

Developments In Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 20,1993

INTERGRATING EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISES INTO THE COLLEGE CURRICULUM THE CASE OF INTERNATIONALIZING THE BUSINESS CURRICULUM

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ABSTRACT

Almost all colleges use simulations and experiential exercises in their courses. In most colleges, their use is made on an *ad hoc* basis by individual instructors. Alverno College, a liberal arts college for women, has taken a different approach in that it has integrated simulations and experiential exercises in a fundamental way into its curriculum. They are used in a wide variety of courses and in many settings outside courses and play a central role in the educational philosophy of the institution.

The educational philosophy of the college leads to the widespread use of experiential exercises, including a new exercise that is being used in the Business and Management Division to help business students develop their abilities to work in an international environment.

ALVERNO'S ABILITY-BASED CURRICULUM

The widespread use of simulations and experiential exercises at Alverno comes from two tenets of the college's philosophy of education. According to this philosophy: 1) learning involves the development of students' abilities and the demonstration of those abilities in realistic settings so they can be assessed by instructors or other people; and 2) students need to develop particular proficiency in social interaction because most activity in jobs and in everyday life involves working with other people.

Using simulations and experiential exercises flows naturally from this conceptualization of learning because it dictates that education develops students' abilities -- not merely adds to the level of knowledge in their heads. Eight abilities have been identified in the Alverno curriculum as being particularly important: communication, analysis, problem solving, valuing, social interaction, global perspective, effective citizenship, and aesthetic responsiveness. Teaching concentrates on integrating these eight abilities into the contents of courses and developing them in each student. Throughout the years, Alverno has found simulations and experiential exercises to be useful in giving students multiple Opportunities to demonstrate the application and integration of their knowledge and abilities in realistic settings.

THE INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS AND CULTURE SIMULATION

Alverno has recognized the need to incorporate multi-cultural and multinational aspects in its curriculum. In keeping with the college's commitment to active ability-based teaching, four Alverno faculty members have designed an experiential exercise to help integrate the international and global perspectives into the business curriculum.

The International Business and Culture Simulation is an experiential exercise in which all business students participate at the end of their fifth semester. It involves: 1) two two-hour training sessions that introduce the students to the exercise and a foreign culture; and 2) a three-hour simulated meeting with representatives from a foreign country. It was run for the first time in the fall of 1992.

The final session is conducted in a large area, sectioned into an office/conference room, a reception/exhibit area, and a dining area. The students are required to solve a problem that involves negotiations with representatives from foreign businesses and organizations. Each scenario exposes students to the culture in a foreign country. Initially, the simulation has been designed to depict Munich, Germany. In subsequent years, the setting will be changed to such places as Tokyo and Mexico City.

In the first running of the simulation, students acted as envoys for the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce. They met in simulated Germany with representatives of the Munich Chamber of Commerce to discuss vocational and technical education in Milwaukee and Munich.

On the day of the Munich meeting, students worked in two- or three-person teams. First, each team arrived for its appointment and waited for 5-10 minutes in the reception area. Students then met with representatives of the Munich Chamber of Commerce. The German representatives were simulated by teams consisting of one or two Alverno professors and two volunteers from outside the college. The outside volunteers were German nationals or had German business experience. In addition to its role as German business leaders, each volunteer group acted as assessors, evaluating the performance of the students.

The meetings were conducted as formal meetings would be conducted in Germany. However, the students were expected to show initiative in proposing the agenda and managing the meeting. By design, the German managers took less assertive roles. The meetings lasted for 30 minutes and were videotaped.

After each session, students reviewed the videotape of the meeting and assessed their own performances. They were given 40 minutes to write their observations and answer specific questions concerning the meeting. Next, students wrote memos to the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce describing the accomplishments of their meeting. A 40-minute block of time was set aside for this task.

The last activity was a group feedback session with each group of students and their assessors. Students' meeting performance, self-assessments, and memos were discussed. The emphasis here was for each student to identify and understand the overall strengths and weaknesses of her performance and discuss strategies for development of her knowledge and abilities.

THE ROLE OF SIMULATIONS AND EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISES IN INTERNATIONALIZING THE BUSINESS CURRICULUM

The primary objective of the exercise is to provide students with the opportunity to integrate liberal learning with sound business practice in an international setting. To successfully complete the exercise, the students need to: 1) use and integrate organizational and management theory with liberal learning to interact effectively in diverse organizational and cultural contexts; 2) accurately interpret and analyze business situations and to effectively communicate their analyses to others; and 3) take the initiative in identifying and solving problems or pursuing opportunities for organizational growth or improvement in a global environment.

In addition, students must learn about vocational and technical education in the Milwaukee area. Among the eight abilities listed earlier, social interaction, analysis, and problem solving are emphasized.

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