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WANING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH LIFELONG LEARNING?: A CASE STUDY

Abstract:

Capstone experiences for graduating seniors have garnered growing attention as we see a cultural shift in the understanding of a college degree's purpose. With exponentially increasing costs associated with acquiring a college degree, it is no wonder that we see the world's focus turn to its ROI. Many feel the returns from this investment are best demonstrated by colleges with job placement rates and average starting salaries of its graduates. Unfortunately, for many academics, they feel such a focus demands curriculum be changed to suit equipping students with ready-to-use job skills at the cost of truly teaching critical skills necessary to be a life-long learner. Many feel this causes students to disengage from their learning, and instead concentrate only on skills that will directly help them in their first job. It is possible to help students see beyond the direct relation of their education to a job, and engage with them on a higher level, pushing them academically in ways that create better students and better professionals.

This paper will provide a case study of a capstone class of graduating senior accounting students who are asked to collaboratively set the agenda of their learning as the last step in their formal education as a way to engage them with the act of learning itself, and the many forms it can take outside the classroom.

Best practices will be presented to get students fully engaged in the process of collaboratively setting the agenda for the class, as well as pitfalls to avoid. Instructors will have the most success with such student collaboration if they focus on the desired learning outcomes of the course, and pre-emptively design ways in which that learning can occur. Guiding the students to activities that best suits their learning, seemingly by their design, is the desired outcome. The class in the case to be presented creates a conference and hosts local business professionals who attend- thus the student becomes the teacher as the culminating outcome for the course.

Keywords:

Collaboration, case study, integrative learning, return on investment, engagement, lifelong learning, experiential learning, high impact practice, best practice

JEL Classification: I29, M49