Role of Collaboration in Higher Education in Business

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Education is quickly evolving from the traditional approach of presenting instruction to that of facilitating learning. Many benefits of collaboration in teaching have been demonstrated by researchers. Moreover, external pressures from practitioners and various accreditation agencies are forcing many higher education institutions to create learning communities, service and community-based learning, and interdisciplinary research and teaching. The role of the professor in planning their discourse has been to approach teaching the same way that organizations approach strategic planning by using collaboration among diverse talent and expertise. Strategic instruction identifies the student's long term career, academic, and life goals. This is followed by looking at the skills, behaviors, and abilities needed to achieve these goals and developing the needed course content. In this paper, the authors offer a progress report on the aforementioned trends in academia in business education and present the results of a survey conducted with business faculty in various disciplines.

Keywords: Interdisciplinary teaching, Faculty collaboration, Team-teaching, Learning communities

INTRODUCTION

As a result of the business environment’s fast changing pace, teams have emerged as a requirement for business success due to synergism. The whole is greater than the parts taken independently. Creative people are thought of as individuals working alone, however, interacting and collaborating with others has become critical (Fischer, 2005). “Learning to collaborate by collaborating” is evolving and requires support to be successful (Cortez, 2009). Inadequate support can cause collaborating partners to fail in completion of the joint task (Rummel & Spada, 2005). Knowledge generating communities are taking opportunities to collaborate as instructors, as well as guiding students through collaborations. This is providing frameworks for teaching/learning ways that are not based on traditional means. Education is quickly evolving from the traditional approach of presenting instruction to that of facilitating learning (Elam, 2004; Kezar, 2005).

Collaboration and participation in leadership approaches often makes for more informed and better decisions than what might come from an individual approach. Peter Drucker (1992), a writer, management consultant, and self-described “social ecologist” has said that leaders who are the most effective “never say I” (Merchant, 2009).

Recent data points toward unstructured learning that engages students at a deeper level. Randy Bass, executive director of Georgetown University's Center for New Designs in Learning and Scholarship, ran focus groups and asked the students “where did they have their deepest learning?” (eNewsline, 2011). Their responses were always “outside the formal curriculum.” Bass says that classes form a framework and need to focus more on linking skills conveyed in the classroom to hands-on student activities. Mr. Bass asserts that such an evolution has already begun, driven by student demand, for a better understanding of how students learn, and a new generation of faculty members trying tech-infused teaching methods.

Problem-based learning (PBL) is a pedagogical approach that uses complex situations or scenarios to engage students in seeking solutions to problems (Edens, 2000; Major & Palmer, 2001). It is compatible with collaborative learning (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 1991; Stage, Muller, Kinzie, & Simmons, 1998). In collaborative learning projects, student work in