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Center for the Advancement of Research and Teaching:

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

by Barbara Apstein

"Only in education, never in the life of the farmer, sailor, merchant, physician or laboratory experimenter, does knowledge mean primarily a store of information aloof from doing."

John Dewey

Writing a half century ago, philosopher and educator John Dewey identified a serious weakness of traditional schooling. Listening passively while a teacher lectures, studying textbooks in order to acquire "a store of information" is not, for many students, the best way to learn. When knowledge is divorced from any practical application, students are deprived of the involvement and satisfaction that comes from "doing."

Professor Sylvia Keyes of Bridgewater's Department of Management Science and Aviation Science discovered early in her teaching career that textbook concepts become a lot more meaningful when they are taught in conjunction with practical applications. Because she takes this idea very seriously, Professor Keyes incorporates work experiences into all her upper-level marketing courses. Courses in Marketing Research, Marketing and Sales Promotion, Sales Management and Industrial Marketing all include experiential programs, originating from the classroom and monitored at all stages by a faculty member. Students in Marketing Research, for example, have completed over 100 projects. They have conducted focus groups for a coffee company, a cablevision

station and a major manufacturer, as well as doing taste tests for a beverage company. They have designed questionnaires and conducted in-depth interviews for several transportation agencies, a nursing home, a veterinarian, retail and wholesale jewelers, a major supermarket, libraries and several museums. By participating in such projects as these, the students learn team work and experience first-hand the steps in the research process: how to conduct exploratory research, design questionnaires, computerize questions and enter data, perform statistical tests, write reports and make oral presentations.

In the spring of 1993, Professor Keyes was awarded a CART grant to assess the value of such experiential classes by conducting a survey of Bridgewater alumni, the organizations for whom they had completed projects and faculty in other colleges and universities. The responses were consistently positive, with Management Science graduates strongly recommending that students in the upper-level marketing courses continue to work with clients and sponsors.

In the spring of 1991, the Brockton Area Transit Authority approached Professor Keyes with the idea of doing an economic impact study. Professor Keyes sought the expertise of Professor Margaret Landman of the Economics Department, and the two decided to create an interdisciplinary project involving students from Professor Keyes' Principles of Marketing and Industrial Marketing classes and Professor Landman's Principles of Economics and Money and Banking classes. Ultimately, the project took two years to complete and involved students from several different classes.

The purpose of the study was to assess the impact of public transit on the City of Brockton and the nine surrounding towns and cities in its jurisdiction. Three months before the start of the semester, Professors Keyes and Landman met with the Brockton Area Transit Authority Administrator, Ray Ledoux, to outline the scope of the project and plans to implement it.

With more than 100 students participating in the project, a significant amount of planning and organizing was necessary. Schedules needed to be arranged and lead-

ership positions assigned; classes had to be divided into appropriate teams and committees. The Brockton Area Transit project was the major focus of the courses, providing examples to illustrate the concepts explained in the textbooks.

Students in both classes conducted in-depth interviews with bus passengers, asking open-ended questions to elicit information on their use of the bus system, particularly as a mode of access to local businesses. How often did they use the bus system to get to the bank? To buy clothing and food? On the basis of the preliminary information gathered during these interviews, the students designed a questionnaire. After determining the correct sample size for the amount of reliability desired, they pre-tested the questionnaire with 10% of the sample. Once the results were judged to be satisfactory, the Industrial Marketing students entered the data into a computer system, and, once the final document had been approved by Transit Administrator Ray Ledoux, had copies of the final questionnaire printed. They completed 744 face-to-face interviews at the central bus depot in Brockton and a variety of stops, including several supermarkets, two malls and two hospitals. Students enrolled in Directed Studies validated over 10% of the completed interviews, certifying that everything had been done correctly, with Professors Keyes and Landman double-checking the interviews.

Members of the Industrial Marketing class, meeting in a networked classroom in the Moakley Center, were responsible for data entry and for preparing frequency tables and cross tabulations. This class also was in charge of collecting data from agencies, vendors, and businesses that have an impact on the Transit Authority's community, as well as from Transit Authority employees themselves.

In March of 1994 President Tinsley, Carl Pitaro, then Mayor of Brockton, and Ray Ledoux hosted a major conference where Professors Keyes and Landman presented their findings. The audience included the Board of Directors of the Transit Authority, executives from federal and state transportation offices, legislators who provided some funding for the project, businesses that permitted interviewing at their locations, ad-

ministrators and faculty from the College and the students from the Industrial Marketing and Money and Banking classes who had provided so much of the research and implementation.

So successful was the Brockton Transit study that President Tinsley asked Professors Keyes and Landman to embark on a second project: a study of the impact of Bridgewater State College on the local community through its spending, employment, banking and volunteerism. Over 300 students enrolled in Management Science and Economics classes participated in the study. They conducted over 1,600 interviews with administrators, faculty, librarians, staff members, fellow students and visitors to the campus. The study, completed in September 1995, concluded that estimated annual spending by the College, along with its employees, students and visitors, in the Bridgewater area (which includes the Town of Bridgewater, ten proximate cities and towns and the Buzzards Bay area), is over \$60 million. The College is a major source of employment: over 2,500 jobs are held either by BSC employees or by men and women whose work is related to the demand for goods and services which the College creates. In addition, the study revealed that 38% of College employees and 31% of the students volunteer their own time to numerous, diverse charitable organizations located in the Bridgewater area, contributing an estimated 570,000 hours each year.

Professor Keyes' sales classes also include an experiential learning component. The Sales Promotion classes of 1994 and 1995 participated in the SGRO General Motors Marketing Internships. Two groups of students worked through the entire promotion process, including research, advertising, sales, and presenting all-campus events in behalf of Walter Earl Chevrolet. In addition to raising prizes for the event, each team collected enough donations to give sizable contributions to the United Way and to DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education).

The Sales Management course culminates in a "national sales conference," during which students serve a banquet and describe their team work during the semester. Sales sponsors such as the Boston Museum of Fine Arts Industrial Division, Greater Attleboro Transit Authority, Plymouth County Development Council, Cablevision Industries, the American Red Cross, Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Digital Service Center and many others attend the end-of-semester event. All clients and sponsors make donations to the Bridgewater State College Chapter of the American Marketing Association. This money subsidizes student members' trips to regional and international conferences.



Professor Sylvia Keyes supervises marketing students.

Another of Professor Keyes' projects involved student members of the American Marketing Association working in partnership with Ocean Spray Cranberries, Inc. and The Massachusetts Environmental Trust. Professor Keyes was asked to lend her expertise to an effort to determine the pricing point for, and the likelihood of public acceptance of a new Massachusetts license plate. All parties, including the advertising agency that had designed the right whale license plate with the slogan "Preserve the Trust," met with Professor Keyes and her students in the Davis Alumni House. Professor Keyes and the students designed and pre-tested a questionnaire, offered it for modification to the parties involved, and then began to interview. Ocean Spray, Shaw's Supermarkets and the Foxboro Company allowed Professor Keyes and the students to conduct interviews in their plants. Now, when these

students see a car with a whale license plate, they have a visual reminder of their work. In addition, this project was recognized at the International Collegiate Conference held in New Orleans, where Bridgewater won awards for the best educational exhibits in both 1995 and 1996.

While large companies such as Ocean Spray and the Foxboro Company are able to provide students with well defined projects which require working in teams, Professor Keyes' classes also work for many small businesses and non-profit organizations. Projects are currently under way in the Sales class for such diverse clients as the American Red Cross, the Bridgewater Bandits (a local hockey team), the Bridgewater Foundation, Cablevision, the Digital Service Center at Moakley, Sullivan Tire, and the Ridder Country Club in Whitman.

These and other clients have expressed their appreciation for the students' work by making donations to the local chapter of the American Marketing Association. The largest donation recorded so far was made by the Bristol County Savings Bank in recognition of a research project completed by a team of five in the spring of 1996.

Professor Keyes has found that all these organizations seem to enjoy working with young people. The students, in turn, gain opportunities to see organizational life from the inside and to build their resumes. Most importantly, they learn to work in a hierarchy, while at the same time being exposed to team building. As a result, they are ready to step into work force positions in which the participative approach and empowerment are expected. Recent Bridgewater graduates whose current employment developed out of their experiential courses include Sonia Arruda ('95) and Patrick Connolly ('96). As a result of her participation in the General Motors Marketing Internship, Sonia was recruited by SGRO Promo, the company which sponsors the Internship on many college campuses. Patrick is currently employed by Sullivan Tire, where he reports to Bill Patterson, another Bridgewater alumnus. 