

Food Drive Energized (on Steroids?) What Happens when the Business Division Adopts It!

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In an effort to better prepare our students for the accounting and business professions, we have focused on methods that encourage our students to become active participants in the learning process. This approach creates a challenge of incorporating the topics and methods of engaging our students in this process. Additionally, the service-learning must incorporate a strategy that links the service performed with the curriculum goals and mission of the college.

In an attempt to foster interdepartmental team building, the Business Administration Dean at St. Louis Community College – Meramec decided that the entire Division should focus their attention on a Canned Food Drive during Hunger Awareness Week. He specifically challenged the faculty to encourage student participation and to implement appropriate activities into the curriculum of their courses. To accomplish this goal, the Business Division partnered with the Service Learning Coordinator to facilitate the annual on campus food drive.

The Service Learning Coordinator provided hunger awareness information to the Business Division and also encouraged our business courses to participate in the food drive process. In the past, several accounting courses have assisted with the collection and inventory of the food items. The students used accounting inventory methods and procedures during the food drives as a service learning tool.

Accordingly, these accounting courses continued the service learning opportunity in this Business Division quest. In addition, the managerial accounting students applied the standard cost concepts to cost out and provide meals to an assisted living center. Students received food recipes and a requirement was to calculate the cost of ingredients, labor and overhead. These students purchased the ingredients and then prepared meals for the center.

Another opportunity for service-learning included the development of a program to accommodate the inventory summary through our accounting database course. The Business Dean and food pantry required a detailed summary of information. The course built a custom accounting database that provided the needed information.

In an Economics course, a professor developed and utilized a game setting. The goal of the game was to mirror the situation firms face in an oligopolistic market structure. In an oligopolistic market structure, a small number of firms supply fungible products in order to satisfy the consumer demand. Because only a small number of firms exist, each firm's individual production decisions will impact the profits of other companies in the market. Unfortunately, the firms could collectively agree to restrict production (collude), thus, causing an increase in price and greater profits for each of them. However, a powerful incentive seduces each firm to cheat by producing more than the agreed-upon amount. The cheating firm would earn a larger profit at the expense of all of the other businesses in that industry. This game is a variation of the Prisoners' Dilemma game that theorists commonly use to predict how businesses will behave in an oligopoly.

The setup of this game creates two positive by-products that are not present in the standard Prisoners' Dilemma: 1) food is collected for the needy; and 2) students approach the game more seriously because of their costs and because of the potential outcome of additional points toward their final grade. Over a two-semester period, eight sections of students have played this game. Those sections contributed a total of 1,339 cans, an average of 167 cans per section or 12 cans per participant.

We have successfully enhanced our curriculum by implementing accounting, business and economic concepts and models into the community food drives. Consequently, the most recent campus food drive increased hunger awareness amongst the students and resulted in donations amounting to 10,000 pounds of food items earmarked for a local food pantry.