THE ROLE OF INDUSTRY COUNCILS IN THE BUSINESS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

The past three decades the face of higher education in the United States has changed. In 1985 McDonald [1] wrote that colleges and universities were increasing their relationships with industry and business. She contended that this increase inclusion of industry provided students with invaluable access to industry leaders via participating in career-related opportunities, councils, and research. And, although McDonald [1] sees value in such a collaboration she questions the growing role of industry and businesses in higher education and even queries who is doing the educating, higher education or industry. Researchers [2]; [3] have examined this very concern whereas others [4]; [5] have looked at the beneficial ways industry enhances the higher education classroom and how the college classroom can benefit industry and business [6]. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the use of industry as a contributor to academic departments achieving their goals of updated curriculum, post-graduation success, and fundraising. The authors offer a model for using industry councils in academic departments and make recommendations for success. The creation of an industry or advisory council can be an effective way to use industry. Gabbin [7] suggests that industry advisory councils are a great way to gain support, to get industry input, and to get external financial sponsorship for programs. The requirement of academic accreditation boards to involve industry is one of the forces guiding business programs to develop industry councils. The accreditation bodies are looking to increase accountability [8]. The use of a council demonstrates the program’s commitment to industry linkage.

Keywords: Industry councils, advisory councils, higher education, advisory boards.

1 INTRODUCTION

The business world has changed and continues to change at a rapid pace. The dynamic nature of business has increased the pressure on universities to keep up and meet the needs of the industry. Bisoux [9] argues that classrooms are behind in keeping abreast of the more expansive range of skills and practices students need in the workplace. Today's college student is inherently different for decades past due to the technologically rich environment they have existed in. Fox-Wolfgramm [10] calls for college students to be taught strategically self-leadership. She further states that the global nature of the business environment requires students to be exposed to more workplace situations that align with the complex business world. Hence, the authors call for links between industry and academia is becoming increasingly important. According to the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International [11].

The business world has never been more competitive, demanding and volatile than it is today. And it has never moved so fast. Business schools are the first to admit that they can’t begin to keep up without valuable direct links to the realities of that world…

Interaction between industry and academia has existed for years. In 1985, McDonald[1] wrote that colleges and universities were increasing their relationships with industry and business. She contended that this increased inclusion of industry provided students with invaluable access to industry leaders via participating in career-related opportunities, councils, and research. Since industry is one of the most important stakeholders of the university outside of the actual student, involvement between academia and industry is crucial. In addition, industry can play an important role in guiding program curriculum to meet industry needs. Programs miss the mark with curriculum if they are not aware of relevant issues in industry [12]. Gabbin [7], in his article discussing accounting programs, proposed that universities take a new approach to curriculum, through industry partnerships such as cooperative learning, field trips and interaction with accounting practitioners.

One of the most effective ways that this interaction can occur is via industry councils, which are sometimes referred to as advisory councils or advisory boards. AACSB [11] supports interaction via advisory boards:
That valuable connect lies in advisory boards. These groups of executives work closely with school leadership to help bring relevance to the curriculum and the classroom and to champion the school to prospective donors and students, to business colleagues and to the community.

The existence of industry councils indicate a commitment to quality improvement to various stakeholders such as accreditation bodies, perspective students and faculty. As suggested by Bosley [13] the goal of an advisory council is “To develop a symbiotic relationship that would provide students and faculty with the (technological) expertise practitioners... could offer, but, at the same time, to provide a construct true to the missions of a liberal education” (p.43). Industry advisory councils are a great way to gain support, to get industry input, and to get external financial sponsorship for programs Gabbin [7]. A survey conducted by the American Library Association indicated that schools were not taking full advantage of advisory boards.

1.1 Benefits of Industry Councils.

Interaction between industry and academia through industry councils or other means can be beneficial for both parties. Academia can benefit via direct financial support, curricula guidance and business expertise. Industry can benefit via technical expertise of academia and source of graduates [14]; [15]. Industry boards provide interaction between programs and practitioners, which facilitate continuous improvement and information exchange [16]. Programs that emphasize interaction with practitioners can be an effective marketing tool to attract students [7]. Involvement with these boards can also cause their members to become increasingly committed to the success of the academic institution and to playing an important advocacy role. [21]. The results of a survey of advisory board members sponsored by the American Society of Journalism School Administrators indicated several advantages of having an advisory board. Boards can also assist with fundraising, strategic planning and, mission development. In addition, board suggestions in relationship to facilities or curriculum, for example, can carry more weight with administration [17]; [22]

Students can benefit in many ways via council guest speakers, opportunities provided for jobs or internship through council members, and possible mentorship programs. Students can also benefit from direct contact with members during or outside of board meetings. Advice can be shared such as industry insight, field trips, securing industry jobs and internships, mock interviews, resume preparation and hiring procedures [14]. Not only do students and programs benefit, but advisory board members can benefit as well. Getting the opportunity to meet with fellow industry professionals that they might not encounter otherwise can lead to partnerships or sharing of information. In addition, a personal sense of fulfillment since board members are influencing the development of future leaders in their industry. Lastly, depending upon the organization, board members can fulfill their commitment to community service that many organizations emphasize in their social responsibility initiatives [14].

1.2 Industry Councils and Accrediting Bodies

Although benefits of industry councils are well known by universities and have been documented in many research studies, the big push to create industry councils, especially in business schools are due to accrediting bodies such as the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) and Business Education and the International Assembly of College Business Education (IACBE).

Accreditation bodies such as the AACSB emphasize quality improvement, which should involve stakeholder input. Industry councils are an excellent way to show accrediting bodies that the university is engaging industry in various aspects of its business program. [16]. The accreditation bodies are looking to increase accountability [8]. The use of a council demonstrates the program’s commitment to industry linkage.

Although many programs see the vast benefits in industry councils, some do not. In a survey of 213 U.S. journalism departments regarding industry advisory boards, some of the respondents (41) indicated that they did not have an advisory board. The most frequent reason that was indicated was that programs already had an informal relationship with various industry professionals and saw no need to establish something formal [17].

1.3 Industry Councils and Department Goals and Objectives

Higher education institutions need to be strategic in setting goals and objectives that not only align with their mission but the dynamic global world. Graduates of these institutions are sent into this world
and count on being properly prepared by their educational experiences. The trickle down of the delivery of the mission statement and the expectation that graduates will have transferable skills and be market-ready ends in the lap of academic departments. Universities and colleges are organized by academic disciplines. Discipline-specific departments provide leadership and governance of academic programs. Of all the activities of academic departments, three goals seem to be present across school of business departments. Departments want to offer students updated, current and relevant curriculum that is aligned with industry. Additionally, departments want to achieve post-graduation success of students. Due to major budget cuts in higher education and the overall declining economic health of higher education, fundraising for monies to acquire resources important to offering updated, current and relevant curriculum.

Cairns, Mohaghegh, Cundy & Johnson, [18]; Thorley, [5] have looked at the beneficial ways industry enhances the higher education classroom and how the college classroom can benefit industry and business. In a survey conducted of engineering advisory board members and school directors in 2007 indicated that there were differing attitudes regarding fundraising. Some boards chose not to ask members for donations while other did but those fundraising efforts became a “source of frustration and contention”. Clear communication with board members regarding fundraising is important. In addition, buy in from the board members is crucial with fundraising initiatives lead by board members, not the university [19].

2 A MODEL FOR USING INDUSTRY COUNCILS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

To date not much attention has been given to the use of industry councils in higher education by researchers. There has been research exploring community involvement as a scholarly activity. Pienaar-Steyn [20] writes about South Africa’s effort to better understand community engagement and the benefits to higher education. And, although, Pienaar-Steyn [20] does not directly write of the use of industry to aid in universities reaching their goals of providing but one can see the connection between the two. One of the goals of higher education is to produce highly functioning graduates that are prepared to talk their next step. Fig. 1 the authors argue that for business schools the goal is to produce workplace-ready students. It is posited that a workplace-ready student has the sophisticated ability to navigate the complex environment via classroom experiences, internships and industry councils.

![Diagram](image)

Figure 1 Workplace-ready Students

There are decades of research examining the values of active learning practices in the classroom and the experiential learning of internships. As mentioned there is scarce research examining the role industry plays, outside of serving an internship site, in higher education. Fig 2 shows a model of developing an industry council at a department level.

The first thing faculty should do is establish a mission statement for the council. The long term goals of the council should be considered. The mission statement should be concise but elevating in nature that is goal-oriented. It is beneficial to develop the mission statement by gathering information from stakeholders, including faculty, administrators, students and existing councils. Once the mission statement has been written and agreed upon, faculty should determine the logistics of the council. It is recommended that frequency of meetings be determined as well as location of meeting. At least one meeting should be held on campus to facilitate networking among students and industry professionals.
If possible, one meeting a year should be hosted by one of the industry members in the workplace. Build this visit around tours, if appropriate, of the workplace providing students with a behind-the-scene view of the industry. Also, this affords an opportunity for students to network with professionals away from campus. Consider building in workshops in the weeks leading up to the meeting for students on networking, etiquette, and professional dress. Think about the timing of the meetings so that they do not overburden, faculty, industry professionals and students. It is best to avoid final exam time and holidays. Avoid industry-specific dates that may place a burden on members, such as tax season. Develop a list of expectations for members. Since fundraising is relationship based it is recommended that it is not listed as an expectation in the early years of the council; rather, after the council is established revise the council’s charter to include fundraising. Often it is the council members who decides that they want to take on a fundraising aspect. Scholarships and in-kind donations can help provided needed resources not only to the department but the students. Decide how students will be involved in the council meetings. Should students be selected by invite only? Should it be an open meeting to all students in the department? Should it be limited to just upper/senior students? Next, it is important to consider activities that are interactive in nature. Members are giving up their valuable time away from work or family, be certain to utilize their expertise. Most industry professionals feel a sense of wanting to give back to young professionals just getting started. Never overlook the importance the students play in a successful council. Some of the activities may take place outside of the meeting, such as having members serve as guest speakers in class, clients for projects in the class and evaluators for student portfolios. Plan the first meeting and the agenda. Be sure to send out the calendar remember with all the necessary documents. It is best to give the information about one month in advance of the meeting. Develop a habit of assessing and re-assessing the council to stay focused on stated mission as well as grow with the council.

3 CONCLUSIONS

Industry professionals can serve an important part of linking higher education with business. Students can benefit from being immersed alongside their faculty with industry professionals. Faculty help model appropriate professional behaviors for students such as dress, networking, communication, etc. Also, students are eased into an uncertain territory as well as the role of young professional. Industry councils should be developed with intention and purpose.

REFERENCES


