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Academic Service Learning and Society: From Individual to Institutional

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INTRODUCTION

The use of Academic Service Learning (ASL) as a method of teaching students via projects that benefit non profit organizations in the delivery of their mission has been used to varying degrees over the past thirty years. Its introduction and use in a course at a university normally takes the form of an initiative by a professor. Its duration then in turn is dependent on how long that faculty member wishes to use it and if other professors opt to follow suit in implementing ASL in their courses. As a result, ASL ultimately becomes discontinued after a period when the faculty member experiences fatigue or cannot locate participating organizations to keep the initiative moving forward. But with university support and resources ASL as an initiative can help achieve the mission of multiple constituents. Firstly, it assists universities in fulfilling their mission of having a positive effect on society and in helping those in need. Second, it assists non profits in the delivery of their mission by providing them with the intellectual abilities of students who bring a new perspective in the delivery of non profit services. Third, it facilitates faculty in delivering course subject matter by giving it relevance through exposure to real world issues and problems. The essential benefit of institutionalizing ASL is that it makes it sustainable over a number of years and accommodates its adaptation to various disciplines of learning while also exposing new ways of learning to various academic domains. So, through university support can we see ASL evolve as a learning tool that resides in the university as opposed to singular efforts by faculty that expire over time. Applicability of ASL also resonates with universities seeking to serve a mission of interacting positively with its surrounding community. For clarification purposes, the term 'institutionalizing ASL' refers to a university or college taking ownership of the ASL process with a view to ensuring the use of ASL in courses also serves to satisfy and strengthen the university's mission.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic Service Learning (ASL) is a form of experiential learning involving a) student participation, b) reflection, and c) critical thinking in community organizational projects whose purpose is congruent with both course objectives and institutional mission. ASL as a learning tool sees its origins date back to the 1980's when the Presidents of Brown, Georgetown and Stanford universities introduced Campus Compact to forge community partnerships with non profits. This was done in response to the changing social expectations towards universities which demanded involvement in local communities.[1] The major streams of academic study of ASL began in the 1990s when its use as a teaching method gained traction and continue unabated to this day.

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[1] Joy Beatty, For which future? Exploring the implicit futures of service-learning. *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, 18 (2010):181-197.

This literature reveals two major streams of research: the first involving studies examining the implementation of ASL in singular courses and, the second involving the strategic and systematic implementation of ASL at the university or school level.

Professor-Initiated ASL Courses

The implementation of ASL in a singular course is usually spear-headed by a faculty for use in their particular section of that course. The utilization of these single course studies have revealed a plethora of results. We now explore some of these relevant studies to illustrate the versatility of ASL as a teaching method. Firstly, in the area of accounting Gujarathi and McQuade[2] utilized ASL in an intermediate level course to study the impact of environmental forces on the financial viability of non profit organizations showing that quite often non profits are one crisis away from extinction. In another study in the area of accounting Calvert and Kurji[3] explain how they designed and implemented service learning in a managerial accounting course and explained what specific areas of the course are better served by ASL and the benefits derived by their students. In the domain of business communication Morin[4] studied students in a business communications class to explore unexpected drawbacks of service-learning such as insufficient preparation and time to expend on the project while Cooper[5] utilized the reflection papers of an internship class to discover student benefits of ASL in terms of team building. In the international arena Coffey and Wang[6] utilized a capstone course offered in China to obtain and analyze questionnaires of students, community organizations and professors regarding the benefits they derived from the application of service learning showing increased learning and societal awareness.

In other areas of business the studies which have been conducted are both wide and varied. Mancuso, Alijani, Kwun, and Smith[7] described how the utilization of andragogy in entrepreneurship by two historical black colleges and universities in New Orleans resulted in positive results in helping organizations assisting adult learners. Jordan and Schroeder[8] examined how students of a capstone class acted as consultants to a not-for-profit organization and described how the students studied and developed training modules for the community

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[2] Mahendra Gujarathi and Ralph McQuade, Service-learning in business schools: A case study in an intermediate accounting course, *Journal for Education for Business*, 77 (2002): 144-150.

[3] Victoria Calvert and Rafik Kurji, Serving-learning in a Managerial Accounting course: Developing the "soft" skills. *American Journal of Economics and Business Administration*, *4* (2012): 5-12.

[4] Emily Morin, Service learning pitfalls: Problems you didn't see coming. *College Teaching Methods & Styles Journal*, 5 (2009): 43-51.

[5] Linda Cooper, Student reflections on an LIS internship from a service learning perspective supporting multiple learning theories. *Journal of Education for Library and Information Science*. 54 (2013): 286-298.

[6] Betty Coffey and Jia Wang, Service-learning in a Master of Business Administration (MBA) integrative project course: An experience in China. *Journal of Education in Business*, 82 (2006): 119-124.

[7] Louis Mancuso, Ghasem Alijani, Obyung Kwun, and Larry Smith, Successful outcomes of teaching minority undergraduate students entrepreneurial business planning concepts using andragogy and service learning. *Journal of Entrepreneurship Education*, 13 (2010): 37-44.

[8] Mark Jordan and Mike Schroeder, Enhancing education through service-learning: a project overview, *Development and Learning in Organizations*, 25(2011): 21-23.

organization. Buchanan[9] motivated by the 2009 financial crisis incorporated a service- learning component in a mid-level finance class. Her students in cooperation with 45 not-for-profit organizations developed financial literacy seminars for people with no financial knowledge. The results however were mixed due to group size and diversity of knowledge and motivation of the audience.

Further research involving course service learning projects has been conducted by Marques[10] in terms of business ethics. The author studied students in business ethics classes containing a service-learning component and found that 35% of them continued being involved with the community organizations after the class ended. Also in the area of business ethics, Driscoll, McKee, and Price[11] studied students who took a mandatory third year Business Ethics course that required them to design and deliver their own group service-learning projects. Volunteer focus groups and personal interviews were used to find out how students learn the value of service to the community through service learning. They also found that the interconnections of communities help students forge a stronger link to the course, the university and the communities at large. Liu and Lin[12] studied six graduate students taking a service-learning course. They conducted pre and post tests on student attitudes towards service-learning. They found that direct contact of the service recipients proved to be a significant factor affecting subject changes while utilizing reflection diaries along with class discussion supported and inspired the participants. McCrea[13] demonstrated the utilization of service-learning in teaching an entrepreneurship course. The author describes her experiences with the method and provides the tools she utilizes which enhanced student learning.

In terms of strategy research by Robinson, Lloyd-Sherwood, and DePaolo[14] outlines the reasons that have lead them to utilize service-learning in their strategic management course. They argue that students gain an understanding of the strategic problems managers face when they experience the same difficulties in advising non profits. The authors utilized a just-in-time lecture technique for on-demand instruction based upon new information from the service partner and then provided assessment tools and reflection for the course. This helps students understand how new information can suddenly change the direction of strategy development.

Nicolova and Andersen[15] demonstrate how a post-graduate consulting course offered at

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[9] Bonnie Buchanan, Improving international students' understanding of local culture and financial institutions, *Journal of International Education,* 7 (2014): 108-120.

[10] Joan Marques, Shaping morally responsible leaders: Infusing civic engagement into Business Ethics courses. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 135 (2016): 279-291.

[11] Cathy Driscoll, Margaret McKee, and Shelley Price, The "Learning Service" of Service Learning: An exploratory study in a business ethics course content. *Journal of Leadership, Accountability and Ethics*, *14* (2017): 79-100.

[12] Ruo-lan Liu and Pai-ying Lin, Changes in multicultural experience: Action research on a service learning. *Systemic Practice and Action Research*, 30 (2017): 239-256.

[13] Elizabeth McCrea, Integrating service-learning into an introduction to entrepreneurship course. *Journal of Management Education*, 34 (2010): 39-61.

[14] David Robinson, Arthur Lloyd-Sherwood, and Concetta DePaolo, Service-Learning by doing: How a student-run consulting company finds relevance and purpose in a business strategy capstone course. *Journal of Management Education*, *34*(2010): 88-112.

[15] Natalia Nicolova and Lisa Andersen, Creating shared value through service-learning in management education. *Journal of Management Education*, 41 (2017): 750-780.

an Australian university creates value to its stakeholders. The researchers identify four factors that play an important role in the value creation. These factors include a committed engagement of client coordinator, a coaching program that involves management experts, providing student autonomy and rigorous assessments.

Ngui, Voon, and Lee[16] examined sixty students in a social innovation internship course in Malaysia. They analyzed the self-reported logs of the students to find out how the students learn about the community, what problems social enterprises face, how to manage diversity, and how to learn about oneself. The findings reveal how the students utilized instrumental, dialogic and self-reflected learning during the application of academic service-learning.

Outside of the area of business there are still other examples of how professors use and study ASL. Kearny[17] described how he utilized ASL in his pharmacy class and explained how his students improved their learning of concepts through societal relevance. Puri, Kaddoura, and Dominick[18] highlighted the international dimension of academic service learning by describing its benefits to students taking a class in health services and then traveling to Morocco with a more purposeful game-plan in helping others. Chuang and Chen[19] described how they implemented academic service-learning in a systems analysis and design course and how they identified crucial factors playing a role in the success of a project aimed at improving technological efficiency of non profits. Ellenbogen[20] studied 15 students pursuing a bachelor of social work degree and their work with four community organizations through service-learning. The author then developed a model of service learning that could be re-used for other courses.

While many of these examples appear to have no interconnectedness the common thread throughout is that ASL is being used and researched by faculty across numerous areas of academic study.

University-Initiated ASL Courses

The second stream of research examines the institutionalization of academic service-learning in curricula at the university and/or school levels.

Lamb, Swinth, Vinton, and Lee[21] describe how Montana State University employed a preexisting model of value development through community service to institutionalize ASL and deliver more meaningful learning.

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[16] Ngui, K.-S., Voon, M.-L., and Lee, M-H., Integrating community engagement with management education: A case study of ENT 30014 Social Innovation Internship, *Education & Training*, 59 (2017): 579-589.

[17] Kevin Kearny, A service-learning course for first-year Pharmacy students. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*, 72 (2008): 86.

[18] Aditi Puri, Mahmoud Kaddoura, and Christine Dominick, Student perception of travel service learning experience in Morocco. *Journal of Dental Hygiene,* 87 (2013): 235-43.

[19] Keh-Wen Chuang and Kuan Chou Chen, Designing service learning project in system analysis and design course. *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal*, 17 (2013): 47-60.

[20] Stephen Ellenbogen, An alternative model of community service learning: Students, community, and instructors learning from each other. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 7 (2017): 315-330.

[21] Christine Lamb, Robert Swinth, Karen Vinton, and James Lee, Integrating service learning into a business school curriculum. *Journal of Management Education*, 22 (1998): 637-654

Andrews[22] in a 2007 study reviewed successful university programs and how these universities implement ASL into one of three forms: first implementation by course section, second the development of a center for service-learning, and third the creation of a service-learning consortium. The study then examined the implementation of ASL in the business curriculum and finds that though some disciplines such as management have extensive ASL projects others such as finance have very limited ASL involvement. At the graduate level the author found MBA courses to favor ASL use in terms of team projects working on community leadership issues and project management exercises for low-income organizations.

Lopez and Tsai[23] describe how the University of the Incarnate Word of San Antonio utilizes service-learning projects only that are be directly related to the university's mission. This was done with the intention of promoting a better understanding of the university's mission amongst students. The authors studied the perceptions of students who participated in service-learning and found that there is a moderately positive relationship between the students' perceptions of service learning and understanding of the university mission. Peters[24] (2011) examines the benefits and drawbacks of service learning in a course that is part of the undergraduate communication sciences and disorders curriculum. She explains the experiential benefits service-learning provides to the students by allowing them to deal with real life situations, giving them a better understanding of the theoretical concepts learned in class, and thereby allowing them to create a better integration of the knowledge acquired across different courses.

Wittmer[25] describes how Daniels College of Business at the University of Denver has incorporated service-learning into one of its core graduate courses. The philosophy of the service learning initiative is explored as a vehicle to achieve the mission of the college. The service-learning is a one day community based project with a reflection component at the end. Various studies on this initiative showed that if students had a positive experience it enhanced potential student commitment for community service in the future. They also found that there were gender differences in students' opinions of ASL and that international students were less affected by community service and were less likely to do community service in the future.

In the case of St. John's University in New York, ASL went from being a single class project in 1995, resulting in the office of ASL being formed, to being part of the university's institutional strategic plan in 2008 to promote experiential learning and bridge the gap between the university and non profit community organizations. To promote ease of use to faculty, the university offered certification in ASL which was availed by 279 faculty. Nine years later the ASL initiative continues to thrive with 226 faculty using ASL as a teaching method in their

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[22] Christine Andrews, Service learning: Applications and research in business. *Journal of Education in Business*, 83 (2007): 19-26.

[23] Clarissa Lopez and Kuan Chen Tsai, Service learning through mission and ministry. *International Journal of Education*, 4 (2012): 127-137.

[24] Kimberly Peters, Including service learning in the undergraduate communication sciences and disorders curriculum: Benefits, challenges, and strategies for success. *American Journal of Audiology* (online), 20 (2011): 181-96.

[25] Dennis Wittmer, Business and community: Integrating service learning in graduate business education. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 51 (2004): 359-371.

courses in Fall 2017. These courses impacted 6,500 students with 75% of students reporting it helped them gain a better understanding of both the university's teaching and faith missions. Furthermore, research generated from ASL involvement has resulted in 12 articles at the university.

As can be seen from these examples of university sponsored ASL initiatives, all have an underlying theme that reflects the integration of mission with society.

This literature review serves to illustrate that ASL has applicability across numerous domains of academic inquiry at both the individual faculty and university levels. It shows how it can be an ideal method of teaching that carries with it the passion of individual faculty and the mission of universities that recognize social responsibility and seek community engagement.

UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF ASL INITIATIVE

The literature review of this article showed that while there is a plethora of studies about ASL examining its use in single courses, not as many studies on the institutionalization of academic service learning in curricula at the university and/or school levels exist to address this gap. Consequently, this paper now deals with the way ASL was embedded in the curriculum of a College of Business as a part of the overall mission of the university.

The difference between ASL in single courses and those that are a part of a university initiative is that in a singular course the ASL component resides in the professor and therefore has a shorter life span than a university-supported learning method. Once a university decides to implement ASL across various academic disciplines it does so with the inherent understanding that ASL is a vehicle of mission and vision in terms of providing assistance to society at large and teaching in a real-world context. Particularly where the institution has service to community imbedded in its mission it becomes a natural next step in making that service a teaching and learning opportunity.

ASL is used in a variety of methods within a category framework of Basic, Discipline, Project, and Research. Basic begins early in a student's career where they assist a variety of organizations and then bring those experiences to the classroom for discussion and evaluation. Disciplined based focuses on what particular majors can do to help organizations with a niche focus. Project-based ASL involves students with different majors assisting an organization with a particular issue with the view to all students' specializations being utilized to assist in a specific project; this is the case within the business school that consults with non profits on urgent problems as well as strategy development. Research then refers to the stream of research produced by faculty in terms of published articles on the topic.

BUSINESS SCHOOL IMPLEMENTATION OF ASL

In the example here, a business school in the northeast United States, about 1,200 students per year engage in the ASL project where students consult with non profit organizations. The

business school's ASL consulting project makes up 12% of the total number of classes university-wide that engage in ASL with a primary goal of ASL facilitating learning of course material. In responding to a request for feedback from the university's ASL office 90% of faculty indicated that course objectives were better achieved by incorporating ASL. A similar request of students returned that while students fully understood the connection of ASL and university mission 62% felt it also contributed to course learning. A comprehensive measurement of ASL outcomes remains difficult to achieve as the purpose of ASL is to help non profit organizations, satisfy university mission, promote learning, and instill in students the desire to serve their community in the future. The latter would require decades-long longitudinal studies where students would have to cite ASL as a primary reason for volunteering. This business school utilizes ASL as a teaching method to both second year and final year students.

The university utilizes a four-step start to completion process:

1. Identification of an appropriate non profit organization by the university's ASL office that would satisfy the learning goals of the selected course. This involves examining the goals of a number of non profit organizations to ascertain the suitability of the organization in terms of relevance to the course material being taught. The organization that most aligns with learning goals is then selected.
2. Faculty assigned to teaching various section of the particular course together with university ASL personnel meet with executives from the selected organization to establish the needs of the organization which can used as a learning tool by faculty
3. A case study is then written which introduces the organization to students, explains its needs, and what is expected from students in terms of researching solutions.
4. Groups of students selected from each section of the course then present their findings and recommendations to executives of the non profit in a formal presentation.

This process is repeated for both second year and fourth year students. Second-year students are given a case study developed with a non-profit and are asked to develop immediate solutions to pressing problems. Final year students are similarly provided a case study and charged with developing a strategic plan for the non profit. Both groups of students conduct research, benchmark against other organizations, examine mission and vision, culminating in the formal presentations to the non profits. Also of importance is that this four–step process can be used across different academic domains.

This simple yet effective structure for the implementation of ASL assists in student learning while also providing senior leadership of non profits with unbiased opinions of various courses of actions the non-profits should take. Furthermore, its inclusion on a graduate's Curriculum Vitae provides an interview talking point. And while detractors may claim that students are not ready to engage in professional-type consulting projects the fact remains that many companies begin on a shoestring budget in garages, dorm rooms, and basements. Hence, through exposure to business problems early in the collegiate learning process the creative juices of students are engaged and possibly ignite a further thirst for education and business engagement.

Despite not being able to measure long-term effects of participation in ASL it does achieve many of its goals in terms of learning, student retention, collaborative learning in teams,

and increased student faculty interaction such that it validates itself as a learning tool. Furthermore, from a business perspective it increases what we can term "brand credibility" as a university in terms of student recruitment in communicating a sense of caring for both students and society. It also allows a university convey that it provides a forum where students can put learning into practice thereby adding to both the educational experience and workplace readiness.

SATISFACTION OF CONSTITUENT MISSIONS

ASL would not be used a learning tool if it did not promote learning - if it did not connect teaching and practice. The result of this 'praxis' whereby both theory and practice mesh together is an enhanced learning experience for the student. It also achieves satisfaction of university social and religious missions, as well as the attainment of participating non profit organizations goals. ASL can be used not just by religiously affiliated institutions with social missions, even though it fits perfectly with such institutions' missions, but also by any college that wishes to acknowledge the inter-connectedness of places of learning and society at large and wish to impact society positively. And while ASL may be seen as being germane to religious universities it clearly is one of the ways to recognize that the mission of both religious and secular universities may not be as dissimilar as one might think. In responding to the call for more university involvement with society this method of teaching builds bridges between teaching, mission, and community and as such attains its goals in each area.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this paper we uncovered numerous instances where ASL was utilized across numerous domains. And while the term "service-learning" may suggest a dilution of the academic learning process we conclude the opposite is true. The flexibility of choice in deciding how service learning may be utilized in a course gives it a malleable appeal. This utility therefore allows service learning to be built around a course as a complement as opposed to a service-learning project becoming a burden of the course. Although this article examined its use as an institutionally sponsored philosophy of learning, it remains by its very nature, a non-encroaching method of learning imposed on faculty for course inclusion. Its use as a case study, as outlined in the example within this article, complements theory, creates a reference point, and retains grading within the faculty member of a course.

As a means to promote social awareness, integrate colleges with society, and by providing a foundational base of real world learning, ASL garners a valuable place in academia as a learning tool. Its support by a university signals a commitment to positively impacting society through better citizenship while also displaying an openness in exploring different ways to effect learning. We therefore conclude that ASL serves as a creative teaching method while also being the vehicle of the mission of colleges and universities who acknowledge a societal responsibility.