

Social Entrepreneurship and Event Management

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Abstract

Final year undergraduates in the School of Life Sciences at the University of Glasgow may take a two week, intensive course called Business & Bioscience. Student teams work together on the development of innovative bioscience products. After the two week course, the students are required to plan and organise events which will be of benefit to students and the local community. Since 2008 there have been more than twelve events, ranging from "Safety on Campus" to "Style That's Worthwhile". This paper will examine the development of the events and the transition from student events to local community events.

Introduction

This paper takes a reflective stance on a particular aspect of the development of a final year business course for Life Science students at the University of Glasgow. As joint co-ordinator and facilitator on the course, I have endeavoured to give students as authentic and practical an experience as possible. We work in a pressurized environment, with short deadlines and an emphasis on co-operation and teamwork. The core activities of the course take place, with staff and student-mentor facilitation, during an intensive, two-week period. Event management, which is the focus of this paper, takes place in the semester following the two-week course, giving students approximately two months to organize and deliver an event which benefits students and/or the local community. The paper looks at the development of event management as a piece of summative coursework, and the impact that it has on the students that take part.

Background

Since 2008, students undertaking Business & Bioscience in the School of Life Sciences at the University of Glasgow have been required to organize an event as part of their summative assessment. The reasoning behind the decision to include event management in the summative assessment is to give the students an authentic experience, where they have control over a real budget and have to organize a real event, with an invited audience, using their own initiative to deal with problems and issues of organization, aligning with Alan Gibb's (2002, p. 19) holistic model of entrepreneurial teaching.

Students take Business & Bioscience at the start of semester 1, usually the second two weeks of September. The course is unusual, compared to other courses offered by the School of Life Sciences in that it runs over two weeks instead of five and that the final grade is composed of 40% coursework and 60% end of course exam, in contrast to other courses which rely on end of course exam only. The coursework that students complete are team business plan presentation and documentation (15%), individual business plan critique (5%), reflective diary (5%) and individual event report (15%).

The first week and a half is taken up with the development of a biology-related business plan, and students may also elect to complete a commercial project (Tatner & Tierney, 2008) in which they work with an SME (small to medium-sized enterprise) on a bioscience project. The West of Scotland is uniquely placed in that, being in the Scottish Central Belt, there are a large number of these companies within a reasonable distance from the city of Glasgow. The last day of the course is used to introduce the students to event management, and to collect their ideas for their events. The students are also given a small cash budget which they may use for the events, and events must take place by the end of the first week in December. Students are responsible for every aspect of the events from booking a venue, speakers, advertising and hospitality. The course tutors attend all of the events, and students are also required to produce a report on the event, which includes a financial statement, a description of the event and individual roles, and feedback from attendees.

Student-directed event management

The development of the events has been ongoing since their introduction in 2008. From 2008 until 2010, each team of students was required to organize their own event, of benefit to students, or the local community. Students developed ideas which directly impacted on themselves and their friends; for example, an entrepreneurship afternoon, safety on campus, exam de-stress, second chance clubs and societies, part-time employment opportunities. For each of these events, the teams were given a budget of £50, which they used for publicity materials, hospitality and prize draw prizes. Students invited members of staff to contribute to their events, for example by giving a presentation highlighting student enterprise, or by giving exam preparation advice. Alternatively, professional organisations such as the police and fire service were also invited to contribute by attending events on aspects of safety.

While each of the groups successfully delivered an event, it was felt that there was an element that was missing, although we were undecided as to what the missing element was. The answer came unexpectedly in 2010 from one of the teams working on an event.

In 2010, one of the groups decided to organize a fundraising event for local charities. The shopping area around campus has a large number of charity shops which serve the community well: students (and other locals) can shop for inexpensive clothing, and the quality of the clothing is high, due to the area's proximity to affluent local communities. The decision that the students made to hold this type of event marked a turning point in the events, as students were able to turn a profit for the first time and invite the local community to a campus event. These students organized a charity fashion show, and invited five local charities to donate clothes from their shops for the catwalk, which could then be sold to the audience. During the show, there were a series of alternate catwalks and entertainers, with clothes on sale at the venue. The first fashion show raised around £750 (approximately \$1170USD) which was divided between the charities that had attended the event.

In 2011, following the financial success of the previous year, the format of the event management task was changed so that all students contributed to the

fashion show but were allowed to choose which aspect of the event organization they wanted to contribute to. Students identified four areas: Marketing & Finance; Venue, Charities & Models and Entertainment, and organized themselves into four teams, each responsible for one facet of organization. In this way, the students formed a community of practice (Wenger, 1998), rather than organizing competing events. In December 2011, the second "Style That's Worthwhile" charity fashion show was held, raising £800 (approximately \$1245USD) for four local charities.

In organizational terms, the 2011 fashion show was more sophisticated than the previous years. The students were mentored by one of the previous year's students, who was invaluable in offering advice to help the students avoid some of the problems that the team had experienced the previous year. The students also made use of their own contacts, securing Miss Scotland and a Glasgow Student Television presenter to act as hosts for the night. They also invited the campus newspaper Glasgow Guardian (Rainbyrd & Duff, n.d., p. 21) to cover the event. The students made use of social media, creating a Facebook group to recruit participants and publicise the event. However, the students used Mahara (<https://mahara.org>), an online portfolio tool from the University of Auckland to organize the event, separating the public face of the event from the coursework aspect. For entertainment, the students invited a variety of acts who were contacted through personal contacts, and who gave their time for free. Four charities participated, and, as previously, the money raised was shared between the charities.

Impact of the event

The students took part in an Appreciative Inquiry (Ai) (Cooperrider, 1986) session on Day 1 of the course. The positive core of the Inquiry was "Realizing Effective Teamwork". This was seen as an essential part of the course, as the students may previously have had a negative experience of working in groups. From reflective diaries that students kept during the course, the effectiveness of the Ai session was a recurring theme:

"I felt it valuable that early on everyone could discuss what makes a good team and what I particularly liked was that in doing the task, we were exercising the values we were suggesting, if that makes sense!"

"It really makes you think more deeply about what makes an effective team and how to ensure these attributes become reality."

"Then we had a session of teamwork it was such a good fun, I laughed a lot! For me I guess the main goal is to learn being accepting of others opinions because sometimes I do struggle with it. This exercise just proved that working in the team can be enjoyable which was one of the points on our poster."

"Being a person who generally likes to be in control, work alone and be self responsible working in a team can be quite daunting and so I found that talking over what really being in a team is all about helped to reassure me."

While the students worked in independent teams during the two week course, it was noticeable that they organized themselves into an efficient organizational structure for the event management, with an overall leader-in-charge, and four team leaders who reported at regular intervals to the overall leader. All of the decisions that were made, and milestones that were reached were recorded on Mahara, so that everyone, including the course tutors were informed as to the progress of the organization of the event. This is noteworthy as it contrasts with previous event organization which was not recorded in a way that we could keep regular contact with students during the development stage.

Impact on students was not confined to efficient organization. In the event reports that students are required to write for summative assessment, several of them reflected on the impact that organizing the event had had on them.

“What really struck me during the event was something that the salsa dancing organiser said which was, that charity shouldn’t be about making us feel guilty for what we have but it should be about the positive blessings and change we can give to others. This was incredibly true of Style That’s Worthwhile.”

“It was the first time I felt like I was working on something in the real world in a practical way for a goal that was real and worth working towards... I definitely gained confidence in myself and helped me to realise the social and work skills I have. Being aware of my skills enabled me to implement tasks successfully and work to my strengths. The project also helped me to get to know and make new friends with people I have added respect for after seeing all the hard work we all put in to produce such a great result of a night.”

“I think the greatest lesson though was that you don’t need a great deal of money or experience to make a difference or set up something from scratch, all you need is a great idea and the ambition to see it through, and I think that’s something that the business and bioscience course has been trying to show us from the start.”

“Finally, a concluding statement about Style That’s Worthwhile; which I can safely say changed my perspective on many aspects of life. It was a genuine pleasure setting up this event as I knew all the money raised would benefit the less fortunate and aid in life-saving research. This feeling is difficult to come by in an every-day 9-5 setting; which has inspired me to do more charity work in the upcoming months.”

It is noteworthy here to mention that in the event reports which were handed in as the summatively assessed coursework, bioscience students, trained for four years in a positivist paradigm to deal objectively with facts and figures, evidence and data, engaged with a more personal reflective way of expressing themselves, including a personal reflection section in their report. That they have the confidence to write in this manner, articulating their own opinions, and do it in a piece of summative assessment is, in my opinion, a remarkable change in a relatively short space of time.

Impact

The students’ experiences are not confined to subjective changes in the way they express themselves or in the way they view the world. Since taking over the

organisation of the course in 2007, there has been a deliberate effort to develop the course using the principles of Constructive Alignment (Biggs, 1999, 2001). Students perform formative tasks each day, and get immediate feedback from peers and from tutors. The formative tasks also inform the summative tasks, so that students are prepared in advance for both summative coursework and the end of course exam. Students are also asked to write a reflective diary (Moon, 2003) on their experiences of each day's work, which is also given feedback. Students may wish to open their diaries to other students, and the tutors read and comment on all the diary entries on a daily basis.

The development of the course has been ongoing since 2009. Prior to that, it was run in a more traditional, didactic manner. With reference to Figure 1, below, it can be seen that since the introduction of a subject-centred, constructively aligned curriculum, the relative proportions of students taking the course being awarded a first class or upper second class honours degree has increased. The reasons for this remain unclear; it would be naïve to suggest that the course has a major bearing on the final outcome of the students' degree program and further work needs to be done in order to elucidate the reasons for the shift in degree classifications. It may be that more highly achieving students are choosing to take the course, driving up the degree classifications of the Business and Bioscience cohort. However, conversely, it can be stated that taking the course does the students no harm. Previous work (Butler, Tatner, & Tierney, 2010) indicates that students taking Business & Bioscience understand independent learning better after taking the course and are more able to articulate and express their opinions.

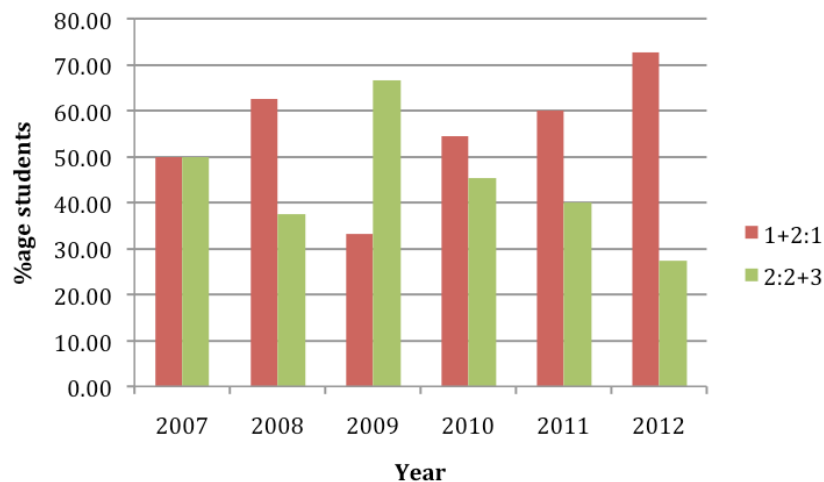


Fig. 1. Percentage degree classifications in Business & Bioscience, 2007-2012 (red bars indicate first and upper second class honours degrees; green bars indicate lower second and third class honours degrees)

In the UK Higher Education system, the undergraduate degree classification system ordains the future prospects of students, especially in the competitive disciplines in Life Sciences. Undergraduate students with ambitions towards PhD

and a career in academia may do so only with a first class or upper second degree. It is heartening to know that the course may be contributing to the future of the students in a quantitative as well as qualitative manner.

Reflection

In giving Business & Bioscience students an event to organize for summative assessment, it is my intention that they put into practice what they have learned in the classroom. I believe that in reality what the students get out of the course and the event management is much more. They gain confidence and perseverance, becoming experienced in dealing with complex situations and responding to unexpected situations. This resonates with the notion of Psychological Capital (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007) which is characterized by an individual's combination of confidence, optimism, hope and resilience, which they need in order to succeed. By using Constructive Alignment (Biggs, 1999, 2001) to develop the course, I not only have happy students, I also have confident, enthusiastic young adults who have the tools they require to succeed in the future.

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