

SWOSU BUSINESS CAREERS TRADE SHOW TRANSFORMS LEARNERS INTO PROFESSIONALS

AN INTERACTIVE PRESENTATION

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

As we seek to create students who are equipped, empowered, and motivated to be successful professionals, it is important to provide them with opportunities to practice and apply what they are learning. Thus, they are more than students; they are Pre-Professionals. With this mindset, we sought to create an assignment that would give our pre-professionals a tangible experience which would expose them to new perspectives and bolster their resumes.

Evert and Myers developed the SWOSU Business Careers Trade Show assignment to encourage their students to start seriously researching prospective career opportunities related to their academic major. The assignment was born out of the realization that many students were waiting until their last semester of college to start career planning. Dr. Amanda Evert incorporated the SWOSU Business Careers Trade Show into her freshman-level Intro to Business course, which included 60 undergraduate students. Ms. Jonna Myers integrated two sections of sophomore-level Business Communication courses, adding 60 undergraduate students and a Human Resources class with 20 upperclassman students.

In the Intro to Business class, instead of assigning a traditional research paper, Evert encouraged her students to research their industries and share their findings in a Trade Show format designed to empower students to build confidence, pride, perspective and identity. SWOSU students were asked to invite their hometown high schools to attend, adding to both the project excitement and the importance of producing a well-researched and informative Trade Show Booth. In the Business Communications, course the students wrote professional letters to all the high school teachers and counselors inviting them to the event. The students also served as ambassadors during the event and helped manage the activities. In the Human Resources course, the students developed a full corporate training to simulate the types of programming a business professional would experience. The students used H.R. training theory in the researching, developing and the implementing of the training activities.

This transformational learning experience was inspired by Michael Porter's (1996) description of strategy. Porter describes the three principles of strategy as 1) "the creation of a unique and valuable position;" 2) making "trade-offs in competing – to choose what not to do;" and 3) "creating 'fit' among a company's activities" (1996). This service learning project was developed and marketed to students as a unique and valuable opportunity to gain what was referred to in the course as "resume gold."

In the Intro to Business class, students were encouraged to see the transformational learning experience as a way of describing their real-world leadership, communications, teamwork, and problem-solving skills within the framework of developing and implementing an event for more than 200 high school and technology center students. The college students were required to describe in their post-experience reflection how the Trade Show could be mentioned on their resume and in a job interview as an example of their personal fit within their future employers' organization. Students were also required to discuss the "trade-offs" they made in selecting the topic of their booths and choosing what materials to include in their presentations.

The curriculum was developed using Bloom's Taxonomy (1956) and included components related to Knowledge, Comprehension, Application, Analysis, Synthesis and Evaluation. The professors started with ensuring Knowledge and Comprehension by requiring students to research their projects. In the Human Resources class, students completed textbook readings related to hosting corporate trainings. In the Intro to Business class, the students researched career data using the Department of Labor's Occupational Handbook. In the Application and Analysis section, the students used their new understanding of the course materials to develop and explain their projects. Then at the conclusion of the event students were asked to synthesize and evaluate their results through an online survey and reflection.

The curriculum developers also used Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle in implementing and evaluating the Trade Show. This transformational learning experience followed Kolb's (1984) cycle by starting with 1) concrete experience of brainstorming their plans for the Trade Show; 2) reflecting on the feedback they received from their classmates in the mock Trade Show practice experience; 3) forming abstract concepts based on their earlier experiences; 4) taking their previous experience and testing their new knowledge in the final event. After the SWOSU Business Careers Trade Show, Evert and Myers used Springfield, Smiler, and Gwozdek's (2015) rubric for measuring the transformative learning by examining the degrees of non-transformative change and transformative change. To do so, they assessed the areas in which these non-transformative and transformative changes occurred including: confidence, pride, skills, perspective, and identity (Springfield et al., 2015). Future research will include formalizing the survey and measurement tools and producing a journal article for the 2018 Transformational Learning Journal.

SELECT REFERENCES

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