

Moving from the Classroom to the Workplace: A Service-Learning Case Study of a Media Production Capstone Course

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Abstract

This is a case study of how a capstone course, Producing and Directing, evolved into a service-learning course designed to provide graduating students with real-world workplace experience. It will examine issues including course structure, grading issues, course and client logistics, unaddressed skill sets, group work, and work-product quality issues. It looks at what has worked and what has not worked in an effort illuminate ways to replicate the successes of the course.

Introduction

It is said that necessity is the mother of invention. Thus, it was that I began to teach our media production capstone course, MCOM 4395 Producing and Directing, as a service-learning course. The previous iteration of Producing and Directing was a weekly thirty-minute magazine show. Each student was required to line-produce one episode of the series. The necessity that brought me to service-learning was the fall semester enrollment in 2005 that was under the minimum number of students needed to produce our magazine show.

University of Arkansas at Little Rock's (UALR) Mission Statement expresses (emphasis added), in broad terms, goals to be strived for:

“The mission of the University of Arkansas at Little Rock is (. . .) within this broad mission are the responsibilities to use quality instruction to instill in students a lifelong desire to learn; to use knowledge in ways that will contribute to society; and to apply the resources and research skills of the University community to the service of the city, the state, the nation, and the world in ways that will benefit humanity.” (UALR Mission Statement, 2012)

In addition, under a section labeled “Objectives,” the Mission Statement explicitly spells out what service it is obligated to:

“Service to Society: The university has a responsibility to serve society through the application of knowledge and research skills. This responsibility includes applying the university’s resources to local, state, national, and

international needs in order to improve the human condition.” (UALR Mission Statement, 2012)

Serendipitously, just before the Producing and Directing course’s enrollment dilemma manifested itself, UALR had begun a new push to encourage adding service-learning components to courses wherever feasible.

In speaking about the discipline of sociology as an appropriate site for such courses, David Blouin and Evelyn Perry wrote:

“Service-learning partnerships thus have the potential to serve both pedagogical and public goals of the discipline. Third, many of the CBOs [Community-based Organizations] that partner with service-learning courses have missions that include the service of disadvantaged groups and the amelioration of social problems.” (Blouin and Perry 2009)

Similarly, media production seems to be uniquely suited to service-learning. First, it is experiential. Along with aesthetic and conceptual skills, students also acquire hands-on practical skills that enable them to produce unique tangible products. Second, many non-profit organizations need video production work, yet cannot afford to pay market rates for such production. Structuring the Producing and Directing course as a service-learning course seemed to be a natural fit. Having students produce needed video communication pieces for non-profits engages and serves the community, applies the students’ knowledge and skills, and serves the greater good.

In addition to UALR’s institutional endorsement and active encouragement of service-learning, my own professional background played a key role in structuring Producing and Directing as a service-learning course. A major portion of my professional career before I earned my PhD was spent at Texas Instruments’ corporate headquarters in Dallas writing, producing, directing, and editing corporate videos. My experience with corporate video work I had done for non-profits on a pro bono basis suggested to me that the students enrolled in Producing and Directing could produce video communication pieces for area non-profits.

The final piece of the puzzle—a willing client—was all that was needed to complete the necessary components in order for the course to be conducted as a service-learning course. A chance encounter with the communications director of a local food bank late in the summer provided that final piece of the puzzle.

Course Structure and Rationale

Many of our students may ultimately move into a corporate communication workplace environment. I wanted to structure this course to represent a transition from the classroom to a workplace environment. The basic structure of Producing and Directing was very intuitive. The course would partner with a “client,” and the client would be a

non-profit community organization. Simply put, students enrolled in the course would be sorted into producing teams and would subsequently produce videos based on the organization's communication needs. My decade of experience producing corporate video provided a standard project timeline.

First, we would meet with the client and determine the parameters and scope of the project. This typically entailed conversations about concept, budget, and schedule. The next step would be to write a draft script and submit it to the client for approval. Typically, there would be revisions to the script after the first draft was submitted. After the script had been approved a production schedule would be determined, shoots would be scheduled, talent and freelance production personnel hired, and post-production time blocked out. Second, actual production would move forward until a rough cut was produced for client approval. The client would view the rough cut, and changes would be requested and made until a final product was approved. I envisioned a very similar process for the Producing and Directing course.

The first stage of the process entails the class meeting with the client, discussing their communication needs, and deciding on a final product. In the case of the first class, the deliverables were to be a short organization ID video (three to seven minutes) and two public service announcements (PSAs). Subsequent classes negotiated different sets of deliverables depending on the organization's needs. There are two key components of this stage of the course, which need to be accomplished before the class ever meets: 1) acquiring a suitable client, and 2) managing client expectations. The first process is more complicated than it might seem. There are an abundance of non-profit organizations that want and need some type of video communication. Finding a willing client is usually not difficult, however, one factor tends to eliminate some organizations—the work must fit within the semester's framework. Some potential clients need work done quickly—within a week or two of initial contact. Others organizations tend to think of the Producing and Directing students as interns who will be at their disposal for the semester as opposed to a team contacted to produce a specific well-defined product. Other organizations balk at the amount of time their contact individual must spend with the class. Despite these constraints and misconceptions, client organizations are fairly easy to acquire.

After the initial acquisition of a client, a meeting between the instructor and the primary contact is needed. This meeting should be devoted to managing client expectations about working with students. The instructor and the client's representative need to know what each side expects from the relationship. The instructor should have a good idea of what sort of project(s) the client needs, in order for the instructor manage the project's scope so that it "fits" within the educational framework. This "fit" includes both the semester-long timeframe and the non-student resources, such as production equipment, computer lab time for postproduction, and ancillary resources (such as production music, stock images, and professional voice or spokesperson talent).

While the course's design attempts to mimic a true work environment, it's not possible for obvious reasons. The client needs to understand the logistical and pedagogical constraints that the instructor and students are working under. One concession that is made due to the course's hybrid nature is that instead of working with just one production team, the client works with two or more teams usually consisting of three to four students. Some clients may initially want to assign each team a different project. Another concession to the academic environment is that each team receives the same assignment. It is important for the client to know this is necessary: to ensure that the instructor is grading each student and each team on an "apples-to-apples" basis. Despite each team having the same project assignment, there is usually very little duplication of the "look and feel" of the finished videos. Each team's creative approach tends to be different, which in turn, results in different final products. Clients sometimes find at the semester's end that they have several finished projects they can use in different ways.

Another preliminary step taken before the client meets the class is a discussion with the client about the client's responsibilities. Ordinarily clients would contract with professionals and trust their experience and skills to ensure that they receive a good value for their money. In this educational setting, money does not change hands and the producers (students) have little or no experience in a professional workplace. In this environment, the instructor is responsible for three things: First, the instructor must educate the client about the process. Second, the instructor must emphasize that the course is intended to emulate the workplace as closely as whenever possible. Practically this means that the client must be cautioned about the "producers'" inexperience, while simultaneously imploring them not to be too "easy" on the students due to it. In other words, as clients, they should not settle for something they either don't want or don't like about the piece the students are producing. Third, the client must be informed about their responsibility to evaluate the quality of work performed by teams and individuals because their subjective evaluations will serve as part of the grading criteria for the course. Clients need to evaluate both the quality of work produced and the quality of their interactions with each team. In short, the instructor must educate the client about what constitutes "reasonable" expectations for the final product and how the student-producers conduct themselves.

In addition, a similar discussion also must be held with the students. The class must be told how the production process will flow, and what sort of milestones they will need to pass before they reach the end of the semester as they, too, are new to the process. They also must be informed about what might be expected as they interact with the client. The students enrolled in the Producing and Directing capstone course are expected to be reasonably proficient with the technical skills taught in the sequence. They all should have basic skills in writing, shooting, and editing. On the other hand, they have not had to interact with anyone outside of the department, nor have they had to produce a product to client specifications. This process is new and foreign to them. Learning interpersonal communication and negotiating skills during the semester helps move the individual from a "student" mind-set (including assignments, professors, classmates, and grades), to a "workplace" mind-set (including projects, clients, team

members, and paychecks). These components might seem analogous and interchangeable, but they are not. There are myriad differences, some large and easy to understand and navigate, while others are much more subtle and difficult to perceive.

One of the most valuable aspects of this course from a pedagogical standpoint is the interaction between the production team and client. There are two large components to this: 1) it brings the interpersonal communication aspect of negotiating with a client to the forefront, and 2) it introduces the individual student to both the joys and the frustrations of working with a team of variably skilled coworkers, sometimes for the first time. Managing both the client and students in a course like this is much different than teaching a more conventional video production course. Because it is impossible to completely mimic a workplace environment, it is necessary to require a certain amount of “play-acting” on the part of both the client and students. The instructor’s role is to educate both parties about their “roles” and to manage the interactions on both sides of the relationship.

Course Logistics

As previously indicated, there are certain logistical accommodations that need to be made on both the client organization’s side and on the academic side of this equation. First, projects must fit within an academic semester, which may take some planning and adjustment on the client’s part. They need to choose appropriately complex projects. Typically, the instructor will know beforehand what sort of project the client wants and know if it fits the course parameters. On the academic side, coaching the students through the initial client discussions is required as well. The students need to be educated about the process before they meet with the client. The first two weeks of class are devoted to talking with the students about who their client will be, and how they will be expected to interact with their client as individuals and teams. In addition, each student is required to do a media production skills assessment in these production areas: writing, directing, shooting, field audio, audio post-production, video post-production and graphics, and animation. These self-assessments, along with my anecdotal knowledge of the students’ skill levels, are used to assemble the production teams. This process has two goals: 1) to ensure that each team has at least one individual on the team with competencies in the key skill sets so that there are no great disparities between the overall competencies of each team, and 2) to break up preexisting team affinities. The rationale is that students need to learn to work in teams, and some individuals are comfortable with each other, while others are not. Some students find that they have worked together in other courses, and naturally will want to continue to work with people with whom they have formed good relationships. In order to mimic the workplace, I try to break these “naturally occurring” teams up. Many graduates may have some control over where they work. However, they will be assigned to work with people they do not know and are expected to work with them in a professional manner. After the teams are assembled, they are required to come up with a team name and to design a team logo, animation, and aural signature to append to their final product.

During the first two weeks of the course, students also are also presented with the basic “rules of engagement.” These range from larger issues, such as how to negotiate creative differences, to more mundane items, such as the required dress code (business casual) when meeting with the client. These rules serve to move the students out of “student” mode and into “professional” mode. It also helps educate them in the soft skills of workplace etiquette and enables them to explore the sometimes fuzzy boundaries that are an everyday part of the work environment. Students also are informed about the role clients will have in determining their final course grade and the role their teammates will have as well. Teammates evaluate each other confidentially, and as mentioned earlier, the client evaluates every team and may confidentially comment as needed on individual students to the instructor.

The client and the students meet face to face for the first time during the third week of class. There are usually at least two meetings with the class during scheduled class times. At the first meeting the clients introduce themselves and explain briefly what organization they represent and what they want done and why. The teams introduce themselves and ask questions to clarify what they have heard from the client and define the creative and aesthetic aspects of the project. Students have been coached to ask about details such as organizational logos and slogans, “company” color schemes, fonts, and taglines. The client has been told to expect these kinds of questions. As an example, the course’s first client was the principal in a local PR firm and served on the client’s board—a state-wide food bank—as their communication officer. During the initial meeting, he made it clear that the client organization did not want “any big, sad-eyed, starving baby pictures” because they were cliché and too negative.

During the next meeting, which is typically held about a week later, teams present treatments and concepts. After the client approves of a conceptual approach, the next step is to write a script, which can be one of the most contentious and lengthy steps in the process. As an instructor, I use my professional experience to provide examples of what issues to look for and avoid. The primary problem in this area tends to hinge on inexperience of both parties. The student producers assume that the client understands both their conceptual approach and can read a two-column video script and “see” the finished product before it is actually produced. The client will “go along” with concepts and scripts both because they do not really understand what is presented to them and because they do not want to hurt the students’ feelings. This stage of the pre-production process is particularly important because it is the place in the production process where changes can be made with the least impact on the rest of the production and ultimately the finished product. It is critical that this stage of the production process result in a clear understanding of what the client wants and what the finished product will be on both sides of the table. This is true in the professional world as well but, while it is sometimes contentious, the client tends to be more assertive because money will ultimately change hands. Clients who contract professional media production services are rarely concerned about being “too nice.”

Many aspects of the production planning cannot be completed until a script has been agreed on. Budgeting, scheduling of personnel and equipment, graphic design, and audio production cannot move forward until it is clear what will be required. It is important not to rush this stage of the process and to caution students that script approval may take longer than they anticipate. Typically these negotiations require an additional three weeks of the semester. It is very common for scripts to be revised at least once and sometimes as many as three times before client approval. One of the most valuable aspects of this portion of the course for the fledgling producers is learning how and when to negotiate aesthetic and creative issues.

After the team's script has been approved, client contact becomes attenuated to some degree. The production teams tend to work more independently resolving minor issues and production questions via phone or e-mail. During this course (and the production) phase, the teams confront the issues inherent in their creative approaches and built into their scripts. They must find locations, get required permissions, audition actors or talent, schedule production gear, and resolve scheduling issues in order to shoot and edit the script they agreed to produce for the client. This phase of production tends to be more "comfortable" for individual students because they use production skills they have honed through the course of their studies. On the other hand, this also is the stage of production where friction can arise between team members over divisions of labor, scheduling, and creative differences. These tensions may be exacerbated by the normal problems encountered during the production process. Examples of such issues include volunteer actors or talent who agree to take part and then drop out, finding that a preferred location is not available, variable quality or poor production skills of team members, and any number of other problems unique either to the producing the agreed-upon script or the interpersonal dynamics of a given team. This phase of the course constitutes the biggest chunk of time. The class meets regularly and each team gives progress reports on the status of their production and the instructor acts as facilitator and problem-solver.

More regular client contact resumes after the rough cut or first draft of each team's piece is completed. The rough cut is submitted to the client for approval. The shooting and post-production schedules are back-timed with this in mind and with the idea that rough cuts should be finished with no less than three weeks of the semester left, leaving enough time to make client-requested changes that will result in the finished product. If care was taken at the script-approval stage in pre-production and communication was clear, than changes are fairly easy to accomplish. If for some reason the rough cut is wildly divergent from the client's expectations, than more serious negotiations are required both because there is no time to re-shoot the project and because the team members' graduation hangs in the balance. This is a rare occurrence. More commonly, minor changes are requested and made, and the finished piece is delivered to the client.

Despite the fact that the final product has been delivered there are several things that have to be done to wrap up the course. The instructor must make sure the client does team evaluations. The students must complete their evaluations of teammates and complete a “demo” reel portfolio of their work. This portfolio is designed to ensure that graduating seniors have something to show prospective employers as they begin their job search.

Course Issues

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of this course is its hybrid nature. Attempting to emulate a creative workplace environment naturally produces issues that would not occur in either environment. Simple logistical issues such as adjusting a “real-life” production project to fit an academic timeframe, creating operating procedures, and grading parameters have been discussed. Adjusting both a client and student’s expectations of processes and outcomes also has been discussed. This is a crucial step, and one that if neglected or improperly executed, can lead to misunderstandings and conflict as the production process proceeds through the semester-long timeline.

Literature available on service-learning details many of the issues I have encountered. Non-profit organizations and their representatives vary from semester to semester. As noted by Wimera and Silverman (2009), there is a variability in the interpersonal dynamic that cannot be predicted or controlled: “[I]nstructors also report a variety of challenges, including unpredictability and occasional unprofessionalism of the community-based clients.”

Perhaps more expectedly, that unpredictability extends to the student side of the relationship. Respondents to a survey of Community-based Organizations (CBOs) conducted by Blouin and Perry (2009) noted some of the concerns that caused dissatisfaction with students involved in service-learning courses taught in sociology: “The most common are complaints of students’ unreliability and lack of motivation and commitment.” These same concerns are typical personnel issues that are commonly encountered by both for-profit and non-profit organizations. The difference is that, as employers, these organizations can terminate an unreliable employee. This leverage is missing in the relationship between students and clients for Producing and Directing. In the service-learning dynamic, clients relinquish this leverage in return for free professional services. Clients working with production teams encounter employment/personnel issues that are common to the work place and well documented:

“Almost all of the respondents struggle with unreliable students who do not show up for shifts, miss appointments, or fail to follow through on tasks or projects. In some instances, this is merely an inconvenience. This becomes a more serious issue, however, when clients are disappointed or important work is not completed.” (Blouin and Perry 2009)

In a typical work environment, the formal controls are financial and the power equation is heavily weighted in the employer’s favor. One of the issues I encountered

in teaching Producing and Directing was the compartmentalization of work and school. This mind-set manifests itself as a casual attitude toward class attendance, punctuality, complying with assignment parameters, and deadlines. School is different from work. This attitude varies from course to course and student to student, and can be affected by the student's like or dislike of the course subject matter and/or the instructor. The instructor has some control over individual student behavior in this regard. This control is largely spelled out as grade, assignment, and attendance requirements. Student compliance is enforced largely by the student's desire to earn an "acceptable" final course grade. The difference between school and work is that poor performance typically will not result in the student's ability to pay rent or meet other financial obligations.

A capstone class is designed to assess individual students' various skill sets and readiness to enter the workforce. Blouin and Perry's survey addressed this as well. Not unsurprisingly they found:

"A significant challenge in working with service learners is a lack of professionalism. CBOs (. . .) almost all described experiences with students who were unwilling to work hard, unable to take initiative, or seemed unconcerned with producing quality results." (Blouin and Perry 2009)

These issues can be grouped into three broad categories: creative differences, production planning, and execution and interpersonal dynamics issues. The problems that crop up in each category tend to crop up at particular times during the production process. Creative differences tend to crop up between the client and the team during the pre-production phase—most often during negotiations about conceptual approach or script approval. The reasons for this are two-fold: First students, especially those who are not used to working in a team environment, are not used to seeking approval for their production projects. In many cases, they conceive and execute projects based on assignment parameters that do not require an instructor's approval of topic or storyline before they are executed.

A second source of friction arises from variably skilled students who are pitching project concepts and scripts to inexperienced clients not familiar with the technology or mechanics of media production. This leads to unrealistic client expectations and project concepts and scripts that ultimately cannot be produced. In addition, a third type of problem also may arise from clients who cannot "see" what a finished piece will look like by just reading the unproduced script. These clients tend to focus almost exclusively on the audio copy and discount the script's video portion, which leads to two common problems: 1) a client may end up at loggerheads with a team over its proposal and insist on a project that will not meet his or her communication needs, or conversely 2) a client may blithely approve a project or script that simply cannot be produced given the timeframe and the resources available to the team. The instructor's role in these cases is to intervene and act as a "translator" for the two parties. Students must be cautioned repeatedly (outside the client's presence) about the production issues with which they must deal. As an example, scripts that use dramatic vignettes

performed by actors may catch the client's imagination but realistically are difficult to produce. Casting actors is time consuming and logistically difficult. It also adds scheduling complexity, and in many cases, because there are no financial incentives, actors can and do drop out at the last minute. The instructor may need to reassure a client that a proposal will look good and serve the organization's communication needs.

Students might need to be encouraged to defend a solid creative concept or proposed script and coached about how to negotiate clients when these issues arise. Conversely, students also might need to be encouraged to accede to the client's requests and taught when that might be appropriate.

One of the problems that may complicate these fairly common negotiations is that individual students sometimes have difficulty conforming to the "workplace" aspect of the course. As noted earlier, production does not start until the client approves a script. On one occasion I had a student erupt in a completely inappropriate tantrum in front of the client when asked to rewrite a script for the third time. The student had, until this class, been completely happy to coast through his other coursework for a "gentleman's C." His focus was not on making the client-requested changes. Instead, he was intent upon simply turning in an assignment with the expectation that anything he did would be "good enough" to pass.

As teams move into the production phase, the logistical problems of production become paramount. They can be a considerable source of friction between team members. This typically manifests in two ways. The first tends to be some version of "creative differences," but in reality has little to do with creative differences and much more to do with two alpha personalities butting heads about control within the group. This is a result of students not being used to working in teams and making a false distinction between school and work, which prevents them from recognizing that many classroom and workplace issues are analogous. Another conflict also may arise that I call the "slacker" problem, which happens when one or more team members feel one team member is not meeting his or her responsibilities. This sort of conflict may arise for many reasons, some of them legitimate and others not so much. Legitimate reasons may include conflicting work schedules, transportation issues, or child-care issues. On the other hand, the "slacker" may, like the student noted previously, not be particularly interested in anything more than passing the course and therefore is unwilling to put the necessary effort into the team's production project. And finally, this sort of conflict may arise because a team member, while earnest and eager to contribute, has not mastered the requisite skills to contribute fully to the team's project.

In all the cases previously outlined, the instructor must act as employer/"boss," mediator, mentor, and last but not least, teacher. It is imperative that the instructor be aware that these problems can and will develop and to be alert for them. The instructor also must be sensitive enough to the issues and personalities involved to make reasonable decisions about when intervention is required and what to do when student comes to you for solutions.

The final stages of the course involve submitting a rough cut to the client for approval. In almost all cases, it results in minor change requests and tweaks to the final product, which can be a source of conflict because students are approaching the hard deadline of the semester's end. Not only are they responsible for completing their projects in Producing and Directing, but many of them have final papers, projects, and final exams that all come due at about the same time. They also are in many cases justifiably proud of the productions and sometimes unpleasantly surprised and hurt that the client has focused on some video aspect that needs to be changed. In some cases, teams' production schedules have slipped into that three-week red zone reserved for client-requested changes to be made due to production problems leaving very little time for client approval for their project before the semester's end. This can be exacerbated by students' sense that work and school are different. Some, especially those that are having problems, feel it is "not fair" that the client can hold their grade, and therefore, their graduation hostage until they get the requisite approval.

All of the issues and potential conflicts previously illustrated are commonly recognized as personnel issues in the workplace. The first-line supervisor or employer is responsible for dealing with these problems. The strongest negotiating tool employers have in the workplace is the ultimate threat—termination. As the kids say, "It's all about the Benjamins." This course is a capstone course and all students must pass it in order to graduate. There is a similar power equation present in this course. Most workplace environments have employment requirements and rules that outline acceptable and unacceptable behaviors that are explicitly "firing offenses." It is useful to have a similar tool to wield as the instructor of a hybrid course such as this one. The MCOM 4395 syllabus explicitly states (bold type and underlining in the original):

"A PREFORTORY GRADING NOTE: (. . .) Work product must conform to client specifications and is subject to client approval. Any action or failure to act on the part of the student that results in the failure of a work product to be delivered to the client as required by the specific assignment and as scheduled will result in failure of the course for the responsible student or students. Just like in the real world, missing critical deadlines will get you fired." (Giese 2008)

It is very important to be explicit and upfront about where the bright lines lay in this course. It emulates the workplace environment by stating explicitly and definitely what constitutes a "firing offense" and explicitly and definitely what the penalties are for violating the rules. In addition, it also is important to be willing to wield this particular tool when necessary. As the course instructor, I have had to invoke this rule more than once over the course of several semesters. It is useful that it is common knowledge among students that others have failed the course with all the consequences that that entails. In reality, even among the most troublesome students, few fail. Most of those in danger of failing choose to drop rather than stay until the end of the course.

Conclusion

Mass Communication is uniquely suited to implement service-learning courses. Public relations, media production, and web design sequences all teach complex professional skill sets that make a service-learning-based capstone experience a good pedagogical option. Designing a media production capstone experience around semester-long client-driven projects has the added benefit of providing a vehicle to expose students to an environment that mimics the workplace and provides an opportunity to teach many of the soft skills graduates will need as they migrate into the workplace. Those soft skills include negotiating interpersonal relationships with clients, employers and co-workers; learning to work to specification; meeting client expectations and deadlines; applying their technical skills to create specific useful products; and learning to think of themselves as “professionals” rather than “students.”

Designing a client-driven and project-based capstone media production experience presents some unique challenges that are a consequence of attempting to provide a workplace experience in an academic setting. Meshing project logistics with the semester-based academic calendar eliminates some worthwhile client organizations and interesting projects. Corporate-style video production project milestones are well known, and many production projects are reasonably easy to fit within the semester timeframe.

Matching inexperienced media production proto-professionals with clients inexperienced with the media production workflow also presents unique challenges for an instructor. Those challenges have much less to do with teaching practical technical concepts and skill sets than they do with serving as a facilitator and mediator between parties that are both on unfamiliar grounds. The instructor must educate the class’s clients about what to expect from the process and what they can expect in terms of finished products. In addition, the instructor must outline the client’s responsibilities both as a client and as an individual who will evaluate the students’ work. On the other side of the table, the instructor must work with the students to educate them about negotiating about creative and technical production issues with the client in order to design a project that will result in an acceptable finished product and be feasible to produce with the resources available within the allotted timeframe. Along the way, the instructor will almost certainly be required to mediate large and small disputes between clients and the production teams and among the team members themselves as they arise.

Many of the problems and conflicts that arise over the course of the semester and the project timeline are very similar to the problems and issues that arise in a project-based media production environment. They tend to be predictable and cyclical and are usually tied to particular times during the project workflow and to common personality archetypes. The problems and interpersonal interaction issues that arise in this hybrid course present unique opportunities to illustrate to budding professionals many of the situations they may encounter in the professional work environment. It gives the student a chance to model the non-technical skills they will need in their roles as professional media producers.

Designing and refining this course over several years confirms much of what has been published in the literature on service-learning. While I have delineated several obstacles and potential conflict points, and despite some of the examples of problem students, my experience using client-driven media production projects as the foundation of a media production capstone experience has been overwhelmingly positive. I have found that in general the community organizations serving as clients were pleased with the finished products resulting from the students' work. Students also came away from the class with a sense of accomplishment and an understanding of the importance being engaged with their community. In addition, and most importantly from a pedagogical standpoint, they finished the course with a much better understanding of interpersonal dynamics and the people skills they might need as they move from the classroom to the professional workplace.

While this case study details an experience focused on media production, I believe that many other areas might find that designing a capstone experience based firmly within the service-learning tradition would make it possible to emulate a workplace environment. In addition, I believe it would benefit the organizations that serve as clients by providing services and resources they might not be able to afford, and it would benefit the students by providing a realistic simulation of the professional work environment regardless of discipline. This would provide a laboratory for the students to practice workplace interactions on many levels and to learn interpersonal skills often neglected in courses designed to teach discipline specific conceptual and technical skills. Project-based capstone experiences such as this will send budding professionals into the workplace with a better understanding of what it means to be a professional in their chosen field and a deeper connection to their community.

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