



Undergraduate Research as a Pedagogical Tool in Business Education: The Lesson of "Doing Well and Doing Good"

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“What should undergraduate business education provide for students?” This was a simple, yet important question posed by Anne Colby and Thomas Ehrlich (2011) in their book, *Rethinking Undergraduate Business Education*. The authors talked about the influence of economic expansion, growing competitive pressure on US firms and employees, and the fragile interdependence of the banking and financial sectors internationally as global realities that change the business education landscape. Such realities place pressures on current and future leaders, and the business educators that train and develop those individuals.

Informed by the Business, Entrepreneurship, and Liberal Learning (BELL) project, an initiative of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Colby and Ehrlich stated, “Simply put, we believe that undergraduate students who major in business should have the benefits of a strong liberal education.” Such an approach to business education would, “prepare students for their professional roles and work and also to prepare them for lives of social contribution and personal fulfillment” (p. 2).

This statement resonates deeply with me as a business educator in a liberal arts college. While business is not considered a traditional liberal arts discipline, and the phrase “business education” can cause my more purist colleagues to gristle at the idea, I believe, now more than ever, our society would benefit from students educated in a business curriculum that is rooted in a strong liberal arts tradition. A liberal arts education is known for developing the habits of the heart and mind, for teaching students to be comfortable being uncomfortable, to lead change rather than just embrace it, and to always be asking why. Aren't these the traits we want of business leaders today? I believe it is my responsibility as a business educator to help my students develop the skills, competencies, and multiple intelligences needed to achieve these desired outcomes, and I chose to teach business in a liberal arts college environment because of the very opportunity to engage in experiential learning that not only enables, but commands these types of outcomes from my students and me.

As business educators, we ask ourselves - what experiences will help students prepare for their professional roles and lives while also teaching them the importance of social contribution? Colby and Ehrlich (2011) discussed the need for innovative pedagogies, an approach to teaching and learning that extends beyond mere classroom lecture. To achieve this aim, they described pedagogies of enactment, which they define as approaches that are “explicit and intentional about representing expertise and providing practice accompanied by informative feedback” (p.89). In business education, the authors suggested pedagogies of enactment should include teamwork, case studies, and simulations. I argue that undergraduate research in business education is a pedagogy of enactment, particularly when the undergraduate research experience is developed around a

theme, one that invokes important lessons about professional roles and lives as well as social contribution. For the remainder of this essay, I will share my experience developing, supervising, and learning from an undergraduate research experience that spanned three semesters and was guided by the theme “Doing Well, and Doing Good.”

The Albion Accelerator: A Space for Creative Innovation and Collaboration

[Albion College](#) received a generous grant from the Andrew W Mellon Foundation in 2014 to develop a series of collaborative symposia and workshops focused upon the applied nature of laboratory experimentation within the arts and humanities disciplines. And while business is not a humanities or arts field, two of my colleagues in the arts contacted me about partnering with them to apply for funding through the Humanities Lab Mellon grant. Our goals were to: (1) to create an intergenerational collaborative environment centered on consistent creative work and the fluid exchange of ideas; and (2) to bring art and business students together to think creatively about how to achieve this aim. We believed these goals honored the spirit of the grant but also the spirit of a liberal arts college education. Thus, the Albion Accelerator was conceived.

The Albion Accelerator (AA) was envisioned to be a workspace in which creative projects could be developed and as a site of interchange between the Albion community, Albion College students and faculty, and recent graduates from various disciplines – a community makerspace. A makerspace is a community-based operation in which people come together around a common interest ranging from arts to technology to entrepreneurship. Makerspaces are typically nonprofit enterprises, but in order to function, require a sustainable business model that accounts for staffing, financial, and physical resources. Some makerspaces charge dues to members in exchange for work space as a means of “keeping the lights on”, while others are run by way of volunteers and through charitable donations. While the goals of a makerspace can vary, there is a growing literature on the positive results communities have achieved by fostering makerspaces (Meacock, 2015; Mooney, 2014), and as such, we felt Albion was an ideal location to pursue such a space as a means of revitalizing the community.

Through the AA, we envisioned a variety of programs that could be developed by participants and staff of the AA and would include programs offered by the Accelerator’s makers, as well as visiting scholars, artists, and others whose thinking and knowledge is of interest to the Albion community. Important to us, however, was the need for such a space and corresponding programming to be dynamic, fluid, relevant, and malleable. In order to be responsive (and anticipatory), the space and associated programming needed to be configured and reconfigured to evolve and address the changing needs and interests of the College and community.

To be honest, when I presented this undergraduate research opportunity to my students the first semester of the three in which it spanned, they were not thrilled. They did not see how “researching an art makerspace had anything to do with business.” This reaction was precisely the one I had hoped for, oddly enough, and was imperative to teaching my students that in business, it’s possible to do well (e.g., be profitable) and do good (contribute to the communities in which you have or seek membership).

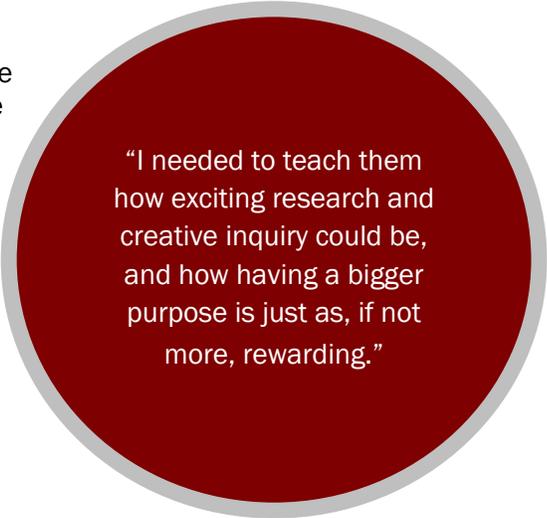
Albion, Michigan was once a booming industrial community with several industries, a bustling downtown, a strong education system, and was known for being a “community of makers.” Unfortunately the community has come on hard times, recently had their school annexed to a nearby community, and has only a small portion of the industry remain that once existed. My students have never known Albion to be the booming, bustling community it once was. My arts colleagues and I saw this project, and the Accelerator, as an opportunity to honor the maker/making roots of Albion and to modernize our approach to making, collaboration, and innovation. Perhaps more important, we saw

the AA as a space and opportunity to bring community members together to think creatively about how to reinvigorate Albion and the Town and Gown connection.

Undergraduate Research in Business

As I reflected on the skills and abilities I wanted my students to gain from this undergraduate research experience, I knew the importance of creating opportunities in which they would gain an appreciation for inquiry and scholarship – taking seemingly disconnected pieces and weaving a tapestry to use data to tell a story, one that influences that lives of others (including their own). I also needed to think deeply about the skills business-minded students would need not just in the next 3 to 5 years, but beyond, that would serve them well in their professional and personal lives. I also wanted, if possible, to make sure my students could put a face to the data – meaning, the undergraduate research experience would require them to engage in the community, to meet with community members, to learn about their experiences, and to help create opportunities that would support community members long after my students walked across the stage to receive their diplomas.

The AA project was also particularly appealing to me because on the surface, it was not a traditional business-focused research project. Rather than researching consumer buying preferences or google analytics, my students would be educating themselves on what a makerspace was, the role of such a space in a given community, and researching the associated business models to then take that information to adapt and apply it in the context of Albion with economic development and sustainability in mind. I felt the AA undergraduate research experience would help them learn that the bottom line and profitability were not the only indicators of success in business (e.g., doing well). Rather, I needed to teach them how exciting research and creative inquiry could be, and how having a bigger purpose is just as, if not more, rewarding (e.g., doing good). And, I was confident such lessons could be realized through the AA undergraduate research experience.



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Project Description

As previously mentioned, the AA undergraduate research experience spanned three semesters and a summer, and was progressive in nature by building on the work completed by students in prior semesters. This work began during the spring, 2015 semester and the main areas of focus for my business students included: (1) understand what a makerspace is and the role of such a space in community development and revitalization; (2) research existing makerspace models, outcomes, and best practices; (3) envision how such a space could be adapted and expanded in the Albion community; and (4) begin to think about the connection between a makerspace and community needs.

My arts colleagues felt their arts students could benefit from working with business students who could research makerspaces from a business perspective, not just the arts perspective. My business students specifically researched the various goals of makerspaces (e.g., technology focused, arts focused, business incubator focused), identified the corresponding business models to better understand how those makerspaces stayed in business, and sought to identify best practices and trends across those business models. These findings informed students’ efforts to identify successful makerspaces (and associated business models) in communities similar to Albion as a first step in envisioning the AA. Students worked in cross course teams with arts students, with my

students focusing specifically on the areas noted above and reporting back to their art peers and to the cross course teams as a whole. As a culminating event, the student teams presented their research findings to campus and community members at Albion College's annual Elkin Isaac Student Research Symposium which is a forum in which students present their research and creative works after being sponsored by a faculty mentor.

A student who was enrolled in the spring course, asked to continue working on this research as part of a summer FURSCA project. FURSCA stands for the Foundation for Undergraduate Research, Scholarship, and Creative Activity at Albion College and the summer FURSCA experience involves a faculty member supervising an undergraduate student on a research experience. The student and I were able to take the data from the spring term to focus on three key areas as a logical next step in the process: (1) develop data collection instruments aimed at needs assessment; (2) complete a needs analysis for the community; and (3) identify important, and necessary, College and community partnerships. We developed a survey to be disseminated in Albion Public Schools. The goal of the survey administration was to learn as much as possible from parents/guardians about key areas of interest related to youth programming (e.g., after school, summer) as well as areas in which parents, guardians, and other community members would appreciate professional development opportunities and other supports.

Key areas addressed on the survey were: demographics (gender, age, grade, favorite school subject); subjects of interest (arts, reading/writing, STEM, music, and other); and parental/guardian supports (e.g., While we are hoping to learn more about your child/children's interests, we would also like to learn more about the types of programs you – the parent/guardian – might like to participate in). Such programs could include resume or cover letter help, job search skills, finance (e.g., budgeting, investing, taxes, etc.). Addressing these broad areas on the survey allowed us to collect the necessary data to identify interests and needed supports for our two targeted populations – youth and parents/guardians.

Given timing of the summer FURSCA experience and the end of the public school calendar, we were unable to fully administer the survey given the goal of sending surveys home with students to share with their parents/guardians. Rather, we were able to pilot test the survey and vet it with key community members for feedback and revisions. In lieu of the survey administration, my summer research student held one-on-one meetings with campus and community members to learn more about past and current community programming efforts and recorded feedback about that programming to identify trends in participation and key success factors. The student and I also held meetings with key Albion public school officials and Albion College administrators. The outcomes of the summer research experience were (1) a secured commitment for a start of school (September, 2015) survey administration, (2) created greater awareness and interest for a community makerspace, and (3) earned the support and endorsement of campus and community constituents.

During the fall, 2015 semester, we administered the needs assessment survey by sending it home with students attending Albion Public Schools. We received nearly 200 completed surveys that contained a great deal of useful information and insights that would inform the development of youth and community programming. Albion College students engaged in both quantitative and qualitative analysis. Students coded the open-ended survey responses such as favorite subject and programs of interest to parents/guardians. Students completed descriptive statistics for the quantitative survey responses. For each category of data (qualitative, quantitative), students identified the most frequently cited responses which served as a foundation with which to build.

At the same time my students were engaged in data analysis, we were in the process of organizing an event titled "1700 Hearts and Minds" that was open to the entire community in which we would

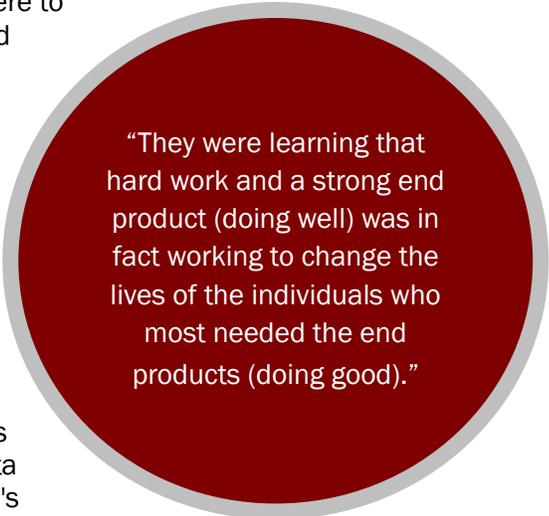
share a summary of the survey findings as well as host smaller breakout sessions around community programming themes that my summer research student ascertained from his one-on-one informational meetings. The title of the event held special meaning by recognizing the 1700 young individuals that lived in the Albion community, but not all attended Albion Public Schools, that would benefit from the programming that we aimed to develop and support through the AA. Also of symbolic and personal meaning was the location of the event – it was held at the Washington Gardner School – a building once bustling with students and community members for decades, but was closed due to the dwindling student enrollments. The College took over the management and maintenance of building upon its closing and the current Albion President, Dr. Mauri Ditzler, suggested we host the "1700 Hearts and Minds" event there.

The decision to host such an event, and in that location, proved to be an important turning point for this undergraduate research experience and for gaining momentum for our efforts moving forward. Nearly 300 members from the community attended; they reminisced about the days in which they attended Washington Gardner, my students and I heard stories about which teachers and classes were taught in which classrooms. We saw community members get emotional remembering the day they walked across the stage in the auditorium at Washington Gardner (where our event was held) to collect their diplomas. As part of the event, we hosted a panel session in which community members discussed current and upcoming programming already in process, followed by smaller breakout sessions in nearby classrooms. Each session was facilitated by a member of the community including my two arts colleagues and me. Our students were there to engage with community members and talk about our efforts and findings to date as well as take notes on information gleaned from the breakout sessions. We concluded the event with a performance by the APS children's choir that was met with thunderous applause and hope for the future.

The data, or market research, collected at this event was summarized by my student teams and the information gathered, along with the survey data, provided a foundation with which my students could begin developing actual programming that could be offered. For the remainder of the semester, the student teams identified a programming topic, researched other similar programs across the nation to serve as benchmarks, and began thinking about how the benchmark data could inform program development and be adapted to fit Albion's population and economic realities. At the end of the semester, we once again hosted a community event in which representatives from each student team presented their programming ideas as informed by the research they engaged in that semester.

It was during this semester, however, that I began to see my students' engagement and interest deepen – this was no longer a class project, but by hosting the community meetings in which students could put a face to the stories and the research, and share the results of their research efforts, they realized the potential impact of their engagement in this work. They were learning that hard work and a strong end product (doing well), was in fact, working to change the lives of the individuals who most needed the end products my students were working to develop (doing good).

Our third, and final semester, working on the AA efforts, focused on further development of the programming ideas the students envisioned the prior semester. We relied on a process called Strategic Doing, which was developed by a team of individuals at Purdue University (Morrison, 2012). Strategic Doing is a strategy aimed at teaching people how to form collaborations quickly, as



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team members work towards achieving measurable outcomes while making needed adjustments along the way. Rather than look at problems and challenges, strategic doing focuses on the creation of an “appreciative question” that guides collaborative efforts while instilling accountability. The identification of assets is critical to the process. My students created the following appreciative question: “What would Albion look like if it was known for its diversity, economic development opportunities, and entrepreneurship?”

To begin answering this question, student teams once again scheduled meetings with community members spanning 12 key community areas including the public library, the Chamber of Commerce, the economic development center, and law enforcement. Students asked constituents from these groups about assets of the community that could be leveraged and linked to answer the appreciative question while also sharing program development ideas based on students’ efforts from the prior semester. All student teams compiled a list of assets and shared those lists with me, at which time I compiled those assets into a master list to identify trends, commonalities, connections to existing (or planned programming), and identified areas of opportunity in which I and my students did not explore previously. As a class, we examined the list of assets, as connected to the appreciative question, to identify the assets that could be linked and leveraged and would result in “The Big Easy” as characterized by the Strategic Doing process.

The Big Easy refers to those assets that can result in short term gains towards the appreciative question. Those assets were then bundled based on commonalities. In their teams, students took groupings of assets, the programming ideas from prior semesters, and feedback from community constituents to develop a “pathfinder project” as defined by the Strategic Doing process. The pathfinder in this instance was the development of an actual community program that could be implemented within 12 to 18 months. That project had to include a program description, budget, intended population, and sustainability plan. In addition, the program (including development and delivery) had to include one community partner and one college partner. The students worked on developing these plans the remainder of the semester.

While the students were working in their teams, I too was engaged in my own pathfinder project which was geared towards parents and guardians with a specific focus on career preparation and readiness. Given the depressed state of Albion, many working adults noted their need for professional development and job search support on the surveys administered at Albion Public Schools the prior semester. I partnered with the Career and Internship Development Center on Albion College’s campus as well as Michigan Works, a provider of workforce development supports, to plan and execute a job fair and associated programming leading to the event (e.g., resume workshop, interview preparation). I always teach my students to not expect behaviors from others you are not willing to expect of yourself. Therefore, I found it particularly important to also be deeply engaged in these efforts by developing and supporting community programming. Much like the students, I shared progress reports to campus and community constituents throughout the development of the job fair. It was an important message for me to send to the students that if I expected their commitment and engagement, they would see the same level of dedication from me.

At the end of the term, the student teams once again presented their complete pathfinder projects at the annual Elkin Isaac Student Research Symposium. Each project focused on a different youth population and theme (athletics, arts, marketing). Each teams’ findings were shared with the strategic planning committee at Albion College at the end of the term to be considered as part of the strategic planning component focused on community revitalization. We also hosted the Career Fair in partnership with the Career and Internship Development Center and Michigan Works. We had a great turn out both in terms of employers recruiting for positions and job seekers.

Why Was the AA Undergraduate Research Experience Successful?

Our efforts related to the AA ended, with us achieving our goals of envisioning a space in which collaboration, creativity, and making can occur (developers are working on a building downtown Albion that can support some of the students' ideas). Our hope is we can act upon some of the students' programming ideas in the short and long term moving forward as supported through Albion College's Strategic Planning efforts.

When I reflect back on this long-term undergraduate research experience and my role as mentor of it, I believe it was successful is for 5 primary reasons.

First, the undergraduate research experience was built around a theme – Doing Well and Doing Good. My students and I were fortunate that such a lesson aligned with the Andrew Mellon Foundation funding received to support the Humanities Lab work. I have heard many times the assumption that business students are only interested in profitability and they choose a business major to make money. While I do not pretend that these outcomes are not of interest to my students, they do not define the business students I am fortunate to work with at Albion College. My business students are socially engaged, innovative, and thoughtful. Knowing these traits, I knew the theme of Doing Well and Doing Good would resonate with them. Perhaps more importantly, the AA project was the perfect combination of challenge, community engagement, critical thinking, and creative inquiry in which my students could engage in such a lesson.

Second, this undergraduate research experience was not “just another class project.” While my students may not have been overjoyed at the idea of researching a makerspace, as they originally conceived the project to be, they quickly saw the value of this work beyond the scope of the classroom once they engaged in the work. The AA project required students to understand the opportunity (to use language from strategic doing) and the impact of successfully completing the undergraduate research. Students needed to understand the context in which this opportunity was situated; the affected populations of interest; the political, social, and economic factors that contributed to envisioning and implementing such opportunities in the community; the intended audience, and the implications, both positive and negative, of successfully completing this work. Also of great import was understanding how one group of students' efforts would and could affect the efforts of the students enrolled in my courses in subsequent semesters.

Third, the AA project and associated research experience was very much rooted in a liberal arts education tradition. The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) published a report as part of their Liberal Education and American's Promise (LEAP) program which launched in 2005. The goal is to champion a 21st century liberal arts education. As part of these efforts, they published a report titled, “What is a 21st Century Liberal Education?” The report argued that a liberal education is one that empowers and prepares young minds to manage complexity, diversity, and change. Such an educational experience provides both breadth and depth, instills a sense of social responsibility while developing transferable and practical skills that stand the test of time including communication, analytical, and critical thinking. A 21st century liberal education situates this learning in ways in which students can demonstrate their abilities, apply knowledge, and test their thinking in real-world settings. The AA undergraduate research experience, in my opinion, epitomized all of the ways in which the AAC&U defined and characterized a liberal education in the 21st century.

Fourth, the AA undergraduate research experience was a comprehensive research experience in which students learned about and took part in the research process from start to finish. While my arts peers and I provided the basic foundation and goals at the beginning of this experience, the students did the majority of the heavy lifting. They were expected to identify the main problem (or opportunity in this case), conduct preliminary research by way of best practices, benchmarking, and

literature reviews and were required to summarize and identify trends as part of these efforts. They also had to identify other sources of information to support data collection and the development of data collection instruments, including pilot testing and revision. By the end of the experience, we had a wealth of data and knowledge with which to draw from including survey and interview data to observations and best practices. The data were then used to develop actual programming that responded directly to community members' needs. And finally, through our community events and the Elkin Isaac symposium, students engaged in dissemination efforts to share their findings.

Fifth, the AA undergraduate research was very much situated in a business topic and required experiences and skill development that would be expected of business educated students today. Students worked in teams, took on leadership roles within their teams, and had to account for the primary resources we discuss in business as part of their programming development – human resources, financial resources, and physical resources. As part of their programming plans, the students identified community and college partnerships to support program development and they proposed a staffing plan for each program. Student teams also had to create budgets and identify startup costs and funds needed to sustain programs for the long-term. Finally, they had to include details about where programming would be held and ensure the appropriate legal and other related considerations were accounted for. This undergraduate research experience was appropriate for my students' skill levels but also pushed them to develop new ones in the process.

Challenges

While I believe the AA undergraduate research experience was a success, and I do believe my arts faculty peers and those who engaged with us would agree, this longitudinal project was not without its challenges. First, such an UR experience would have been hard to replicate without the funding we received. Faculty teams received \$5000 to support efforts related to the project. We were able to bring in speakers with experience in the areas discussed, go on field trips to area makerspaces as part of our research efforts, and purchase additional materials. In addition, we faculty mentors were remunerated each semester which was greatly appreciated.

Second, given the longitudinal nature of this UR project, maintaining momentum, commitment, and relevance was a challenge. My job was to ensure that each group of students were building on the work of past students but also being provided with something new to grapple with so as not to keep repeating the same results in a different semester. The community events played a critical role in ensuring we were constantly sharing new ideas and updates on our efforts. In other words, they kept us honest and accountable for moving forward and keeping our promises.

Third, this UR project relied on the good will and willingness of Albion community members to engage with us on this journey. If at any point community members lost interest, were unwilling to meet with students, or to attend our community events, our project would have ceased to exist. The fact that we were able to fulfill our goal and engage in this work for the duration of the Humanities Lab funding period, is a real testament to the commitment the community has to the College and vice versa to revitalization.

Lastly, this UR project was quite the undertaking to say the least and required a great deal of commitment from me, the students, and campus and community constituents who offered their supports, services, and connections to make this project viable. Simply put, to orchestrate such an endeavor was not easy and I worked hard to weave these practical experiences in with the content, readings, and other classroom activities. My goal, and job, was to make sure the connection between the classroom and the AA research experience was seamless. That would not have been possible without the supports I received along the way.

Final Thoughts

I am proud of the work we did through the AA undergraduate research experience and am even more proud and confident in the fact that we reached people in the community, we found excitement through their excitement, and this experience instilled a sense of responsibility in my students and myself. But such an experience requires a great deal of time organizing all the moving pieces and parts, managing the knowns and unknowns that crept up along the way, and leading all of these efforts while also still managing a day job that involves teaching, advising, and mentoring beyond this experience and others like it. If I had the opportunity to do it again, would I? I certainly would and am already thinking about what the next undergraduate research project is as I type this essay (and am preparing syllabi for the fall term). While exhausting and taxing at times, I do realize how blessed I am to have this opportunity to create research experiences for my students, to see my efforts in the classroom and in terms of scholarship have an immediate impact on those sitting in my classroom and those living in the community in which I teach. I firmly believe we did well, and did good on this one.

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