Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Rubrics May Be a Useful Tool for Assessing MLIS Student Learning Experiences

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Evidence Summary

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A Review of:

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Abstract

Objective – To develop a rubric to assess diversity awareness and professional socialization through in-person or online experiential learning for online MLIS students.

Design – Exploratory case study.

Setting – School of Information Science & Learning Technologies, University of Missouri.

Subjects – Six experiential learning projects designed to promote diversity and professional socialization for online MLIS students.

Methods – The authors developed a rubric in order to evaluate the characteristics of several experiential learning projects. The major themes that were measured in the rubric were identified through a comprehensive literature search, and these included Professional Socialization, Service Orientation, Values Orientation, and Diversity & Inclusion. The authors also added three original

accessibility factors that they considered relevant from a practical approach: time, money, and geographic mobility.

Main Results – The rubric was successfully applied to several ongoing experiential learning projects, as well as to a new project. The authors concluded that it provided a useful framework for assessing the accessibility and estimated value of these experiences.

Conclusion – The rubric seems to be a useful start to assessing experiential learning. However, more research is needed to ensure that it is actually measuring the domains that it is intended to measure. This study only focused on whether the rubric could be applied, whereas future studies should assess its accuracy. The rubric may be useful for curriculum evaluation and planning, accreditation, tenure/promotion, and instructor self-assessment.

Commentary

The quality of this study was appraised using "The CAT: A generic critical appraisal tool" created by Perryman & Rathbun-Grubb (2014). Overall, the article was found to be of high quality based on this assessment. The authors are faculty members from the University of Missouri School of Information Science & Learning Technologies. The research questions are clearly defined and match the method used.

The authors carefully explain the importance of experiential learning in MLIS programs and define the three diversity theories they utilized when designing experiential learning projects at the University of Missouri: contact theory, diversity levers, and the inclusive excellence framework. They also discuss literature that demonstrates an increase in student learning resulting from similar experiences. Finally, they draw upon the literature to include in their rubric several domains of importance in LIS education: Professional Socialization, Service Orientation, Values Orientation, and Diversity & Inclusion. They also add accessibility factors to the rubric, such as time, cost, and ability to travel, all of which may significantly impact a student's ability to participate in these activities.

The rubric clearly outlines all of these factors. However, the category for "Values Orientation" appears to be somewhat difficult to measure. Listing the specific values within the rubric itself, or including an appendix containing a list, would potentially increase the accuracy of the rubric.

One point of confusion in this article is that the authors state that the current projects being examined using the rubric must already contain specific components. If the general components are already prescribed, this seems to greatly diminish the utility of the rubric. Not surprisingly, the rubric scores for all projects only ranged from 16 to 18 out of 24. It may have been more beneficial if the authors examined experiential learning projects from other MLIS programs in order to more rigorously test its efficacy.

The authors state that service learning projects can be beneficial by "allowing instructors to add reasonable and short-term opportunities for interaction within the structure of a class, rather than depending on students gaining this instruction through practicum, internship, assistantship, or work experience" (p. 216). While it is helpful to increase these types of learning experiences in virtual programs, it should not diminish the need for other types of experiences, such as internships and volunteer positions. Internships and volunteer roles are mutually beneficial to both students and libraries alike and have the capacity to provide a deeper dive into professional socialization, particularly in the area of diversity. With the recent increase in virtual work due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is likely an increase in the number of such positions that are available virtually. Also, these types of positions may lead to full time employment after graduation.

Lastly, the authors point out the limitation that this rubric does not assess student learning, only the experience itself. This seems to be a crucial component that should be addressed in future research. Overall, the existing rubric may be of great benefit to educators who are initially designing learning experiences for their students, assessing existing experiences, and facilitating accreditation, self-evaluation, and promotion/tenure assessment.

References

Perryman, C., & Rathbun-Grubb, S. (2014). *The CAT: A generic critical appraisal tool.* http://www.jotform.us/cp1757/TheCat