

Creatively Implementing Experiential Learning into the General Education Curriculum

Randall Violet, Ph.D.
Agriculture and Nutrition Science Department
Southern Utah University
Cedar City, UT



Setting the Stage

- From its founding in 1897, Southern Utah University has evolved from a teacher training institution to now becoming Utah's designated liberal arts and sciences university. SUU has always placed students first by fostering small, personalized classes led by supportive professors who are some of the nation's top scholars in their fields of study.
- Experiential Education (as in “to experience something” outside the classroom) is a process that gives SUU students an edge in applying their learning beyond the classroom. Education Designated to Give Experience – 3 credit hour requirement within the General Education.
- Agriculture program provides 3 courses that meet General Education Life Science requirements.
- NR 1010 required as a core course for the Outdoor Recreation in Parks and Tourism Degree, as well as part of the 454 requirements for USAjobs.gov

Rational

- Course fulfills Life Science requirement for University General Education, attracts majors from across campus.
- Needs to provide academic rigor.
- Potential to recruit students into Range Management emphasis because it is the only thousand level course taught by Range faculty.
- Large class size (75:1) hinders personal attention.
- Canvas network seemed to reduce faculty/student interaction.
- Attendance was poor 60%.
- Needed to supplement text book with hands on learning.
- Take advantage of campus resources (native plant center, pond)
- Needed to improve course evaluations.

Methods

- Adopted textbook that presented the material that matched learner outcomes. “Natural Resource Conservation” Chiras & Reganold
- Created activities that supplemented chapters in the text that could be completed in 50 minutes. (Soil texture, timber cruising, wildlife unit, water quality)
- Established activity groups by splitting the class into thirds. (Monday, Wednesday, Friday)
- Used Canvas to assign additional work, such as video reviews or textbook questions.
- Generated self grading quizzes on Canvas.

Data Collection

IDEA Center Diagnostic Form

- Progress on relative objectives (5 point scale)
 - Five selected objectives

- Overall ratings (5 point scale)
 - Excellent Teacher
 - Excellent Course

- Summary Evaluation (Average of all above)

- Course Description (5 point scale)
 - Amount of reading
 - Amount of work in other (non-reading) assignments
 - Difficulty of subject matter

- Student comments

Results

Objectives Evaluated	Before	After
Gaining factual knowledge (terminology, classifications, methods, trends)	3.7	4.3
Learning fundamental principles, generalizations, or theories	3.7	4.2
Developing specific skills, competencies, and points of view needed by professionals in the field related to course	3.6	4.3
Developing a clearer understanding of, and commitment to, personal values	3.3	3.8
Acquiring an interest in learning more by asking my own questions and seeking answers	3.5	4.0
Average progress (Adjusted)	3.6	4.1

Results

Overall Ratings	Before	After
Excellent Teacher	4.0	4.2
Excellent Course	3.7	4.0
Summary evaluation	3.8	4.1
Amount of reading	1.8	3.5
Amount of work in (non-reading) assignments	2.9	3.3
Difficulty of subject matter	2.9	3.4

Student comments

Before – Boring worst course I have ever taken. Need a textbook. I did not learn the way he teaches.

After- I liked all the hands-on activities it helped me learn. Activities were great and loved getting outside. Activity week was great, small class size helped so I could get questions answered.

Summary and Conclusions

- Average course rating increased by 5%
- Attendance increased by 16%
- Significantly increased work load and rigor of course
- Covered more material
- Made preparation for the week easier
- More personalized attention for students
- Recruited three students into Range Emphasis
- Made better utilization of Canvas
- Classroom management was made more effective
- Students like the hands-on learning

Questions

