

**DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITY BASED
ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS**

A case study: UWS SIFE

(University of Western Sydney Students in Free
Enterprise)

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Abstract

At the University of Western Sydney Students in Free Enterprise [SIFE] was introduced in 2002 to students in all colleges. The SIFE team is under the auspices of the Office of Regional Development and part of the university's cooperative programs scheme. The team works under the guidance of a university mentor. For the past three years the university has entered a team in the annual championship which highlights the community based entrepreneurial activities of the students. A diverse range of projects had been undertaken with a mixed level of success, both in the community and in the national competition. A new team was formed in 2004 who were not from the traditional business colleges rather from education and health. The team achieved both success in the community but also in the national competition when they were placed third.

The focus of this case study is on the 2004/5 teams' development and the community programs implemented. The programs will be highlighted in relation to the development of the skills of both the team participants and the community members involved. The personal and professional development of the university students is examined in relation to their university study.

A six-phase process for formulating a team project for students has evolved. The students follow this system to work as part of the SIFE team. With the success of the 2004 team UWS SIFE will be introduced as part of an academic unit, in 2006, which will introduce additional learning skills. These modules have been developed to meet the individual needs of the students in developing their community based programs. The modules may be undertaken at any time during the six stage process as they are available to students to take in their own time by themselves or working with other team members. The work completed in the modules is not grades rather they are assess for the level of understanding the student attains from completing the work.

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Background on the University of Western Sydney

Greater western Sydney is one of the world's largest urban areas. It covers almost 9,000 square kilometres. It is home to 1.5 million people, about 40% of Sydney's population. The University of Western Sydney encompasses six campuses – Bankstown, Campbelltown, Blacktown, Hawkesbury, Penrith and Parramatta. With 4000 to 6000 students on each of our six campuses, the multicultural population brings to the learning experience a variety of global perspectives on issues that impact on our societies. The university offers academic study in education, communications, law, business, and health at undergraduate and graduate level up to doctoral studies.

Background to SIFE

Students in Free Enterprise [SIFE] is a global organisation which all universities may join at no cost to the university or the individual students. The development of the students is through encouraging them to participate in service learning, which sees links develop between the students, the community and the university. The organisation aims to encourage students to integrate

entrepreneurship, education and community service into service learning programs.

SIFE aims to have students utilise 'the knowledge they are gaining at university to teach others something that will benefit them' (SIFE website). SIFE's mission is to challenge students to make a difference in their own lives by developing their leadership, teamwork and communication skills. Students are encouraged to do this through learning, practising and teaching the principles of free enterprise so as to empower other in their communities and enhance their economic progress.

Thus as participants in SIFE students are required to:

- Devise;
- Develop;
- Deliver; and,
- Document;

all the projects they wish to undertake under the guidance of a university mentor.

Once a year each university team is offered the chance to showcase the work they have undertaken in the local community at a national meeting. Throughout the world many universities participate in the national competitions and in Australia all universities are part of the national competition.

Introduction

This paper examines the development of the University of Western Sydney's SIFE team six stage process and the modules that the students complete in relation to the projects that are to be undertaken. In addition it will highlight the process of developing the university based student group to being part of learning through community service project being proposed so students can apply discipline-based knowledge as they carry out projects of substantial benefit to the wider community.

Literature Discussion

In many education fora academic service learning has been a feature. This has been evident in the last 15 years in the United States of America's Colleges and Universities. Research suggests that the students participating in service learning are likely to improve academically (Fredericksen 2000; Sax & Astin 1997). Students often apply a more engaged form of learning in other academic areas, and use the skills of critical thinking and analysis gained through the service learning in many areas of study (Eyler & Giles 1999, Roschelle, Turpin, & Elias, 2000). An asset to the university community is that service learning can also provide the means whereby universities can reconnect to their surrounding communities and combat a widespread impression that

they have little connection to the everyday lives of people (Gamson 1997; Hollander and Saltmarsh, 2000).

Thus combination of entrepreneurship knowledge and service learning has emerged as students undertaking business courses need to experience the challenges of developing their skills in the business community and working with clients' needs. Service learning is defined as 'linking community service to classroom instruction guided by reflection' (Vickers, Harris & McCarthy, 2004, p. 1). Rozycki (2002) suggested that we need to focus on true service learning [TSL] as 'community service done by students that serves an academic goal for those students that also meets conditions X and Y that I (and my confreres) consider important' and an additional condition is applied that 'the needs of the community dictate the service being provided' (2002, p. 2). However McCarthy purports that 'it is the reflective aspect of academic service learning that makes it distinctive from career-related internships or voluntary activities'. The true service learning ensures that there is a meaningful context for practical learning.

So part of the development of true service learning is the understanding of the underpinning 'entrepreneurship theory [which] is a set of empirical generalisations about the world, economy, and how entrepreneurs should

behave' (Fiet, 2000, p. 104). It is this theory that students need to comprehend to utilise in their collaborative works with local community groups. Thus the true entrepreneurship education provides opportunities for youth to master competencies related to core entrepreneurial knowledge, skills and attitudes including:

Opportunity recognition;

Idea generation and marshalling resources in the face of risk to pursuer opportunities;

Venture creation and operation; and,

Creativity and critical thinking.

This framework reflects many of the theories of creative productivity that have a staged process such as: preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification (Dacey, 1989, p. 84).

All student experiences in the community should be *based on disciplined knowledge* and their learning should be *strengthened through systematic reflection* (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Vickers, McCarthy & Harris, 2004). Thus the role of the university mentor in the SIFE work is to be an '*Information Entrepreneur* who provides practical help and guidance for those who are uncertain about how to proceed' (Coulson-Thomas 2000).

Process

The service learning component of the students' degree has been developed into an academic unit of study – *Learning through community service*. Under this umbrella a range of areas of specialisation have been developed and one of these is the UWS SIFE team. As part of the unit the learning outcomes are as follows:

Students will:

- Apply academic knowledge to issues and problems encountered by community agencies;

- Apply observation, reflection, and interpretation skills in identifying issues affecting community agencies;

- Understand and be sensitive to issues of cultural and social diversity and their impact on the acquisition of social capital of individuals and groups;

- Analyse problems and synthesise information useful to the ongoing concerns of the agency;

- Communicate effectively in person and in writing to a wide variety of stakeholders; and,

- develop products of potential benefit to the communities and agencies in which they do their placements. (University of Western Sydney, 2005).

For this to be achieved the role of the university mentor needs to be highlighted. The mentor would need to advertise the group and network with students to develop the SIFE team. Initially the mentor would coordinate team meeting until the students were confident

to take over the role and then establish the leadership team consisting of a president, treasurer and secretary and any other positions the team wishes to support. The mentor would need to establish a tied account so any monies earned by the team would be accessible and no fees would be charged. These tasks would be undertaken when the team was first established and then the students would continue with the process. Throughout the time as a mentor it is important that the mentor informs academic staff of the development of the team, encouraging more staff to assist in special projects and facilitate the development of the team. Quarterly reports are expected to be submitted to the national coordinator.

The university mentor would maintain these roles while the students work through the six stage process in consultation with the mentor.

The six stage Process to implement a SIFE project

1. Context description and analysis of community needs	Learning modules	Formative evaluation
2. Identification of students' interests, academic study and capabilities with the needs of the community		
3. Linking students with specific projects		
4. Students plan, develop a project plan and budget in consultation with the community members		
5. Implementation of the project		
6. Reflection and evaluation of project		

1. A context description and analysis of community needs. A comprehensive understanding of the local community and their needs will be developed through research on the local area and an examination of the needs of the community. To gain the relevant information the students will visit the local area and interview the local community members to determine the project that could be developed to meet their needs. To ensure the interaction is worthwhile the students would need to write a context description.

A Context Description of the service learning situation is a detailed examination of the community into which a project is to be placed with an analysis of the information as to how it is to be used in the planning of the project. Many methods of collecting information are available to students, including informal discussions with community members; brainstorming sessions with these people; analysis of existing local government documents and regulations which may impact upon the project; checklists and inventories of possible areas to develop; interviews and/or questionnaires distributed to community members. Some of students may need to develop these skills and would complete the learning modules relating to these skills.

The academic mentor would be working on step two of the process at the same time as the students work on developing a context description.

2. Identification of students' interests, academic study and capabilities. This will lead onto the aligning of student groups with a particular community project. The university mentor would interview students to determine their interests and skills to be used with in a particular project. In particular the students' level of commitment needs to be ascertained so that the SIFE team can guarantee that community projects will be completed successfully. A short interest inventory would be used to have students

identify their out of university interests that may assist them in the completion of a particular project.

3. Linking students with specific projects should be undertaken with both groups of students and members of the community teams. The success of the project will be a result of the careful linking of students with the community groups.

4. Students plan, develop a project plan and budget in consultation with the community members. The plan and budget would include:

- Aims – what is hoped to be achieved in the project?
- Outcomes in terms of the community members.
- Context description to show how the project meets the needs of the local community.
- Comprehensive timeline including roles and responsibilities of members of the project team and community members.
- Budget including all the funds that need to be raised and the expenditure of the funds.
- Methods of evaluation to be used during the project (formative) and at the end of the project (summative).

This plan and budget would be submitted to the mentor for consideration prior to the project being undertaken.

5. Implementation of the project within the local community with regular consultations with the university mentor to ensure the project adheres to the plan submitted.

6. Reflection and evaluation of project is to be submitted at the end of the work. Both personal reflections of the process and the community's reflections would be included. The project would be evaluated in relation to the outcomes identified in the original plan.

Recommendations should be given as to how the project may be improved would be included.

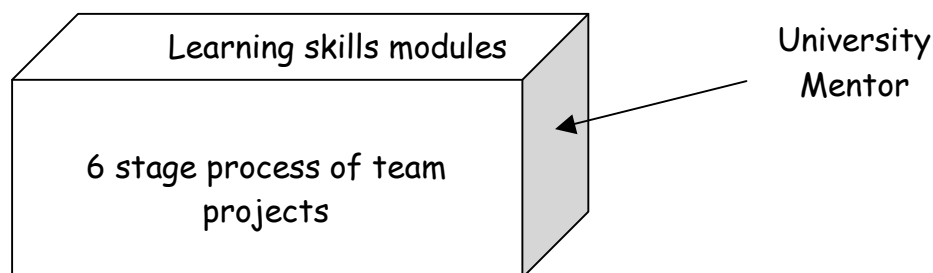


Figure 1: Visual representation of the UWS process

On reflection of the process that had been developed it was evaluated that additional knowledge and skills were needed by the students and so the concept of the learning modules has been introduced. At present an application for an internal grant has been submitted to fund the development of these modules.

Learning Modules

Unlike most community service learning which is set within the community with contact with a university mentor this model adds the learning modules will give the students comprehensive background knowledge to function within the local community to implement a project that enhances their skills whilst assisting the community. The modules are designed to meet the needs of individual students and do not require any students to undertake work that they already have knowledge of. The modules for students will assist them in devising, developing, delivering and documenting their SIFE projects within the local community. The modules would focus upon:

- Selecting a relevant project for your local community;

- Writing a business proposal;

- Maintaining financial records;

- Presentation skills;

- Taking a meeting and recording minutes;

- Creating effective PowerPoint lectures;

- Preparing a business report;

- Writing professional and media communications;

- Marketing a product;

- Creating and maintaining a budget; and,

- Developing a grant submission for funding.

The modules will be self study work that students undertake as they determine they need the knowledge to

complete their projects within the local community. Each module includes readings on the topic, practical examples and activities for the students to complete. These modules will lead to small group sessions to discuss the work undertaken by students in the SIFE team. The university mentor is available for email discussions or short discussions to assist students as they work through the modules.

The Projects in 2004/5

The team for the 2004 tournament presented six projects that they had undertaken using the six stage process:

- Flavours of Western Sydney;
- Teachers' classroom cookbook;
- Chocolate Crackle Capitalist v Chocolate Spider Entrepreneurs;
- Project Elevate;
- Children writing for children; and,
- Hope for Children.

The Flavours of Western Sydney was to establish an ongoing fundraising initiative within schools in Greater Western Sydney and to share the in the positive values and strengths of our community's diversity. The team worked with a school to produce a multicultural cookbook based upon recipes collected from students and teachers within each school.

Teachers' Classroom Cookbook developed from the school based cookbook as it was seen that students in primary schools do not have the opportunity to undertake cooking in class. This compilation of recipes for teachers with suggestions for classroom implementation was developed on a CD Rom but also in laminated work cards. The expectations in the lesson plans are that the students will be involved in the purchasing of the ingredients, the cooking but also the marketing of the food they create. Consideration would need to be given to types of food to cook, the costs and the marketing strategies for selling the products.

The Chocolate Crackle Capitalist v Chocolate Spider Entrepreneurs built upon an idea which had been presented at a previous tournament by another university. Instead of purely developing the production of chocolate crackles as well as considering fair pricing, calculating profits and the ethical issues in food production the students worked on producing two different products and determined which ones would be of greater value to produce.

Project Elevate was aimed at creating excitement, increased awareness and interest in literacy. The project was to involve school students who would attempt to break the Guinness World record for 'Reading Aloud'. A group of more than 1200 students were required to break the record. The SIFE team had negotiated with the

publisher and Australian author James Moloney to use an excerpt from his latest book to be read aloud. The school audience was selected and they had been given the excerpt. The project although was excellently organised did not eventuate in 2004 as on the day that was planned school cleaners in all government schools were on strike and schools were closed and so no students were available to undertake the project. It is hoped that in the future another excerpt will be available to use with students to attempt the record again.

Children writing for children was to encourage the literacy of students through writing stories of their own and then publishing them. Students from different age groups were invited to write their story and were shown how the writing process evolved from thoughts to publication. This was seen as an important component of learning about the marketing of creative ideas.

Hope for Children is an international organisation which supports the forgotten, innocent victims of the AIDS pandemic in Ethiopia. The SIFE team worked within the local Sydney community to fundraise money to assist in the care of these children. The team used a SIFE sponsor's product was the basis of the fund raising.

In 2005 additional students joined the group and also proposed a range of projects which include:

- Keep the money rolling;

- More trust, more benefit;
- Your liability to the government;
- Talk is cheap, or is it? And,
- Pieces of Colour Quilt.

Keep the money rolling is a project to motivate and teach unemployed women business and financial skills so they become financially independent and not require government welfare. A short 8 hour program of meetings have been organised to:

teach financial management to assist in understanding budgeting;

develop the women's money making ventures;

teach business skills; and,

offering women start up grants of \$100 to cover initial cost of materials.

The team leader has benefited from the skills developed in planning and implementing this program as well as the development of financial literacy skills of the women who have participated in the course.

More trust, more benefit is a project which is focussing on new immigrants to Sydney who are not aware of the banking facilities available in their local area because of the lack of communication skills. The project is aiming to translate the English information booklets offered by local banks to customers into Chinese. The SIFE students

working on this project are all within the languages and translation degree at UWS. They have completed the translation of the documents, written publicity posters and media releases. At present they are still awaiting approval from the local banks they are wishing to work with.

Your liability to the government focuses on the ever increasing High Education Contribution [HECS] debt that all students in Australia are faced with as they study at a tertiary institution. The regulations for payment of study have recently changed and a number of options are given to the students. This project focussing on financial literacy was a PowerPoint presentation that was shared with students at UWS to inform them of their options of payment to the government.

Talk is cheap, or is it? related to mobile phone contracts and the cost incurred by people when they engage into a contract with a phone provider. This project developed from the HECS project as students and other members of the community are bombarded with advertisements relating to phone contracts the SIFE team felt that this area of financial literacy needed development. The project has been piloted in a school but will be further developed into a CD Rom to be available to local high schools.

Pieces of Colour Quilt builds upon the work for Hope for Children carried out in 2004. This quilt has been donated to the team to raffle to make additional funds to send to Hope for Children in Ethiopia. This is the commitment of the team to support a charity as they develop their own understanding of financial literacy and the value of money in different economies.

The variety of the projects has drawn upon the personal and professional skills of the participants of the team however all students have commented on their continual development of new and varied skills that are not part of their university study. The areas that have been developed are organisation skills which built upon previous skills. It is most evident that the students' sense of self achievement and esteem has increased as they have achieved what they have set out to achieve through careful goal setting and implementation of the projects.

Conclusion

The development of a structure for students to follow when determining their choice of community service learning project ensures that they both develop the skills and knowledge to undertake the project whilst also experience changes in their interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences (Gardiner, 1983). Students as members of the UWS SIFE team are developing practical

professional skills that complement their academic study pursuits. The service learning becomes a 'conduit for the development and maintenance of meaningful symbiotic relationships between the university and the community' (McCarthy, 2004, p. 1). The continued challenge is to recruit and maintain students in the team by linking the six different campuses which make up the University of Western Sydney.

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