Client Based Projects

Introduction

Experiential learning has been a part of education in agriculture for decades. The model fits especially well with many areas of instruction in agriculture that focus on "hands-on" skill development. It can also be applied to more conceptual frameworks. Through supervised experiences such as internships, students get the opportunity to utilize skills and knowledge gained during class instruction. Client based projects allow students to connect directly with stakeholders to utilize class instruction while meeting the clients' specific needs. I have used client-based projects most commonly in a graduate level class in Program Evaluation. It can also be used in other areas such as Program Planning or the Adoption and Diffusion of Innovations to name a few.

Procedure

I will use a Program Evaluation class the basis for discussion. Basic principles can be modified to meet course expectations and content.

Pre-planning is essential step in this process. The instructor needs to identify programs that are in existence or in the process of being planned. These may be ones that you are engaged in or ones that colleagues are willing to share. Students work in the capacity of the evaluator for the project. Students may work in teams or as individuals depending on the number of projects and the size of the class. Commitment from project directors is essential. Directors must be willing to share files and information, so students can learn about the program. They must also commit to time for interviews conducted by the students. Students need also to be connected to all other relevant stakeholders and be empowered to act on behalf of the program.

Once projects have been assigned, students are assigned the role of external project evaluator. They must meet with their client, learn about the project, meet key stakeholders and design an evaluation plan based on class content that meets the needs of the client. The final project is a written plan as well as a presentation to the client during class time.

Assessment

The final project is evaluated at two levels. A grading rubric outlining all required elements in the written plan is used as the primary assessment. Since the project is client-driven, project directors are also given the opportunity to provide feedback on the extent the plan meets their needs. Client feedback is an essential component, however, due to the subjectivity of this part, it is weighted less on the final grade.

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