Field Experience 3: Evaluation Project Design

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Purpose

The Senior Project at Sir William's High School[1] is an instructional program designed as a capstone experience for all twelfth graders. Since its inception in 2001, it has not undergone a formal evaluation. This evaluation will provide insight to the staff at Sir William's High School on the current implementation of the program, which has undergone changes over the past two years. It will also articulate areas for improvement in the program, based on feedback from students, parents, and the teachers. Specifically, this evaluation will weigh the intended outcomes against the goals for the program and discover how stakeholders in this program perceive both the goals and outcomes.

How this evaluation is used will be determined by the teachers and principal at Sir William's High School. It may result in modifications to the instructional design of the program to better align outcomes to goals. Since this is the first formal evaluation of the senior project, teachers may elect to modify the goals, inputs, activities, or outputs of the program based on what is learned. The evaluation will be successful if it identifies merits of the senior project and any shortcomings, for teachers running the program, students participating in the program, or parents and mentors who help support the program at Sir William's High School.

Evaluation Questions

The evaluation of the Senior Project will be guided by three essential questions. First, *how does the Senior Project contribute towards the success of the senior year experience at Sir William's High School?* For this question, both the literature on a student's senior year and the stakeholders at Sir William's High School will contribute towards defining what a successful

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[1] The school name used here is fictitious. The school referenced in this study is a public high school in rural Virginia, serving approximately 750 students in grades 9-12.

senior year is. As the evaluator, I will compare the design and implementation of the program with ideas on a successful senior year articulated by teachers, current seniors, and their parents.

The second question is: *Do the project options (volunteer experience, job shadowing, creative project) affect the outcomes for this program?* While students have a choice in their Senior Project through three options (job shadowing, volunteering, and creative projects), the project is consistent in terms of some of the activities leading to the same outputs. These outputs include a project proposal, a project log, a reflection paper, and a presentation at the conclusion of the students' experience. Does this initial choice students make affect the learning experience in the program? For example, does this choice affect how much career exploration, workplace readiness skill development, or college preparation a student receives? If this choice does affect the program's outcomes, the evaluation may equip teachers to inform students about making a choice that best meets their needs, or else re-design the program to be more equitable through its student option selection.

Third, *are the program goals being met through the planned activities and outputs?* While this question could be answered through instructional assessment instruments, it would be difficult to determine if community involvement, or twenty-first century skills, were obtained only through participation in the Senior Project. Instead, this question will be answered through a qualitative perspective in an effort to deliver insight into its impact on student learning and growth.

Evaluation Design

This evaluation will be a responsive case study (Stake, 2004). Specifically, I am conducting this evaluation to support the needs of the teachers and senior students at Sir William's High School. A mixed methods approach will be used, collecting qualitative data

through interviews in the context of a focus group with teachers. This qualitative method will

provide context for the teachers' role in the program and how they feel about its current

implementation. I will deliver surveys to two stakeholder groups, namely parents and students

participating in the program, with an aim at maximizing the sample size among each group. I

expect a better response rate from students. I will analyze these data to provide insight on these

stakeholder perspectives towards the Senior Project's success during the senior year and the

perceptions of outcomes depending upon which project option students have chosen. In the end,

the teachers at Sir William's High School should have enough information gleaned from both the

qualitative and quantitative analyses to make decisions about the program's implementation and

any needs for improvement.

Components

This project will formally begin in December, 2012, and end in May, 2013. In total, four

sets of data will be collected as part of the evaluation. Components are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Design Evaluation Components

Timeframe	Stakeholder	Type	Purpose
December	Teachers	Planning Meeting	Go over evaluation design details and receive input to teacher (and possibly student) needs.
January	Teachers	Focus Group	To gain insight into the operation of the instructional program, its

			benefits for students, and its adherence to articulated goals and outcomes.
January	Students	Survey "Pre"	To gain insight into student understanding of the program, its goals, and its purpose.
March	Parents	Survey	To gain insight into parental understanding and attitudes towards the program, its goals, and its purpose.
May	Students	Survey "Post"	To compare student insights regarding the program, its goals and purpose, after participating in all the program's activities.
May	Teachers	Report Delivery	Evaluation will be delivered to the Senior Project team.

Rationale

       This evaluation will start from input from the teachers and principal at Sir William's High School on their implementation of the Senior Project and what they would like to learn through an evaluation. Case studies include rich detail about the environment in which a program exists. The mixed methods approach will support significant detail about the Senior Project program, from multiple perspectives. While a multi-year study might provide more significant insight into the program, its success, and areas for improvement, the components of this short-term evaluation should address the essential questions for the implementation of the Senior Project with its current team of teachers and principal, using a new design with three project options for students.

       The richest detail about the program may come from the focus group with teachers. Using open-ended questions, with no set agenda save for providing insight into the program, teachers will be open to share on all aspects of the program, from the planning stages in previous years, to current-year performance by students, including areas of strength and possible improvement. The focus group questioning may be biased by my position at the central office within this school's district. I believe I can get honest input from teachers as long as they understand I have no intention of modifying or canceling the program, and I plan no formal recommendations as part of this evaluation.

       Three sets of survey data will provide input from parents and high school seniors. I plan to ask each stakeholder group a different set of questions. With parents, I am interested in understanding to what degree they were involved in the processes of choosing the project type and experience for their student. I am interested in asking questions that will indicate the value they place on this project in context of the senior year. Will they view the experience as

beneficial to post-high school employment? Will they view the experience as beneficial towards

college preparation? Parents also have an option to become involved at the project's conclusion,

when students present their findings to a panel. I am interested to find if parents plan to

participate in this final experience, and if they believe the Senior Project is a true "capstone"

experience. By questioning them through a survey in March, a significant portion of the project

will already have passed.

  While a true "pre-" and "posttest" survey cannot be given to seniors due to the late start

of this evaluation, I am still interested in asking seniors about their experience in the Senior

Project midway through the experience after the first semester (in January), and at the conclusion

of the project in May. I am interested in gaining insight into every aspect of the program, but

specifically will focus on student perceptions of the program's goals, their work towards these

goals, and their progress towards the program's outputs and outcomes. Many of the questions

will be the same in each survey, so that comparisons may be made between the two data

collections. Anonymous identifiers will be used to track responses among individuals for these

comparisons.

  The final report will be written to aid the team running this program at Sir William's

High School in seeing the project from a "big picture" perspective, with insight provided with a

review of the literature on senior year capstone projects. The findings in the report, specifically

from the data collected, will be organized to maximize the utility for successfully continuing this

instructional program.

Logic Model

  The Senior Project is an instructional program centered around a model of project-based

learning. The Buck Institute describes *project-based learning* as "an instructional approach built

upon authentic learning experiences" (2012, paragraph 1). This approach also prescribes

allowing students to reflect upon "their own ideas and opinions" (Buck Institute for Education,

2012, paragraph 5). The series of activities required in the Senior Project are grouped in the

Activities section in Figure 1, which presents a logic model for the program.

High School Senior Project

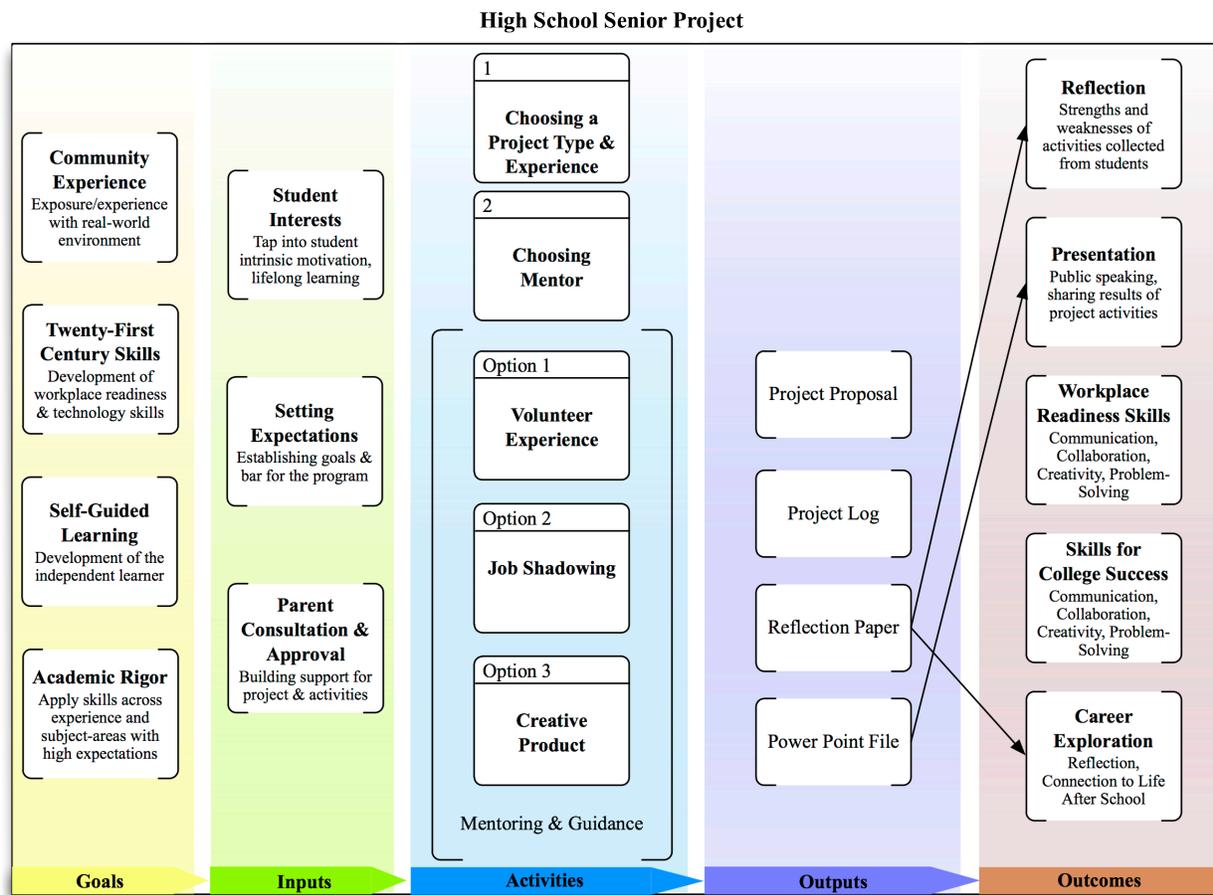| Goals	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes
Community Experience Exposure/experience with real-world environment	**Student Interests** Tap into student intrinsic motivation, lifelong learning	**1 Choosing a Project Type & Experience**	Project Proposal	**Reflection** Strengths and weaknesses of activities collected from students
Twenty-First Century Skills Development of workplace readiness & technology skills	**Setting Expectations** Establishing goals & bar for the program	**2 Choosing Mentor** **Option 1 Volunteer Experience**	Project Log	**Presentation** Public speaking, sharing results of project activities
Self-Guided Learning Development of the independent learner	**Parent Consultation & Approval** Building support for project & activities	**Option 2 Job Shadowing**	Reflection Paper	**Workplace Readiness Skills** Communication, Collaboration, Creativity, Problem-Solving
Academic Rigor Apply skills across experience and subject-areas with high expectations		**Option 3 Creative Product** Mentoring & Guidance	Power Point File	**Skills for College Success** Communication, Collaboration, Creativity, Problem-Solving **Career Exploration** Reflection, Connection to Life After School

Figure 1. Logic model for the Senior Project. Activities required for the project include a number

of outputs, including an observed performance (presentation) that I have categorized as an

outcome.

Goals

        The goals for this program, including many models of other capstone, service learning,

and research paper-based projects, include real world (community) learning experiences, a desire

to offer students an opportunity for self-guided, independent learning, a series of more rigorous

learning activities, and the practice and development of so-called twenty-first century skills. Further research into this program at Sir William's High School may reveal clarification of these stated goals, in addition to other goals not already articulated in the previous figure.

Inputs

What contributes to the program's functioning? Key to this project is the opportunity students have to choose their own learning experience. Students are encouraged to choose from among the three options something of genuine interest to them. Expectations from teachers and parental communication also contribute to the inputs in this model. Further research into this program may reveal refinements to the inputs depicted in the previous figure.

Activities

Students engage in every one of the activities articulated in this model. It is the author's intent to receive further detail in how students complete each of the three different options of Senior Project activities. For instance, how do the activities change for job shadowing, compared to the creative product? What is clear from documentation about the program is the role both duty teachers and the mentor provide in offering guidance and direction to students during the project.

Outputs

The outputs for this project from the student's point of view are also clear, with documentation that the lead teachers provide to students. Each of these is a requirement, as part of the project. Details on the requirements for the proposal, the log of hours, the reflection paper, and the presentation file are provided to students at the appropriate times throughout the school year.

Outcomes

      I have included the presentation as an outcome, due to its placement as the final output of the project. In addition to this observable performance by students, the development of skills, grouped either separately or together as "workplace readiness" or "college readiness," tie directly back to the goals of the program in the author's articulation of twenty-first century skills. Another outcome of the program is student reflection, especially in terms of their future career goals.

References

Buck Institute for Education (2012). *What is project-based learning?* [Web site]. Retrieved from

      http://pbl-online.org/About/whatisPBL.htm

Stake, R. E. (2004). *Standards-based and responsive evaluation.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.