

# **How a MUN experience meshes with the liberal arts and management education**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper documents the multiplicative benefits from an experiential extracurricular activity – i.e., participation in a Model United Nations (MUN) Club. Management instructors are encouraged to sponsor such activities to give leadership training to students. The benefits are especially rich in liberal-arts institutions, like Park University, because the experience enmeshes with life lessons taught in the curriculum. Secondly, students who study management and business studies gain considerably in what is expected in the global business community. Thirdly, the principles of PRME are upheld and nurtured. The multi-faceted experience of attending the NMUN Conference presents a dynamic opportunity that fulfills multiple educational goals and should be considered by others in business schools to add value to the curriculum.

Keywords: MUN, model United Nations, experiential learning

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is to document how an extracurricular activity in the Model United Nations (MUN) Club can fulfill so many ideals for management and business education. This paper provides a practice-focused application of liberal arts education that is valued by the business community and valued by the Principles of Responsible Management Education (PRME). The plethora of benefits which can result from an experiential extracurricular event is awe-inspiring for educators in general, but to see the amplitude of benefits for business students at a liberal arts institution can be overwhelming and very gratifying. This paper tells how the MUN experience integrates and embraces principles endeared by the liberal arts, conservatism, corporate responsibility and sustainability, the mission of business education, and the principles of PRME.

## **Benefits of Liberal Arts Education**

One of the benefits of teaching at a liberal arts institution is that it is an institution that delivers and supports a holistic education. Park University headquartered in the Midwest in Parkville, Missouri, is an institution of higher education steeped in the liberal arts tradition. Park University's mission statement is to provide academic opportunities which prepare students to think critically, communicate effectively, and engage in lifelong learning while serving a global community. Consistent with that mission is Park's motto "Fides et labor" – faith and work.

Clearly, Park University has an aim to prepare students for exercising their freedoms responsibly. Just as the philosopher John Stuart Mill had defended in 1867, the need in education is to continually balance a liberal education with the sciences and mathematics. Certainly, all areas are needed in order to have a world of thinking citizens living with today's issues. But as stated in a recent Wall Street Journal editorial, liberal education really matters in this day and age (Berkowitz, 2010). Berkowitz asks "how can citizens pass judgment on public policy if they are ignorant on the principles of government and market operation?" Certainly the principles of liberal education are indeed needed as students judge competing opinions and values of justice in today's society.

Students with a liberal arts education develop strength of mind and an ordered intellect (Harris, 1991). They think for themselves; they develop their own opinions, attitudes, values, and beliefs based on their own evaluation of worldly evidence. Students develop an active engagement with knowledge and are not passive recipients of facts. With a liberal education, students are prepared to exercise their freedom responsibly in sustainable organizations, as Principle No. 1 of PRME posits.

Students at Park University teach each other and communicate on a frequent basis; they are a community of teachers, i.e., a learning community. "Teaching and learning" continually goes on as students develop and learn. As a faculty member, it is one's desire as well as duty to make the quality, richness, and truth of teaching as great as possible. As a teacher of accounting and business management at a liberal arts institution, a real sense of the value of the liberal arts is witnessed when students take on the extracurricular challenge by participating in the Model United Nations Club (MUN). Ancillary to this challenge is the diversity brought about with the joining of forces from the distant Austin campus. Students from the Austin location may not feel the customary camaraderie experienced at traditional institutions on flagship (or main) campuses. The integration of students from a distant campus with fellow MUN club members

from the main campus can result in shared leadership initiatives that apply the principles of PRME and are an outstanding method of bringing about diversity.  
Benefits of Management and Business Education

An education in management provides knowledge of business and business principles. A management degree includes management and supervisory training as well as building leadership capacity. Nontraditional students at an extended campus such as Austin aim to finalize a degree while in the workforce. Students often realize upon entry in the job market that they need to know something about business. With the job market in turmoil as experienced in 2010-2011, interest in business has surged, according to Paul Danos, dean of Dartmouth's Tuck School of Business (ACBSP, 2009).

A similar finding emerged from a survey of financial executives. In the survey of financial executives done by the Journal of Accountancy, finance executives were asked to rank the top three skills that were important when hiring staff and managers (Lamoreaux, 2010). The top three skills were:

1. Knowledge of financial accounting
2. Industry experience
3. Communication skills.

It is interesting to note that the pragmatic application of management education – i.e., accounting emerged as knowledge desired in new hires from the survey of financial executives. This illustrates the value of a business education touted by liberal arts institutions as they say “business studies” may be the “new liberal art” of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (ACBSP, 2009). If accounting knowledge is valued in the hiring of new hires, an education in business is indeed valued for its liberal arts connection. Fortunately, knowledge of accounting involves management skills that are valued in the current economy. The article by Lamoreaux ends with a statement that communication skills ranked third in importance when hiring staff. The article suggests that CPAs in business and industry should consider specialized training in the communications area because such skills are not emphasized in typical accounting curricula or CPA courses (Lamoreaux, 2010). Indeed, communication and accounting knowledge are both highly valued by the business community.

### **MUN Program at Park University**

Park University is a liberal arts institution headquartered in the Midwest in Parkville, Missouri with primarily traditional students. Forty campuses located throughout the United States (referred to as distant or extended campuses) primarily serve nontraditional adult students. The University has 25,000 students, half of whom enroll in business programs. Park University has a MUN Club housed at the main campus that customarily attracts many international students. The Club recently extended invitations to the extended campuses to send students to the NMUN Conference in New York. Little if any other opportunity exists for the distant campuses to integrate their studies or activities with the main campus students. This case study documents one successful activity whereby Park University main campus students join with distant students in NMUN Conference preparation activities.

By participating in the MUN program at Park University, students attend the NMUN Conference in New York gaining an immersion in leadership skills, which are sorely needed to meet problems in today's global economy. The experience provides international studies often needed in business schools as they strive to teach social responsibility and sustainability in organizations. The international climate necessitates curricula changes whereby sustainability and social responsibility are better integrated in the curriculum. The MUN program presents opportunities to bring out life experiences suitable for the global world. Students take on problems and issues for the countries they represent at the NMUN Conference. Students learn to negotiate and compromise, to partner and work out solutions with others – valuable leadership experiences. The value of the MUN experience is that many different kinds of talents are developed in the students who attend the NMUN conference. Teamwork, expository writing, persuasive writing, debating, and negotiation are important for personal development and future success (Brennan, 2007). Business school students gain valuable team building and communication skills.

As stated by Harris, educating for the holistic person is what liberal education does best, and the MUN program finds a common purpose on which to educate students on NMUN topics. This provides a well-rounded education in life itself especially as life exists in other nations. Life experiences require knowledge of many fields – called the acquisition of wisdom in educational circles. Wisdom is seeing life as a whole – meaning that every realm of knowledge is consulted and used to make a positive learning experience. The adult students who participate in MUN utilize their collective wisdom – their liberal arts education – in the MUN experience. In the 1980's an important organizing force, the United Nations Association of the USA, recognized the momentum of the Model UN programs and founded its Model UN and Youth Department to coordinate and track the development of the Model UN on a global level (Brennan, 2007). Such program enhancements flow into fulfilling the principles for responsible management education (PRME, 2011).

Students have life-changing experiences by participating in MUN. The experience broadens their view of other nations, cultures, and ways of life. The experiences of students from Park University were consistent with that of other institutions, such as Phoenix College where students experience “something bigger than yourself” (Phoenix College, 2004). Another Park University student conveyed that she wanted more from Park University than just going to classes. She wanted to interact with people and learn how to speak and negotiate, which the MUN experience provided. That same student developed in remarkable ways – connecting with other students representing the Southern hemisphere at a recent NMUN Conference and spoke extemporaneously for the first time in her life. Another student gained broader perspectives and was inspired to make the world a better place. Such testimonials from Park University students showed the benefits of the MUN program are definitely in accordance with the PRME principles as well as the tenets of liberal education.

### **How PRME Principles Aid Responsible Management Education**

The purpose of the PRME principles is to inspire and champion responsible management education. The PRME are inspired by internationally accepted values of the United Nations Global Compact that seek continuous improvement from management educators as new generations of business leaders are developed. The PRME, developed in 2007 by an

international task force of sixty academic institutions, is based on a principle-based global engagement platform. The Six Principles of PRME integrate corporate responsibility and sustainability in a systematic manner and have the capacity for universal values in business on every continent (PRME, 2011), as Indicated in the exhibit (Appendix).

Management educators should incorporate such education into the business curriculum in 2011. To do so will bring about a more sustainable organization that the international community expects. Experiential learning opportunities with the MUN can bring about service learning and leadership training for the global business community. In 2011 in schools where business programs exist, an international focus as established in PRME is paramount.

The MUN experience for Austin students is a very positive experience to accompany leadership development for management education. First and foremost, the joining of two very different student populations – traditional students at the main campus of Park University with nontraditional, working adult students from the Austin campus is a major feat at unification of two diverse groups. This joint effort produces tremendous diversity and is a major plus to the experience. This also produces a team of nontraditional students from Austin with traditional Park University students on MUN projects and enables the teaching of teamwork. This one aspect of MUN is valuable to business students (Brennan, 2007).

As stated by other student groups, leadership skills are a take-away from the experience (Ryan, 2010). To lead others, one needs to convince and to motivate others. In their representation of nations around the world, students practice communication skills by using persuasive strategies for global initiatives. The motivational and persuasive skills while speaking and caucusing at the NMUN competition are long lasting. Communication skills are definitely a positive gain from participating in the NMUN as well as desired by the business community (Lamoreaux, 2010).

The leadership gains are further expansive because of Park University's diversity in the extended campus setting. The Austin students get to connect with Parkville students, which enables encounters of campus cultures, especially with Park University's large population of international students. This experience brings together diverse minds on responsible leadership initiatives as they attempt to bring about global social responsibility on behalf of their country. The liberal arts curriculum at Park University cultivates minds from around the world by providing the MUN experience. Students get to formulate matters of public policy portrayed by the principles of PRME. Truly, the experience is an in-depth experience for responsible leadership education. Students are often willing to work extra, attending club meetings on weekends or Friday nights in order to gain knowledge about the MUN program. Students like pragmatic experiences where they gain in leadership as they further their education in management areas.

Qualitatively, the MUN experience is one of the most pragmatic applications of leadership and management studies. It is an experiential application of an extracurricular activity that benefits education and experience that definitely enhances the principles of PRME. Students experience leading others and teaching others in values in the liberal tradition. The opportunity to teach others gives students valuable life lessons. The communication skills that are gained in the process are invaluable. The MUN Club experience develops specific management skills such as compromise, strategy-setting, negotiation, and consensus building from the perspective of another nation - all highly valued by management students. The gains from communicating simulate real-life global problems and are very much in demand in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in all business areas. It is interesting to note that participating students come from many

areas of business, including majors from management, human resources, social psychology, and education.

## **Conclusion**

This paper documents the multiplicative benefits from an experiential extracurricular activity – i.e., participation in a Model United Nations (MUN) Club. Further, the paper shows how students are the direct beneficiary of the leadership training gained from the experience. The benefits are especially rich in liberal-arts institutions, like Park University because the experience enmeshes with life lessons taught in the curriculum. Secondly, students who study management and business studies gain considerably in what is expected in the global business community. Thirdly, the principles of PRME are upheld and nurtured. The multi-faceted experience of attending the NMUN fulfills multiple educational endeavors and should be considered by others in business schools to add value to the curriculum.

By participating in the Model United Nations Club, many educators might suspect only political science would benefit. This case study tells how students at Park University gain valuable leadership skills through the club experience. Such skills enhance classroom work at liberal arts institutions such as Park University. Students gain incredible life leadership lessons from participation in an extracurricular club such as the one described in this paper. The experience adds to the strength of students' resumes, which is a resume-enhancement strategy done by many students. The lessons learned are in accordance with the Six Principles of Responsible Management Education and United Nations initiatives (unprme.org). Definitely, there is an inter-mingling of benefits from an MUN experience.

Students get practice in formulating policy as future generators of sustainable value for their nations. Students incorporate values of global social responsibility as portrayed by the United Nations Global Compact. Students get hands-on experience in responsible leadership with their fellow club members, faculty, and associates from other clubs around the world. Students engage in conceptual and empirical research of issues that are part of United Nations' initiatives. Students practice communication skills – writing position papers and articulating issues related to committee or other work. Students interact with others extensively, which in itself, is a great lesson especially at an institution as diverse as Park University. Student interactions were consistent with outcomes experienced by other institutions (Phoenix College, 2004). Students take on challenges from stakeholders and get to practice problem resolution from different perspectives, which is a further enrichment of the communication process.

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## Appendix Exhibit

### The Principles for Responsible Management Education

Source: [www.unprme.org](http://www.unprme.org)

#### **Principle 1**

**Purpose:** We will develop the capabilities of students to be future generators of sustainable value for business and society at large and to work for an inclusive and sustainable global economy.

#### **Principle 2**

**Values:** We will incorporate into our academic activities and curricula the values of global social responsibility as portrayed in international initiatives such as the United Nations Global Compact.

#### **Principle 3**

**Method:** We will create educational frameworks, materials, processes and environments that enable effective learning experiences for responsible leadership.

#### **Principle 4**

**Research:** We will engage in conceptual and empirical research that advances our understanding about the rule, dynamics, and impact of corporations in the creation of sustainable social, environmental and economic value.

#### **Principle 5**

**Partnership:** We will interact with managers of business corporations to extend our knowledge of their challenges in meeting social and environmental responsibilities and to explore jointly effective approaches to meeting these challenges.

#### **Principle 6**

**Dialogue:** We will facilitate and support dialog and debate among educators, business, government, consumers, media, civil society organizations and other interested groups and stakeholders on critical issues related to global social responsibility and sustainability.

We understand that our own organizational practices should serve as example of the values and attitudes we convey to our students.