Understanding the Role and Effectiveness of Alumni Connections on Experiential Learning

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Introduction: Key Questions

- How does experiential learning tie to alumni connections?
- What is the College Fed Challenge and what activities link it to alumni?
- What do St. Lawrence University students, alumni, and hosts report about the connections?
- Where do we go from here to be more effective instructors?

Experiential Learning: Kolb’s Cycle

1) Concrete Experience
- New experience that one encounters which can be in an educational or professional setting

2) Reflective observation
- Learners reflect and contemplate upon the experience

3) Abstract conceptualization
- Learner adjusts and modifies their concepts, ideas, and approaches to an experience

4) Active experimentation
- When the learner applies what they have learned and tests this new approach

Activity

- Discuss ‘Big Questions’ in finance, economics, and monetary policy
- Mock presentation
- Question and answer sessions with alumni

Methods and Subjects

Qualtrics was employed to create and distribute our survey.

Survey Results I

- I’m more comfortable networking after meeting with alumni.
- Alumni connections improved my interests in economics and finance.
- Alumni connections made me more prepared and competitive in the job market.
- Alumni connections were one of the top reasons I took the Fed Challenge class.

Survey Results II

- The Fed Challenge class emphasized connections with industry.
- The Fed Challenge course fostered an environment of teamwork.
- I was prompted to think critically about the course material.
- The Fed Challenge class helped me connect economic theories to real-world issues.
- Taking the Fed Challenge class was intellectually challenging.

Open Ended Evidence

1) Apply economic theory to job-related tasks
- “…more about putting theory into practice…”
- “…greatly improved my ability to relate concepts to the real world.”

2) Career connections with alumni
- “We had excellent alumni mentors.”
- “…was something I was able to speak to during interviews, that set me apart from the competition.”

3) Skills building
- “Greatly improved my ability to think critically”
- “It also helped me become more comfortable presenting in front of audiences that were not my peers.”

Conclusion

- Almost 3/4ths of respondents agree that alumni interactions contributed to their career success.
- Students were well prepared and alumni hosts emphatically report they would host students again.
- The class fostered teamwork and critical thinking, encouraged real life applications and emphasized connections with industry professionals.
- Potential to expand upon positive connections going forward.

Future Work

- Continue sending survey to more subjects to increase sample size.
- Send survey to SLU’s students who didn’t take the Fed Challenge class to compare educational satisfaction.
- Use students who didn’t take the Fed Challenge class as a control group to do econometric analysis (i.e., run regression to see by how much university-alumni connections improve study/career success).

References

5. Kelley, Mary, and Carolyn M. “It also helped me become more comfortable presenting in front of audiences that were not my peers.”

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