's website that accompanies the logos of the winning team actually come from the losing team's book. This particular example demonstrates the relative strength of the work of both student teams engaged in a direct competition and bodes well for competitive modeling in service-learning courses (McCollough, 2018; Rentner, 2011). Both winning and losing team members were able to use their work to strengthen their professional portfolios because the client derived tangible value.

That said, there were elements that clearly posed a challenge for some student groups. In one group, it was clear that the inability to balance group dynamics and individual student egos limited their effectiveness in managing a campaign. Student peer evaluations consistently discussed team disagreements and criticism over team members' inability to accept one another's viewpoints as part of the strategy. In another student group, inattention to the quality of the writing and media produced led to the campaign falling short against a better balanced campaign pitch despite superior research and strategy by the other team. Finally, one team's inability to communicate with the client for the duration of the campaign left them well behind their opponent, making winning a pitch a very difficult prospect. Even with the limitations on individual projects, the overall quality of the products were stronger than in previous campaigns courses and helped yield a solid campaign execution in the spring semester.

Impact on the Community and Pasaquan

While not causal, the data point to strong indicators of positive returns for Marion County and Pasaquan in terms of revenue, development, and population growth. Interview data and the content review of student materials and subsequent promotional materials and grant writing indicate student work took on a foundational role upon

which the community built its materials and arguments for support. The Chamber of Commerce president reported the county successfully obtained \$62,000 in initial grant support targeting economic development and travel and tourism promotion support. The chamber president noted the state's Department of Community Affairs granted the funds on the basis of an updated design proposal from the public relations management team for refinishing storefronts, streets, and the courthouse grounds of the town square. This design proposal was based on the recommendations of student teams in the public relations campaigns course tasked to help the community adapt to effectively support Pasaquan's guests.

The chamber president credited the partnership and project success with enabling subsequent growth and project work from the county. Since June 2016, eight new businesses have opened in Marion County, and there is an ongoing conversation about the opening of seven additional businesses, according to the Marion County Chamber of Commerce president. In addition to the proposed openings, early reports indicated new buyers were developing recreational hunting and lodging venues, as well as commercial real estate purchase inquiries from potential commercial developers. Furthermore, the chamber was working to encourage small business development through multiple seminars for aspiring business owners and travel and tourism promotion seminars. Most importantly, the unemployment numbers were down to 5.5% from the 9% after the Tyson plant closed (United States Department of Labor, 2018).

Another solid indicator was the recent reports on sales tax revenue. In the summer of 2016, the Chamber of Commerce president reported the sales tax revenue had bottomed out in 2015 but has enjoyed a steady increase in revenue each subsequent quarter. She attributes this increase in revenue to the opening of new businesses and growing tourism numbers in the community related to both Pasaquan and the partnership now in place with a regional tourism program sponsored by the state's Department

of Economic Development. The community relations and promotional strategies in use employed elements both directly and indirectly sourced from the core materials and strategies developed, presented, and shared by students in the public relations campaigns and management courses. The finalized strategies and materials were implemented and monitored by the senior public relations intern.

Another area of concern when the local community entered into the partnership was the potential for community growth, and early indicators also suggested successful community growth. At present, 34 housing permits have been approved for additional development. This number is the largest in the seven years the Building, Code, and Zoning Administrator has been in office. The president of the local Chamber of Commerce asked new residents about their reasons for joining the community, and several reasons were clear. Among the strongest reasons were the community culture, the strong school district, and the revitalization underway. Helping the effort are the relatively inexpensive property taxes and the positive reputation of the local government in Marion County.

Although the areas of macro-business development, shrinking unemployment, and growth in residence and sales tax revenue were not targeted areas of the class projects or points of focus for assessment of students, the students' work did directly support the migration to the new economic model and the early promotion of Pasaquan, Marion County, and the small town within it, which is prompting much of the subsequent growth. Data analysis indicates the students' initial work in both courses and through the internship provided foundational material for revitalizing the community and contributed to raising the profile of the primary engine for the community's economic growth: Pasaquan.

On October 22, 2016, Pasaquan opened to the public and was transferred to the university foundation. At the opening, 2,200 people

attended the festivities from 34 states and 14 countries. In its first five weeks after the opening, 892 visitors came to Pasaquan, averaging 179 visitors a week on a 3-day weekly schedule. Visitors since the opening have traveled in groups from New York, Portland, Chicago, and Atlanta. Graduate students from Cornell University, University of Wisconsin, University of Georgia, and Georgia State University have conducted research on site, and it promises to host guest artists and provide source material in its archives to art students for years to come. In addition to several traveling exhibitions and a documentary on the restoration, the efforts of public relations campaigns, public relations management, and senior internship students helped the Department of Art solicit more than \$16,000 in fundraising in the first five weeks after the opening. All promotional materials and the Web presence for Pasaquan were a direct result of advanced research and content development on the part of students in the public relations campaigns course and remain in use three years later. The service-learning efforts impacted Marion County and Pasaquan, and they also made an impact on university students.

Impact for the Students

The project work in Marion County and Pasaquan brought more than 28 public relations campaign students, eight public relations management students, and one senior intern to the region and helped them develop industry-relevant experience and portfolio materials. Looking at the larger collaboration, according to Pasaquan's director, 120 students enrolled at the university have helped to advance the work in Marion County and Pasaquan over the last two years. The students came from the public relations and integrated media production program in communication, art historians and studio students in art, students gathering information through oral history collection and archiving in history, students developing travel and tourism maps in geography, and creative writing students in English. The venue's plans for flexible use promise to

bring a more diverse, interdisciplinary group of students for future class projects. The most obvious source of collaboration is within one of the university's colleges, which now produces several onsite exhibitions each year, most notably a collaborative composition of an opera about the artist and Pasaquan, first performed by faculty and students on the grounds in October 2017. In short, the project brought an intellectually diverse group of young talent together to facilitate solutions intended to help revitalize a community and elevate the profile of a unique cultural venue in the rural Southeast.

The direct impact of this project for public relations students continues to be improved marketability at graduation, as well as enhanced civic engagement. Mentioned earlier, the senior public relations student who took on the role of an intern at the Chamber of Commerce demonstrated the benefit of this approach to study for students. She did so largely because of her desire to gain more experience, but also because she was from the region and wanted to continue to help its growth. During the internship, she had a direct role in developing the marketing and promotion for the county and town. She also aided planning and executing the launch for Pasaquan and was the first ambassador for the new Pasaquan Welcome Center. The experiences she had in the internship made it possible for her to earn her first position as the communication director for a neighboring chamber of commerce, as well as maintaining her support role with the Marion County Chamber of Commerce two years after graduation. The intern's experience and ultimate career path represents an ideal model for the civic and professional benefit of service and experiential learning (see Bollinger, 2004; Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Wandel, 2005).

Discussion and Recommendations for Educators

As a single case, there are certainly conditions here that proved beneficial to faculty, students, and the community. The shared mission and

vision for the project among faculty, students, community leaders, and appropriate state agencies have much to say about the access, opportunity, and outcome of the project. That said, none of this diminishes the level of commitment and professional attitude and ability demonstrated by 37 students throughout three public relations courses. It should also be noted that the researcher acknowledges the comprehensive body of work from the students in strategy and materials, while significant as source material for subsequent project work and grant funding, do not explain the entire impact. In fact, there are multiple factors that contributed to the ongoing economic improvement in the region over the past three years. That said, the project demonstrates value in adopting service learning for students, faculty, the university, and a community partner on multiple fronts.

This study contributes to the limited body of knowledge about the value of public relations education to economic development (Fraustino et al., 2019). These findings also reinforce the body of literature supporting the value of service learning, including impact on rural communities (Frazier, Niehm, & Stoel, 2012; Miller, 1991; Tonn, Ezzell, & Ogle, 2010). This piece should be seen as a preliminary step in exploring means of developing more sophisticated and nuanced models for assessing economic impact in future scholarship on the subject, particularly on matters of long-term impact and projects that extend beyond single-semester courses. The researcher acknowledges the limitations of this assessment and analysis, particularly in examining student perceptions, but also notes the potential for additional scholarship that develops service-learning models devoted to economic development projects, as well as tools specifically designed for assessing the economic impact that faculty, students, and community partners achieve in projects similar to this one.

Literature in service learning details the value of the practice to individual students (Allison, 2008; Muturi et al., 2013; Rentner, 2011; Todd, 2014; Toncar et al., 2006; Witmer et al., 2009) and educators (Fall &

Bourland-Davis, 2004; Wandel, 2005), and the larger view of the benefit to organizations, communities, and the university's original purpose and strategic mission (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Greene, 2006). This case offers a model for a project that helped advance the university mission by helping local economic prospects, raising the profile of a visionary art venue and strengthening a community's buy-in during the process. Furthermore, it creates opportunities for students to build portfolios that will make them marketable in the workforce.

The concerns posed about service learning as a time-consuming and labor-intensive process (Fall & Bourland-Davis, 2004; Fraustino et al., 2019; Wandel, 2005) certainly hold true here. The instructor invested the better part of a year in research and relationship cultivation on site in Marion County with community members, in meetings with faculty in other departments, and in the development of a project design that would provide students with the opportunity to meet community needs. The intent of this research, however, is to illustrate the long-term value of the preparation and effort to advancing the students, community, and the faculty member. This project prompts further inquiry into the measurable impact of competition on service learning (McCullough, 2018; Rentner, 2011), and further study of the ultimate impact of the service-learning projects on Marion County, the town, and Pasaquan. Further, the specific case offers an opportunity for educators to further explore situations in which a losing team's work ultimately contributes to the partner organizations.

Building and sustaining relationships through the two years of development and coursework speaks to relationship nurturing, a key component of stewardship in the ROPES PR model, which is commonly associated with fundraising (Kelly, 2001; Waters, 2009). The strength of the students' stewardship permitted the work to progress across three semesters. This is an example of the value of teaching stewardship in

service learning public relations courses. It also suggests a potential alternative to leaving work partially complete for the professor or client to see through (Fraustino et al., 2019) and a potential approach to managing client expectations of student output and timeline for useful strategy and materials (Rogers & Andrews, 2015). It also suggests an argument for developing a curriculum that incrementally builds in service-learning coursework that culminates in a capstone course structure, strengthening student aptitude with service learning and providing sustained support for client partners.

For community leaders, academic decision-makers, and other interested parties, the study should also be an example of the potential value of integrating coursework with practical environments. For community leaders, the local university may be able to serve as an engine for growth and revitalization beyond enrolled students, faculty, and staff living in the region. Service learning offers an approach to teaching that engenders strong social and civic engagement from students that can facilitate change. For faculty members who are hesitant to engage in service learning for various reasons, time commitment among them, this offers an example of economic growth spurred in part at the foundational level by students working both in a classroom and in a real-world lab environment.

Limitations

A study of this nature has its limitations in assessing impact. The researcher learned about the potential economic and community impact of the collaborative partnership after the coursework began, and only started studying the impact of the project 15 months after the completion of the senior internship. This limited the study to a case analysis of student project work, student outputs, client responses to project outcomes, and review of economic development markers after the coursework was complete. Future scholarship on service-learning projects associated with

economic development would benefit from quantitative or qualitative survey analysis that examines student perspectives, either from a follow-up survey (Werder & Strand, 2011) or a pre-test and post-test model (Fraustino et al., 2019). This would enrich the body of knowledge on the value of service learning in economic development to public relations students in addition to the case analysis presented here. Furthermore, in light of scholarship examining the challenges of service learning for faculty and students (Fraustino et al., 2019; Witmer et al., 2009), future studies in this area should examine the potential challenges service learning can pose for faculty and students alike.

Areas of Further Study

In considering the perspective of students, the students' holistic experience with and impression of projects of this nature is of benefit and should be an area of analysis in looking at future service-learning projects that focus on economic development and community revitalization of this nature. This presents an opportunity to leverage prior scholarship and models related to the subject (Muturi et al., 2013; Rogers & Andrews, 2015; Werder & Strand, 2011) to get a better perspective on students' responses to and benefit from service-learning projects focused on economic development.

Also valuable would be further assessment of economic impact that can be implemented at the outset of a public relations course. This study provides an example where the client partner indicates that the work of students across each semester developed strategy and materials that ultimately shaped and informed promotional materials for the arts venue, as well as background research and strategy that yielded grant support for economic-development projects. A more comprehensive instrument that would demonstrate economic performance at the outset and in the aftermath of the course project would offer a stronger argument that supports qualitative data akin to the findings in this case study.

Finally, another area of analysis is to explore the impact of embedding stewardship (Kelly, 1991, 2001; Waters, 2009) in the public relations curriculum to create service-learning partnerships that endure across semesters. The potential benefits for students in terms of sustained client partnerships and the long-term value to community partners demonstrated in this case suggest value in additional study to determine viability of embracing the practice in the public relations classroom.

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