

Service Learning: Evidence of Learning Community Services (LCS) as a Model of Students Success at Talladega College.

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Abstract: - Consumer Behavior (Mktg. 310) in alliance with Accounting 211 and Accounting 212 were three Division of Business courses designed to teach students the art of learning community services. These and the psychological concepts were the basis of the Consumer Behavior for the purpose of this paper.

The Course Description: Consumer Behavior: Consumer Behavior course is designed to meet the behavioral course requirement for marketing and accounting students. The course provided students with the understanding of Consumer Behavior, Buying Behavior, and Basic knowledge of the principle of marketing, selling, retailing, and global consumers' cultural needs. Discussions on changes that are taking place among domestic and global consumers, coupled with their demographic cultures and institutions were discussed. Students were assigned local business to serve as consultants and write a report for class grades, using the tools of accounting (Journal Entry, Balance sheet and Income Statements).

Study Objective/Rational: To study and understand consumers buying behavior and their motivation towards individual market offerings, here in the United States of America. Students serve as supervised business consultants in Alabama communities.

Methodology: The students served as volunteer business consultants by providing services in Accounting and Marketing to small business owners (Entrepreneurs). They conducted strategic diagnosis to identify problem(s) faced by the business and then suggest solutions to the owners for implementation. Individual students write a final report on their consulting experiences. This was done periodically and graded as part of the student's final grade for the course. A conceptual framework was developed (see figure 1) and refined for the implementation of the LCS theories and practices in both courses. The study was concluded with evaluation model (see figure 2) to assess the success or failure of the program.

Keywords: - Learning Community; Psychological Concepts; Performance Indicators; Community Services; Turbulence Environment; Evaluators.

Consumer Behavior:

Consumer Behavior Course (Mktg.310) in alliance with Accounting 201 and 202 (Principles of Accounting) were two College of Business (undergraduate) courses designed to teach students the art of learning community services. This study was focused on the Consumer Behavior.

The Course Description:

Consumer Behavior course as a learning community is designed to meet the behavioral course requirement for marketing and other Talladega

College students. The course will provide students with the understanding of Consumer Behavior (Buying Behavior), with focus on consumer attitudes and buying behavior.

Basic knowledge of the principles of marketing, selling, retailing, global consumers' culture/need and general marketing framework and models through prior reading of cases featuring real life consumption behavior and associated companies are prerequisites for the course. Discussions on changes that are taking place among domestic and global consumers,

coupled with their demographic, culture and institutions were discussed.

Course Objective / Rational:

To study and understand consumers buying behavior and their motivation towards individual market offering, here in the United States of America and the world, is a partial form of learning community services that is the focus of this article.

Methodology Adopted for The LCS.

Methods of teaching were the traditional lecturing, assigned reading cases’ analysis, focusing on consumer’s behavior concepts and related marketing concepts in general. Consumer behavior / attitude across culture towards products and services was the course subject matter. Relevant technology was applied to the different topics/issues of instruction. Students were assigned individual projects in LCI and final report was presented to the university community and the public.

Talladega College Students’ ID.

| | | | |
|---------------------|--------|--------|--------|
| 155363 | 155055 | 167697 | 195212 |
| 159970 | 165073 | 194287 | 134117 |
| 195384 | 164347 | 195054 | 186905 |
| 157140 | 188839 | 195505 | 194288 |
| 154569 | 195751 | 176172 | 176116 |
| 154138 | 195382 | 172763 | 195156 |
| | 195212 | 157430 | |
| <u>N= 26</u> | | | |

The Conceptual Models

Figure 1, represents the detailed program services to the constraints faced by both students and faculty (investigators), towards implementation. The linkages are shown in figure 1 below. The model also suggested process of recommendations, feedbacks from TC Student Success Director and Adjustments for future use.

The LCS Research and Service Model

A conceptual frame work was developed for the implementation of LCS theories and practices in both courses (see attached figure I & II). The Participants in the Consumer Behavior (MKTG. 310) class include the following twenty-five students who completed the assignment on LCS before the end of the fall 2020 semester. The assignment represents 40% of their grades for the course. Sample of the assignment project, excluding quizzes and essay tests is also attached to this report. Students as subjects and consumers were identified by “Talladega ID” for the purpose of confidentiality (Kendall, G. and Austin K. (2013).

The students involved in the study are shown by **made up students TC ID**. Without names, because of College policy and confidentiality:

As figure 2 indicates, the implementation phases of the LCS services and its overall evaluation process is a step-by-step approach for the evaluators

The Evaluation Process:

An evaluation was conducted on learning Community programs at Talladega College, Talladega, Alabama. The office of Student Success Center sponsored it during the academic year 2019 – 2020.

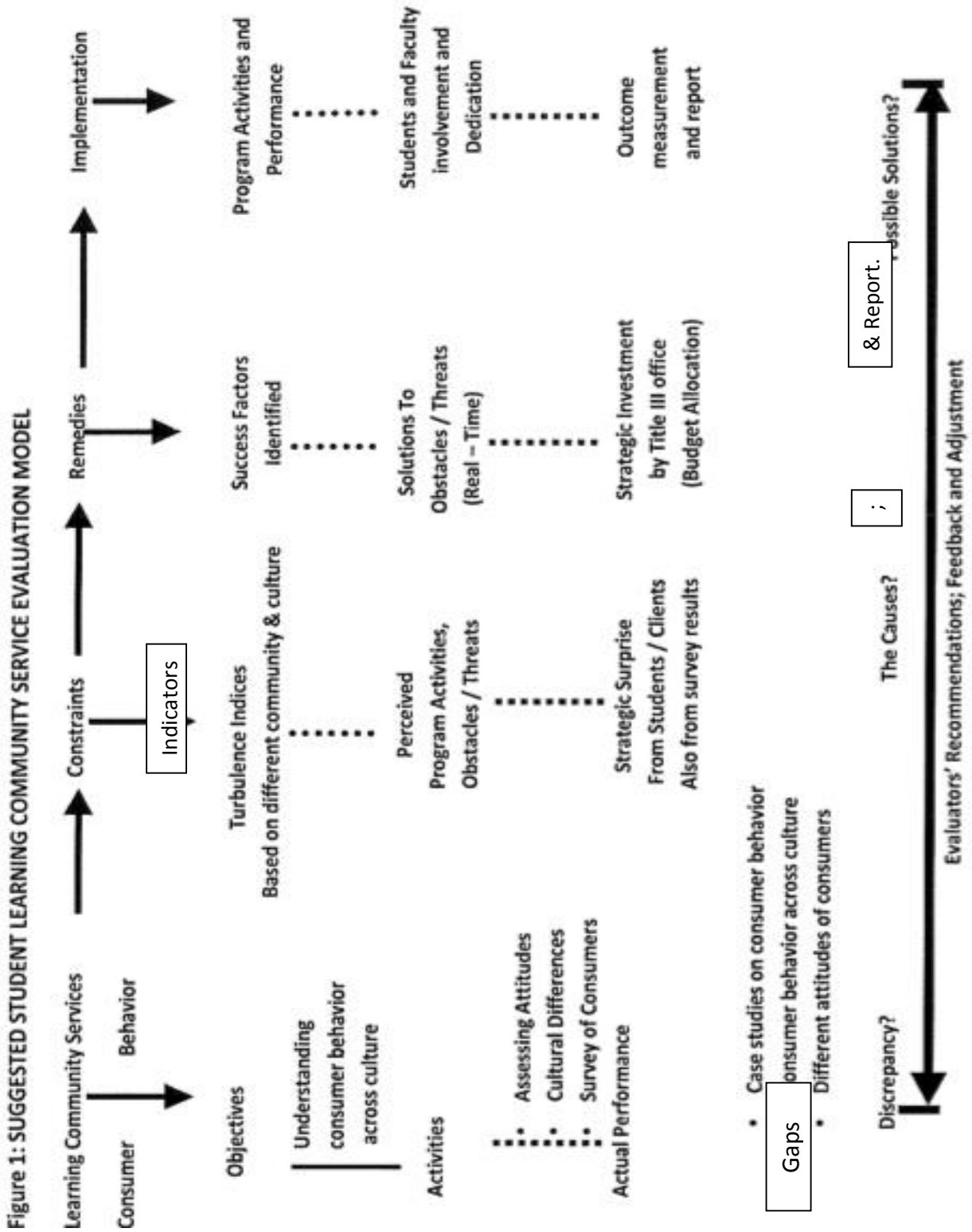
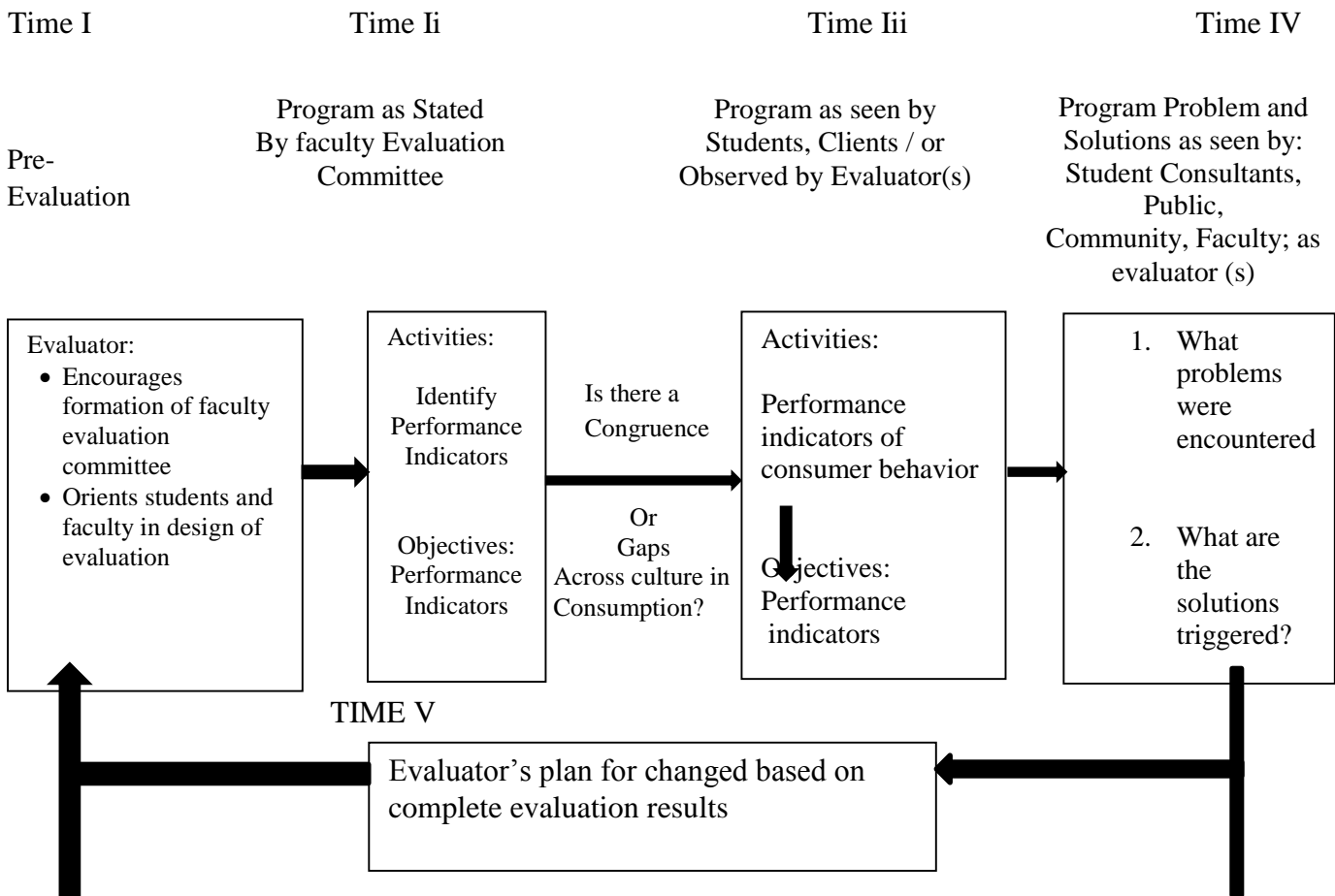


Figure 2: Learning Community Service Evaluation Process after Implementation



The objective was to determine the extent to which the learning community programs and activities achieved their stated goals and objectives.

The Applied Methodology involved:

1. Students Participants stating their objectives and activities.
2. Student's participation and the extent they perceived the value of the learning community activities, using the concept of Consumer Behavior and Accounting.
3. The program final report to Student Success Center Director; and presented to the College Community and the Public

In the process of implementation, four major evaluation problems were encountered

1. How to obtain data on students learning experiences and activities performance results which are acceptable to Business Client, Dega program director, faculty and staff of the College

2. How to provide problem analysis and solutions which would be accepted and implemented by the Business as clients
3. How to involve the faculty principal investigators and students so that a developmental program evaluation design is put in place to acquire knowledge, skills and insights necessary to implement the recommendations
4. Deciding on decision – making tool to utilize in promoting knowledge skills and insights gained during implementation of the project (enhanced students' learning).

Contributions towards Existing Literature, Situational Practice / Process

A developmental program evaluation design was developed “in process” to resolve the above problems (a- d above). The evaluator (Elimimian, Gaitor and Akbari, 2020) began with the objective oriented evaluation model. This model was first developed by (Persand. G. 1987) and fully utilized

and validated by several scholars and practitioners with modified models within general characteristics such as:

(i) Specific standards / objectives are set (ii) actual performance is observed to determine the standards set (iii) information about discrepancies or gaps are used to decide whether to improve, maintain, or terminate the students program of activities in the subject areas.

This is the first recorded evaluation process for Talladega Learning Community project in the Division of Business. The evaluators sensed an element of resistance from Business-Clients participants.

Obviously, the program evaluators (being internal) could see that a comparison of their intended objectives with actual performance, if indicating a discrepancy, would lead to future blame and accountability.

The investigators spent a disproportionate amount of time attempting to determine, precisely, who (she/he, they) demanded the evaluation and what was the purpose? If we were only to determine the discrepancy/ gaps between (i) stated objectives and (ii) actual performance, then apportioning blame appeared to be the purpose.

Thus, the evaluators had to vary the purpose of the research from a purely discrepancy model to include (a) the problems which were encountered in goal attainment and (b) solutions to the problem. This released the pressure from blame and empowered the program evaluators with the responsibility of resolving their problems, if any. The result was that the program evaluators became free in identifying their problems and analyzing potential solutions.

To be able to do these, however, the program evaluators had to be removed from their hierarchical status (principal investigators) relationship and be placed in a participatory role.

To obtain a participatory mode, the external evaluators set up an internal program evaluation team (IPET). This team effort, not only generated ideas about problems and solutions but, also, lowered

resistance (Kurt Lewin, 1969 and Kendall, G. and Austin K. (2013). and facilitated cooperation between the evaluator and the subjects. Next, the student became articulate in demanding to know how to state their objectives and program activities, in future study/project management.

The students wanted to determine the evaluators' standards of good objectives and good activities and to provide, according to the standards of the evaluators (another attempt to avoid blame) rather than describing precisely their own behaviors and activities. To overcome this problem, the evaluators provided a model of previous evaluation results, so that the program evaluators (internal evaluation team) could see examples of objectives and activities (Provus, M.M; 1969 and Kendall, G. and Austin K., 2013). _).

The Student Actors and Assessment:

The internal students (participants) still had a problem of how to distinguish an objective from an activity. Talladega College is managed as bureaucracy and hence, there is a tendency to confuse rules and activities (to implement rules) as objectives. Indeed, a major problem confronting the College as administrative bureaucracy is that there is not a one to one relationship between cross curriculum objectives, activities and rules, even in the strategic plan.

To resolve this problem, a management oriented approach was utilized. The context, input, process and product (CIPP model) was used to facilitate the statement of cross curriculum objectives, design of activities, process and deliverables. The model, however, did not ensure that the students would not confuse objectives with activities and vice versa. Further study on the subject is needed given the management transition that is going on.

Hence, a systems approach was utilized to show the students how to frame objectives with measurable indicators, and how to select and match those learning community services they have conducted to promote and achieve the corresponding specified objectives. This decision-making tool facilitated students' growth in knowledge, skills and insights

which moved the study along and lowered institutional resistance.

The students also specified their objectives and corresponding activities to the evaluators. However, the problem still existed, as the students (participant) still observed a discrepancy between the stated and actual performance implemented objectives and activities. The decisions to correct the system would rest with the evaluators. Such decisions could be perceived as arbitrary by the students and implementation could be resisted by College Administrators. To overcome this problem, the students were asked to state the problems that blocked their goal performance and to offer their suggested solutions.

The evaluators constructed, the questionnaire on these aspects and sat down with students to agree on the items (Test of Validity). To secure validity of the items, the students were allowed to modify, add and eliminate items, the total agreement was reached. The questionnaire was administered to all the students which they identified as the learning community participants.

The results were also shared with the students and they went on to facilitate implementation of the recommendations, which were their own but also, confirmed by the Student Success Program Director.

Thus, the end model could be called a developmental program evaluation model as it encompassed all aspects of the evaluation context, unlike other evaluation models which covered one or another aspect. The practical aspect of the evaluation indicates that there is a dialectic process at work. First, the evaluators attempt to determine if there are discrepancies or gaps between the stated and observed performance activities. This brings about a reaction from the evaluators.

They become role-defenders and question whether or not in the end program evaluation equals student evaluation. To release this tension, the evaluator has to modify/enlarge his/her goal to accommodate the concerns of the evaluates in a new relationship. To remove the evaluates from a role-defending position, both the evaluator and evaluates have to attempt to

see the whole component of the learning community program and activities. This requires another approach to evaluation, but since the program evaluators are not currently trained and / or sensitive to its utilization, they have to be trained on the job with the new approach. This is the developmental aspect of the faculty and it is maximized by the kind of developmental questions which are framed by the evaluators to facilitate growth in the evaluates (Metfessel et.al; 1967 & 2020).

The model is conceptually designed in figure (1) and operationalized in figure (2). It offers a strategy for faculty evaluator's development through program assessment. It helped the Students Success Center Director to locate and select the strategic objectives and enabled them to generate, select and match activities with objectives of the Program. Since, they also assessed problems and determined solutions in the implementation stages, the development skills in both planning and evaluation as a strategic tool for effectiveness, in managing future Students' Success learning community projects (Project Management Institute, 2021).

Conclusion:

The Learning Community Service study conducted at Talladega College was both serviceable and serves as a practical knowledge base and tool for Consumer Behavior Course. To establish a lasting value of good system for student's customer service practices. Students learnt from the services the following critical success factors:

- Students learn to establish and maintain organizational values / among staff, faculty and students.
- That all factors in the business organization must be accountable in their individual and collective tasks and responsibilities.
- Student learn to institutionalize a sense of delegation of authority and not responsibility to subordinates or colleagues, now and after college
- Students learn to establish and cherish a friendly and courteous working environment.

- The student also learned to reward and recognize good customer service- practices of employee motivation.

The activities provided an opportunity for students and faculty to learn how to improve on customer's services. This is the core of legendary marketing concept, of "customer satisfaction guaranteed." (Kendall et.al, 2013). To ensure customer's service satisfaction, this project recommended the following ideas to clients.

- Provide problem solving training for service(s) provider's team.
- Improve existing process of customer services.
- Provide training to managers as employees on stress management and effective organizational communication
- Service providers must apologize on time for inaction or ineffectiveness of service rendered
- Accept citizens' and customer's complaints and act positively
- Provide basic human kindness
- Report delay in services if applicable and follow best practices.

Impact:

The data have been reported to the director, coordinators and the staff members of the Client base. The recommendations have been adopted for implementation by Talladega College, Students Success Center.

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