

Closing the Gap Between Business Students and the Poor: An Introduction to the Volume

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This special issue volume is an outgrowth of an all-academy symposium on innovative community projects at the 1994 Academy of Management Meeting in Dallas, Texas. The symposium panel expanded mostly by word-of-mouth. After several telephone calls with some of the authors included in this volume, a six person panel was created that provided a range of administrative options on how to link students to the social problems of local communities. Deborah Poff, the editor of *Journal of Business Ethics*, was then kind enough to agree to publish all of the symposium papers as a special issue. Word-of-mouth about these projects continued to spread during the Academy of Management Conference and the accompanying Society for Business Ethics Conference, which also met in Dallas. The end result is the twelve articles that appear in this volume.

Prior to describing the contents of this issue, I wish to first share with the readers my own personal journey in becoming concerned with the problems of poverty and the need for educational institutions to attack the problem. A reading of these articles reveals that many paths lead scholars to engage in service-learning projects. I share my own journey in the next section because editing this special issue has been an absolute labor of love and, thus, a part of this evolving adventure. For readers who dislike personal testimonies, please forgive me for this unacademic transgression and skip to the section titled "Contents of this Special Issue"!

Becoming concerned

I grew up in Carlstadt, New Jersey, a suburb of New York City, during the 1960s and 1970s. Like most suburban communities, Carlstadt was isolated from the problems of poverty. Beginning my freshman year in college, without my parents' knowledge, I explored New York City just about every Saturday evening. I drove my new 1972 canary yellow Dodge Colt on Route 3 heading east to the Lincoln Tunnel, paid my admission to the New York City amusement park at the toll plaza, and zipped through the tunnel, where, at its end, Oz awaited.

My first city experiences involved the poverty surrounding the New York Port Authority building on Eighth Avenue and 40th Street in Manhattan. I was mesmerized by the prostitutes asking me if I was looking for a date, the derelicts who wanted a quarter and the almost derelicts who wanted a dollar for opening the door of a taxi or to clean their spit off my previously clean windshield. According to my father, who worked on the streets of New York City for the electric utility company, these people were bums. I had no reason to disagree with him on this particular issue. After a night of education and adventure, I would arrive within a few feet of my car parked on some quiet dark side street, look into nearby doorways, glance over my shoulders, and, if nobody looking like he may want to mug or kill me was within sight, I would quickly unlock the door, get in, relock the door, start the motor, look around to see if anybody was running threateningly toward my car, take a deep breath, make the sign of the cross, and retreat to New Jersey.

Then late one evening, after a night of

roaming Greenwich Village came to an end, I jumped into my Colt and headed down Sixth Avenue toward the Lincoln Tunnel. It's a beautiful ride in the sense that if you drive about 25 miles an hour you can go through thirty green lights before getting a red light. But this time, I got a red light and my engine died. Something was wrong with the starter. I knew enough to pull over and lift up the hood. Naturally, it was a sleazy corner, with bums sitting in unlit corners. I was helpless.

A bum helped me. I saw him coming toward me out of the corner of my eye. While I was foolishly staring at the engine wondering what to do, he lifted himself up off the ground, staggered toward me and threw his weight against the side of the car. "Got some problems, dontcha", he slurred. "Yep". "Got a hammer or somethin like that?" "Yeah, a crowbar in my trunk". "Get it for me an I can help ya". At this point, I figured he could smash my car with it and I might even help, as long as he didn't turn the crowbar on me. Instead, he took the crowbar and banged on the starter.

"Get in and start the engine", he ordered. I got in the car and it started. "Used to be a mechanic", he said with a smirk. So I parked the car, bought him a bottle of cheap whiskey at a nearby liquor store, found a partially lighted wall, and joined him for a drink on the sidewalk. We had a long, long talk. I have forgotten the specifics of his story, other than that many things went wrong for him. He made some wrong decisions in response to things that went wrong, so things went even further wrong. He didn't want to be a drunk. He didn't want to be living on the streets. He didn't want to spend the hours of every day begging people for money or cleaning his spit off windshields for a tip. But he did all of these things every day anyway. They were all habits which were extremely difficult for him to break.

A few months later I was greatly influenced by another person apparently living in poverty. On a hot Saturday afternoon in festive Washington Square Park, I was struck by the rhythm of a bongo drummer. It was a simple beat with simple lyrics. The refrain went: "You gotta listen to the sounds of the street". He would repeat this line

three or four times and then repeat the words of a real person he overheard. The stories were sad ones. Most were about poverty and other human injustices. What bothered me the most was that New York University was just a few blocks from the poverty surrounding Greenwich Village and Columbia University was just a few blocks from the poverty of Harlem. The smart faculty, students and administrators associated with these prestigious schools seemed to be doing so little regarding the social problems they must see every day.

During the next decade I forced myself to have many interactions with low-income people. Some had homes or apartments, but I wouldn't want to grow up in them. In 1978 I became frustrated with my existence as a college educated supermarket manager trainee, packed my bags to escape New Jersey, drove across the country, settled in the promised land of San Francisco and Berkeley, and joined a religious commune to the chagrin of my parents and friends. I always volunteered to fundraise in public housing projects. I did well there, offering cheap jewelry or candy in exchange for donations. The low-income residents were friendly, religious, open and emotional. They were very real to me. Unfortunately, their living conditions were pitiful. Too many people crowded in too few rooms with furniture that was too used. I heard many more stories about adults experiencing missed and blocked opportunities. Their children, who didn't ask to be born into housing projects that were physically falling apart and dominated by violent gangs, suffered as a result. And what were the students and faculty of nearby universities doing to put an end to this?

Now, as a professor myself, it's time to put up or shut up.

Contents of this special issue

The articles have been organized to tell a story about introducing service-learning projects in the business school curriculum. Table I summarizes each article in terms of the author's primary concern. Some are written about courses at research universities (University of Michigan,

TABLE I
Summary of articles

Author	Curriculum Unit	Concern
Zlotkowski	Nation-wide	Service-Learning Education in Business Schools
Morton & Troppe	Nation-wide	History of Campus Compact and Project on Integrating Service with Academic Study
Hogner	Undergraduate Business & Society class	Feeding the homeless and Enviro-Mentor Program
Kohls	Undergraduate Business Ethics class	Student reflections on volunteering at social service agencies and nonprofit organizations
Smith	Undergraduate Leadership Internship seminar	Ethical dilemmas students witnessed during internships
Collins	Graduate Business & Society/Business Ethics class	Creating networks between low income community centers and university/businesses; Volunteering at Homeless Shelter
Graham	Graduate Strategic Management class	Developing business plans for firms operating in inner-city neighborhoods
Friedman	Graduate Foundations of Leadership class	Service- and profit-oriented class projects in inner-city neighborhoods
Bies	Graduate Leadership and Power class	Lobbying on behalf of disenfranchised groups (homeless, AIDS patients)
Mercer	MBA Orientation	Environmental and human capital (health, housing, education) projects
Kenworthy	Business School	Partnerships developed with social service agencies
Kolenko <i>et al.</i>	All levels	Critique of projects

University of Wisconsin-Madison, Wharton), others about courses at teaching universities (Bentley College, Gonzaga University). Some pertain to schools located in cities (Loyola University, Florida International University), others are located in rural environments (North Central College). Several schools have religious affiliations (Georgetown University, Loyola). The range of classes include Business & Society, Business Ethics, Strategic Management and Leadership classes. After studying all of these articles, the reader should know how to integrate service-learning projects in their undergraduate classes, internship programs, graduate classes, orientation week, across the business school curriculum and across the university curriculum.

The first two articles provide an overview of the nation-wide phenomenon known as service-

learning. Edward Zlotkowski, the director of the Bentley Service-Learning Project, presents service-learning projects as a response to the criticism that a business education does not sufficiently prepare students to appropriately understand the external environment of business. This is followed by a history of Campus Compact, an organization of 475 college and university presidents founded in 1985, and its Project on Integrating Service with Academic Study, by Keith Morton, the former project director, and Marie Troppe, the current project associate.

The next two articles describe projects offered in Robert Hogner's undergraduate Business & Society class at Florida International University and a John Kohl's Business Ethics class at Gonzaga University. Robert Hogner's students

work on issues related to homelessness, the natural environment and the elderly, among others. John Kohl's students volunteer at social service agencies and nonprofit organizations. In the final undergraduate class project article, David Smith summarizes his experience teaching a Leadership Internship seminar at North Central College in Naperville, Illinois aimed at sensitizing students to ethical dilemmas students witness.

The following four articles are about particular graduate level classes. I teach a required MBA Business & Society/Business Ethics course at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and require my students to volunteer at local homeless shelters and low-income community centers. In addition, they work on a variety of projects aimed at improving living conditions in low-income neighborhoods. Jill Graham teaches a capstone Strategic Management class at Loyola University and requires her students to develop business plans that could be implemented in Chicago's inner-city neighborhoods. Stew Friedman teaches a Foundations of Leadership class at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania where students work on service- and profit-oriented projects that benefit Philadelphia's low-income neighborhoods. Robert Bies teaches a Leadership and Power class at Georgetown University in Washington D.C. and requires his students to meet with members of a disenfranchised group, such as the homeless or AIDS patients, and take responsibility for some constructive action on their behalf.

The next article is written by Graham Mercer, the Director of the Global Citizenship program at the University of Michigan's Business School. He describes the two day program held during orientation week where teams of new MBA students work on environmental, housing, education, and health problems. Amy Kenworthy is the Administrative Coordinator of the Bentley Service-Learning Project. She describes what many of us can, as of this moment, only dream about – institutionalizing service-learning projects across the entire university curriculum. The final article offers a constructive critique of these projects from the perspective of Management Education scholars – Thomas Kolenko, Marvele Colby, Gayle Porter & Walter Wheatley.

By the end of this special issue you will know how some educators have integrated service-learning projects in their undergraduate classes, internship programs, graduate classes, orientation week, across the business school curriculum and across the university curriculum. Now go out and do it. Write to us if you should have any additional questions about our experiences. We wish you the best of luck.

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