

Sandra Ryan

Instructor MGT 4397 – 001 – Management and the Business Environment

Course Narrative:

Management and the Business Environment, MGT 4397, is a course that will translate well to the service learning model. Students in this course will have the opportunity to actively engage in service-learning with a local nonprofit organization, to create and achieve a strategic goal, and complete a stakeholder analysis of the organization.

Students in this course are generally juniors and seniors at Rawls College, and draw on previous course work and newly introduced topics to gain a basic understanding of the interrelationship between business and society and those groups and individual (stakeholders) who are affected and have an interest in a firm's strategic objections, actions and decisions. Both businesses and nonprofit organizations operate in a complex environment and this course examines how both ethical and stakeholder issues influence strategic goals and objectives.

Critical Reflection:

Critical reflection will be incorporated in the class in a variety of ways. The initial discussions will center around the connections between the projects and the course topics, which will convey the importance of developing an understanding, based on their interactions with their community partners and projects, of the impact they are having on the community. Rather than just complete a project for a grade, students will reflect as a vehicle to use their experience and observations to achieve a better understanding of their external environment, the course concepts, and their own personal development.

The students will develop weekly journal entries based on their experiences with their community partners and their team. During our regular class times, (MWF) students will discuss the course material and reflect on their experiences with their community partners. Small, mixed group discussions are often used so that teams may draw on other teams' experiences, as well as their own. In terms of topics covered in Management and the Business Environment and the service-learning experience. The final service-learning reflection paper will allow individual students to reflect on and discuss their personal experiences and how the service-learning experience has affected them as students and how they foresee the service-learning experience affecting them in the future.

The weekly journal entries will be guided by prompt questions, and each journal will encourage the students to expand on issues they find important. Prompts range from specific topics such as "Have you been able to adjust, adapt, and overcome when confronted with difficult situations?" to open ended prompts such as "Because of service-learning, I am.....". Class discussion prompts begin with a discussion of the course topics, and reflection is guided through the relationship between the course, the community partner, and the projects. Journals and the final reflection paper are assessed through rubrics and discussion with the individual students.

Meaningful Service:

Students will participate in field work with their community partner, reviewing the organization as a whole; gaining an understanding of the stakeholders of the organization, and of the complex environment the community partner exists in. The students, as part of a team, will set a goal with their community partner and use topics covered in Management and the Business Environment to achieve this goal. The goal will meet a need of the nonprofit organization and the local community, while providing experiential learning for the students.

As in my past service-learning course, I would envision my students partnering with a wide variety of community partners. Examples of past and current community partners include Goodwill of Northwest Texas, East Lubbock Promise, Lubbock Chamber of Commerce, Haven Animal Shelter, United Blood Services, and Lubbock Moonlight Musicals. Many of these organizations have expressed an interest in working with service-learning students again in the future.

Most community partners have been identified through networking, while others have been identified by students who have had involvement with organizations in the past. Students are permitted to choose community partners that have missions aligned with their interests.

I anticipate that the service-learning will have a positive impact on the community. With the community partners my students will identify a need that will benefit the stakeholders of the organization, set a strategic goal to create a solution to fill the identified need, and often execute a process to meet the goal. The community will benefit by the goal being met, and my students will benefit by having the opportunity to put their management skills into practice and using what they are learning in a real life situation. Also, to be sure the experience is mutually beneficial for both the students and the community partner I make sure the lines of communication between all of us are open and that everyone has an understanding of what we are trying to accomplish with service-learning. A good example is Goodwill of Northwest Texas. To date I have had three service-learning teams work with this organization. Our Goodwill contact meets with each team at the main Goodwill facility and gives a thorough orientation so that the teams understand the mission of Goodwill. The teams then meet with various Goodwill managers to discuss available projects, and how the projects could relate to the course. The students have a valid service-learning experience, and the community partners find the teams to be a resource in fulfilling their mission.

Civic Awareness:

“Students will be able to demonstrate connections between course content, their service experience, and community engagement.”

The service-learning experience relates to and enhances my course curriculum by allowing students to take the course topics and in an experiential setting take the concepts from the classroom and use them in a real world environment. While participating in service-learning, and using the course concepts to complete a project for a community partner, students take abstract concepts and use them in a setting where they can see the outcome of their initiatives. Students will gain first-hand knowledge about the stakeholders involved with their community partners and see how they can positively impact their community.

The service-learning experience might encourage civic awareness because students, through their engagement with community partners are exposed to situations many have not thought about. By working with organizations such as East Lubbock promise and Goodwill teams are exposed to at risk populations and see first-hand the need for service in the community. In my past service-learning course it was evident from the service-learning journals and the final project that the desire to make a difference with the project became a major objective for most students. Many had expressed that they would continue to contribute through community engagement.