The Use of Guest Speakers, Company Visits and Professional Bodies' Events in the Curriculum

Nathalie Geraldine Ormrod
Senior Lecturer in Marketing
Department of Business and Management Studies
Manchester Metropolitan University Cheshire
Crewe Green Road
Crewe, Cheshire, CW1 5DU
Tel. 0161 247 5131
N.G.Ormrod@mmu.ac.uk

Nathalie Ormrod

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Abstract

Most universities are now actively engaged in developing and maintaining successful relationships with their local business community. Bringing the "real world" into the classroom is as useful for educators to enrich their own subject expertise as it is to motivate their students since it provides them with industrial knowledge, professional awareness, career prospects etc. The study concentrates on the use of guest speakers, company visits and professional bodies' events in the curriculum and shows how these teaching activities do foster and promote active learning. Results confirm that most students wish to be given regular opportunities to exchange with practitioners in all aspects of their courses.

Introduction

As the Government expects higher education to develop and largely contribute to lifelong learning strategies, specific recommendations include "increasing its responsiveness to the needs of business and collaborating more closely and effectively with other institutions and with the world of work" (Gordon, 1999:142). New universities are generally perceived as pluralistic and multifaceted institutions with less of a monolithic culture, thus many of their existing programmes do encompass a flexible approach to learning methods and emphasise access and synergies with the world of work (Gordon, 1999).

There is a need for business and non business firms to cooperate in the education process as higher education will, in many cases, provide their future workforce whose quality will in turn directly impact the future success of their activities; providing guest speakers in the classroom, internships with students, funds for facilities development etc. may successfully serve this purpose (Malhotra and Miller, 1999). In universities, academics provide students with the knowledge and skills base needed to understand and work for large companies as well as SMES since the latter will recruit the largest numbers. Therefore, understanding the business environment and gaining hands-on experiences add value to existing business programmes by enhancing students' employability, knowledge, experience and giving a definite educational competitive advantage (Cooper et al., 2004). And in an increasingly changing and demanding educational environment, numerous teaching tools have become available for instructors such as case analyses, term projects, discussions, videos, computer-assisted multimedia presentations etc. (Smart et al., 1999 in Payne et al., 2003). Yet monetary and time constraints usually delay the implementation of innovative educational techniques (Metrejean et al., 2002).

Although "real world" learning and teaching methods may not be considered as appropriate educational tools and viewed as entertainment instead of education, they remain very valuable tools to convey important knowledge to students when managed adequately (Payne et al., 2003). Specific subjects, such as Marketing, derive entirely from real-world observations across contexts, however, many students perceive theory as an antithesis of reality, not the synthesis of reality for various reasons: they may not appreciate how theories are rooted in reality, or may

find theories more difficult to understand, or less exciting than interactions with practitioners (Bacon and Novotny, 2002).

Looking for innovative ways to implement these teaching methods may therefore require involving colleagues in informal discussions, workshops, residential courses etc. (Heylings and Tariq, 2001; Conway et al., 1994). Colleagues need to be surveyed to assess individual course requirements as well as specific subject/unit requests for outside contributions. Funding may become available to set up and manage faculties' on-line directories of potential contacts in their immediate business community.

An Educational Approach: Active Learning

Various forms of active learning enable students to become self-managed learners. Specific information and procedures become rapidly outdated in a fast and dynamic information environment; critical thinking and problem-solving skills are therefore crucial to help students manage successfully future changes in their professional roles (Sivan et al., 2000).

Today's business environment demand creative and critical thinking skills; yet, many higher education institutions lack the resources and support to develop and offer effective 'active learning' tools. Active learning emphasises analytical and critical thinking skills, helps review attitudes and values held about course material, encourages students to do rather than remain passive (critical thinking, analysis and evaluation versus knowledge gathering) and promotes instant feedback (Snyder, 2003; Sivan et al., 2000). Active learning does foster enthusiasm and interest as well as promoting effective ways of learning, applying knowledge, developing independent learning skills and preparing students effectively for their future careers. Students are therefore more likely to choose a deep studying approach (intrinsic motivation or curiosity in the subject matter) by concentrating on underlying meanings rather than literal aspects and retaining course contents and materials more successfully, hence becoming higher achievers (Payne et al., 2003; Sivan et al., 2000). Active learning teaching resources may, for instance, include readings, outside speakers, teaching technology etc. In a business educational context, students tend to rate much lower any activities failing to relate directly with industry (Sivan et al., 2000).

Understanding students' learning styles is therefore crucial. McCarthy (1996, in Payne et al., 2003) describes four main learning styles: Type 1 - innovative learners (they need a reason for learning and connect it with their personal experience); Type 2 - analytic learners (interested in acquiring facts to deepen their understanding of concepts and processes and enjoying independent research, analysis of data, and listening to the "experts"); Type 3 - common sense learners (primarily interested in how things work with experiential learning activities); and Type 4 - dynamic learners (intuitive, they look for independent scholarship, exploring, doing and feeling). Students may combine various attributes, hence multiple teaching methods remain useful when teaching large numbers of students (McCarthy, 1996). The integration of company visits and guest speakers would therefore appeal to the innovative (Type 1), analytic (Type 2), common sense

(Type 3) and dynamic learners (Type 4) and reinforce classroom lectures and textbook materials with active involvement teaching methods, thus enhancing the learning processes of students. Likewise, the application of classroom instruction to the "real world" may provide the lecturer with the opportunity to reach all students and respond better to the increasing growth of ethnic, gender and cultural diversity in the classroom (Payne et al., 2003)

Roth (2001) argues that when students have significant business experience, they seem to have some intuitive understanding of business operations, key roles and interactions. Traditional business students could therefore develop their knowledge of organisations and develop their career prospects further through effective exposure to the complex world of business, since nearly all will eventually become employees. As managers and their staff often fail to comprehend, compare and contrast the perspectives of different organisational stakeholders, developing and sharing a common language of organisational environments may lead to successful and effective staff management cooperation. A variety of stakeholders with differing perspectives and interests ultimately provide students with considerable "real world" experience (Roth, 2001). Clarke III and Flaherty (2002) also researched the impact of nine teaching tools (academic readings, computer simulations, field research, guest speakers, homework problems, Internet communications, lecture, practitioner readings, and videos) on students' perceptions of learning in various countries. The People's Republic of China (PRC) rated academic readings "high" since academics are culturally held in the highest regard (class time should be dedicated to the most educated persons with the highest title) and guest speakers "low" since exposure to practitioners' ideas is less credited than academic thought (marketing practitioners in the PRC are often without formal education hence may be disliked in the classroom setting and also tend to use examples of Western companies to which Chinese students have difficulty relating). U.S. students on the contrary prefer exposure to practitioner viewpoints and British students highly value additional material relevant to their course since they put theoretical concepts and frameworks in a practical dimension.

Active learning does, however, involve some elements of risk: students may not participate, nor use appropriate thinking skills, nor learn sufficient content. Some academics may therefore "feel a loss of control, lack the necessary skills, or be criticised for teaching in unorthodox ways and not covering the same amount of material as before"(Snyder, 2003: 160). Educators may indeed resent not knowing what to expect and students may not be willing or feel ill-prepared to shoulder responsibilities. Hence, clearly defined connections between stated learning objectives, education strategies and evaluation processes, may successfully reduce risk perceptions. However, active learning requires a greater and more involved degree of planning compared with passive learning methods and usually entails regular fine-tuning to continue building students' self-esteem (hence academic performance) and motivation (commitment in their educational process) (Snyder, 2003).

Guest Speakers, Company Visits and Professional Bodies Events: Benefits to the Students' Learning Experience

By working together, industrialists and academics can pool their expertise and experience and influence the learning of undergraduates to produce a workforce with adequate academic knowledge and flexibility (Kemp and Foster, 1995). Benefits from interacting with "real-world" practitioners are multiple. They provide insights into how employers might contribute to students' research projects and likewise, how projects inform employers about the quality and skills of graduate students (Heylings and Tariq, 2001; Gustafson, 1998).

Guest Speakers

When company visits cannot be used, guest speakers are an effective means to bring the world into the classroom (Payne et al., 2003). Most business schools strive to entertain close links with their local professional community; programmes tend to increasingly encourage a greater interaction among executives, faculty and students to sustain their educational relevancy, thus business people do often serve as guest speakers in classes (Lantos, 1994). Many students also demand a better balance between theory and practice and in most business courses, the use of guest speakers and of real life case studies remain the most popular suggestions (Clarke and Gibson-Sweet, 1998).

The "guest speaker activity" addresses the following educational objectives: knowledge, application, valuing and characterising (Hite et al., 1985 in Karns, 1993). Students tend to perceive a guest speaker's presentation to be relatively stimulating with less effort than other teaching methods, and an experience that brings them in contact with the "real world", hence is more concrete and effective (Karns, 1993). Guest speakers enable students to apply and critically analyse theoretical concepts learnt in the class as well as relating them better to their coursework (Payne et al., 2003) and enable educators to remain in contact with the professionals in the community; they also promote good public relations (Wortmann, 1992). They also open students' minds to varying viewpoints (Gainer and Payne, 2001 in Payne et al., 2003). Students love to hear real business professionals tell real work anecdotes, especially when companies usually discard valuable information that universities cannot afford or that textbooks will not provide (Gustafson,1998). Guest speakers are also career-information providers, hence are a valuable resource to provide students with meaningful career information not always available in textbooks, as well as advice on interviewing, examination taking and career opportunities. These events may help prepare students for job interviews, reassure them that they are studying the right subject and provide them with opportunities for informal networking with professionals (Metrejean et al., 2002).

Both Faculty and University also benefit from guest speakers' events. The latter facilitate exchanges of information about the business world, provide lecturers with the latest workplace issues and innovations, and keep the practising professional familiar with the educational environment. These events enhance the support

normally provided by the University Students Services for career guidance. Networking opportunities may render possible internships and work-study programmes, hence does improve the local presence of the university by putting faculty members in direct contact with local professionals and making them attentive to the professional needs of their immediate community. Likewise, speakers and their business may be more willing to contribute resources if they become aware of a need (Wortman, 1992).

Selecting Guest Speakers

Asking colleagues whom they have used in the past, as well as asking graduate students in employment for the names of possible guest speakers, searching the Internet or telephoning should help with finding guest speakers willing and able to provide a meaningful experience to the class (Pestel, 1989; Mooney, 1998 in Payne et al., 2003).

Payne et al. (2003) argue that guest speakers may be (1) Students currently in employment and who may welcome the opportunity to see their education rewarded, (2) Professionals, (3) Faculty Members discussing ways the topic is currently researched, (4) Graduate Students sharing their learning, life or cultural experiences and possibly encouraging undergraduate students to consider post-graduate studies, and (5) Authors whose research/book(s) are used (mediated classrooms with telephone conversations can give students the possibility to hear the author and ask him questions).

A database of potential local guest speakers (professionals, firms etc.) is a valuable tool and should include specific information such as the name and title of the speaker and expertise (years and types of experience, certifications, education), the name of the firm (address, phone, e-mail, fax, office support staff, the name of the supervisor of speaker (to send a note of gratitude), any specific student feedback about the speaker and information concerning day and time availability, expertise, past success, and so on. A comprehensive and regularly maintained speaker file enables lecturers to identify the most appropriate and diverse speakers for speaker events (Metrejean et al., 2002).

Organising and Managing a Guest Speaker's Presentation

To be successful, a guest speaker's contribution needs to be well organised and professionally executed. Planning guest speakers' events during class time remains necessary as many students may be unable to attend extra-curricular activities due to family responsibilities or work commitments (Metrejean et al., 2002) and when there are multiple teaching sessions of the same unit, video recordings of the presentation may be made for the next classes (Wortmann, 1992).

As many guest speakers come from service-oriented professions, it is also necessary to devise a teaching calendar and organise speakers well in advance. Advance planning reinforces the importance of the speaking engagement to

speakers. Guest speakers should therefore be provided with a list of topics already covered in class and possible other subjects that may be suitable for their presentation. The latter make events more convenient and comfortable to arrange (Wortmann, 1992).

Students' interest is crucial to the success of the event, hence prior preparation and discussion with the class will encourage participation (Payne et al., 2003). Students must know what is expected of them prior to the event (Agha-Jaffar, 2000). Lecturers should let the class know clearly their expectations (behaviour, use of the event in the course, part of the assessment or not, feedback etc.). In order to encourage challenging students to develop their critical thinking skills, students should be in a position to critically analyse the event and address the following issues: ways the presentation reinforces ideas students already believe to be true; comments which challenge students' belief systems; the extent the course content relates to ideas discussed by the guest speaker; and dynamics in the speaker's life which may have influenced his or her perspectives about the issues discussed (Payne et al., 2003). Students may wear name tags or place name cards over their desks to be referred to by their names; some academics organise the presentation into a question/answer format rather than a lecture format so that issues discussed may subsequently be integrated into both class discussions and class lectures. A speaker confirming ideas previously presented by the lecturer makes the course content more reliable (Payne et al., 2003). Other presentations' formats include student-submitted questions for the speaker with an informal period of refreshments after the presentation to provide time for interaction among the speaker, the students and the instructor (Davis,1993, in Metrejean et al., 2002). However, interviewing the guest speaker effectively can be difficult and Roth (2001) recommends a structured approach such as a list of potential questions to be submitted to the students prior to the event so that they may suggest additional questions. Results are then reviewed with prospective speakers and the final edited list of questions is distributed to both students and speakers so that both parties are well prepared and may meet expectations. As a significant amount of time is allocated to answering questions, students and speakers can also pursue tangential issues. In this context, speakers appear to need little or no preparation and seem to speak more spontaneously and extemporaneously, while students are very willing to ask questions, thus making the event more engaging for both sides (Roth, 2001). Based on students' suggestions, Metrejean et al. (2002) have devised an approach to include several guests per event in order to provide a range of backgrounds and opinions. Small groups of students can therefore exchange with industrial speakers at a time following a set rotation to ensure equal time with each speaker. This variety helps to bring together different branches of one profession so that students may explore similarities, differences and interactions. Students can also be involved in the planning of the event with volunteers planning the refreshments available during or after the event. Students receive cash in advance and must later provide receipts for expenses which gives them the chance to show responsibility and to increase their level of interest and participation (Metrejean et al., 2002). In any case, students should always be required to takes notes on specifically designed hand-outs during guest speaker's presentation to give the event full teaching value and credibility (Wortmann, 1992).

Lecturers should also ask guest speakers for a one-paragraph biography to suitably introduce them to the class as well as liaising in advance with the guest speaker to clarify issues to be presented and discussed (Pestel, 1989). Guest speaker events should include the following stages: (1) preparing the guest speaker, (2) preparing the class, (3) the presentation itself, (4) showing appreciation to the guest speaker and tying the guest speaker's ideas into course material (Metrejean et al., 2002). General rules include asking guest speakers to (1) introduce themselves, (2) talk about their job, (3) highlight the relevance and usefulness of their education (4) avoid too many facts and figures, (5) avoid criticising other professions, (6) bring visual aids, and (7) stimulate student participation (Pestel, 1989; Mooney, 1998 in Payne et al., 2003). Pestel (1989) recommends that when invited as guest speakers, professionals should be encouraged to address various aspects of their work to include which activities are performed, perceived advantages and disadvantages, the academic and professional preparation needed, predictions for employment in that profession and interesting anecdotes. Finally, during the presentations, guest speakers should be encouraged to share their thoughts and opinions as well as developing controversies since students will benefit from varying view points in order to reach their own judgements. Guest speakers may also be able to clarify issues with which the lecturer may not be entirely familiar (Wortmann, 1992).

Company Visits (or Plant Tours, Field Trips and Ride-Alongs)

While field trips are relatively common in elementary schools and high schools, higher education does not appear to provide students with the same frequency of opportunities although research indicates that it can increase students' interest in a subject, comprehension of subject matter, observation skills, powers of recall, abilities to think critically, and understanding of their community (Payne et al., 2003). Company visits are also very important in the job-search process and, when graduates apply for work, visits may be the last stage before a conditional work offer is made to the suitable candidates (Greenberg, 1997; Kerr, 1991). Yet, no extensive research has been carried out on the benefits of company visits as part of many companies' recruiting processes, nor have company visits' place in an university context been fully analysed in terms of learning outcomes.

Short periods of structured access to the workplace constitute an innovative approach to the integration of academic and work-based learning. Students see theoretical approaches demonstrated in practice and can appreciate the relevance of their academic course material to the real world. This may lead to the successful development of communication, group working and interpersonal skills (Kemp and Foster, 1995). Yet, course requirements and lecturers' expectations must be clearly defined and students' feedback thoroughly collected and analysed for further improvements (Stout, 1999 in Payne et al., 2003).

Plant tours are "lower risk" active learning strategies, especially when they require little or no travel time. Students show their commitment by getting to the plant and being punctual and examples, that students can relate to better, can be used in subsequent lectures (Snyder, 2003). The degree of interaction in company guided visits is "medium", the proximity to the professional as a learning source remains,

the opportunity for questioning is "high" and the involvement and depth of learning is "moderate active" on the ladder of learning (Cooper et al., 2004). In some courses, learning outcomes are agreed in advance with the companies. Students consult literature provided by the companies being visited, and re-examine relevant theory. Visits normally last half a working day with a brief introduction, a plant tour and a plenary session with key personnel. When debriefing, groups of students compare their various experiences, assess their relevance to taught theory and prepare for assessment (written report and/or oral presentation) (Kemp and Foster, 1995). Visiting different companies allows students to see more than one example of "reality", gives them an overview of industry and illustrates various aspects of their course. This also helps students decide on their preferences for future employment (Kemp and Foster, 1995).

Employers' motivations to participate vary as some may welcome new data on their industry and others may want to give something back to students with a learning and skills building experience (Cooper et al., 2004). Although students do not get hands-on experience due to the short length of the visits, timetable constraints and the amount of time that companies can offer usually mean that half days are convenient time durations for both parties. Short, structured experiences such as these are less resource-intensive to employers and more viable in the current economic climate. Employers' feedback indicates that they appreciate structured visits with clearly stated outcomes and welcome interactions with students who ask relevant and well-informed questions. Companies also admit to knowing their own organisations better following the event as well as being a valuable staff development exercise, especially for recently appointed graduates (Kemp and Foster, 1995).

Professional Bodies Events

Although professional bodies have grown in size and influence over the past decades as well as playing an important role in business education for instance, very little research concerning the use of professional bodies' events in the curriculum is currently available. Yet their function in education and training in the UK encompass the following remits: (1) set education and training objectives; (2) formulate rules and regulations; (3) specify entry requirements into professional studies; (4) establish examination structures; (5) grant exemptions from professional examinations; (6) determine course content and syllabuses; (7) prescribe in some cases the mode of study; (8) consult with, liaise with and approve institutions of higher education that provide courses leading to professional qualifications; (9) set own examinations or delegate the setting of examinations; (10) mark examination papers or moderate examinations papers; (11) specify work experience required; and (12) award qualifications (Trotman-Dickenson, 1989: 48). The professional bodies continue to depend on the ability of institutions of higher education to co-operate with them through the introduction of new subjects, materials and modes of instruction into professional courses (Trotman-Dickenson, 1989: 48), as well as possibly welcoming non member students to attend evening events free of charge in order to raise their awareness of a possible future professional environment, stimulate interest in their activities, contribute to the development and training of a better informed workforce, promote

networking between practitioners and future graduates and nurture valuable relationships with educators to promote their courses and qualifications.

Students' Feedback

Metrejean et al. (2002) recommend that students' comments be used to modify the event processes as seen earlier (several speakers, longer events etc.), and categorise student comments as: (1) event-specific (speaker's presentation ability, ability to answer questions, amount of knowledge demonstrated, whether the students found the presentation interesting etc.); (2) motivational (effects of the speaker on students' behaviour and attitudes); and (3) career-oriented. Devising learning tools by which students may assess the extent to which they have benefited from the event(s) (communication, intellectual and interpersonal skills, general and business knowledge etc.) may void negative opinions such as having wasted valuable lecture time or not fully understanding these events' relevance (Metrejean et al., 2002)

Methodology

A survey was carried out in March 2004 with the objective to canvas the views of undergraduate students attending Leisure Marketing, a final year unit, on whether the use of Guest Speakers, Company Visits and Professional Bodies' Events (GSCVPB) had enhanced their learning experience of the subject. Amongst the students who took part in the research, 65% were British and 35% International students, 51% females and 49% males. Students came from various academic backgrounds: 42% Business and Management Studies (optional unit); 33% Environmental and Leisure Studies (core unit); and 24% Joint Honours Marketing Route (core unit).

Questionnaires were circulated in the class at the end of the students' academic year and comprised a mix of open-ended and structured questions. Results were processed with Excel and turned into percentages and charts for analysis. Not all respondents answered every question; percentages are therefore based on actual responses. The research serves as the basis for future investigations, namely whether perceptions and answers may differ due to nationality, the core/optional nature of the unit, the need for GSCVPB to enhance the course content and delivery etc.

Limitations include the small size of the sample as 37 respondents out of a total of 79 students attending the unit for 2003/2004 returned the questionnaire. During the two semesters, students visited two companies: Bannatyne's Health Club (located opposite the University) and The Trafford Centre (well known to most British students; during their initial orientation course at the University international students are also taken to The Trafford Centre for their shopping needs at the beginning of the academic year). Students listened to one guest speaker (Shearings) and were given the opportunity to attend a talk staged by the CIM (Chartered Institute of Marketing – Manchester United's global communications strategy) out of class hours. The students' exposure to the GSCVPB events was therefore limited due to limited class contact time and budget constraints when transport was necessary. The fact that most students were familiar with the two companies visited and less so with the guest

speaker's firm may have also influenced results. Finally, the researcher's initial lack of prior academic knowledge in the planning and organising of these events may have reduced the number, range and depth of questions that such a study could have addressed.
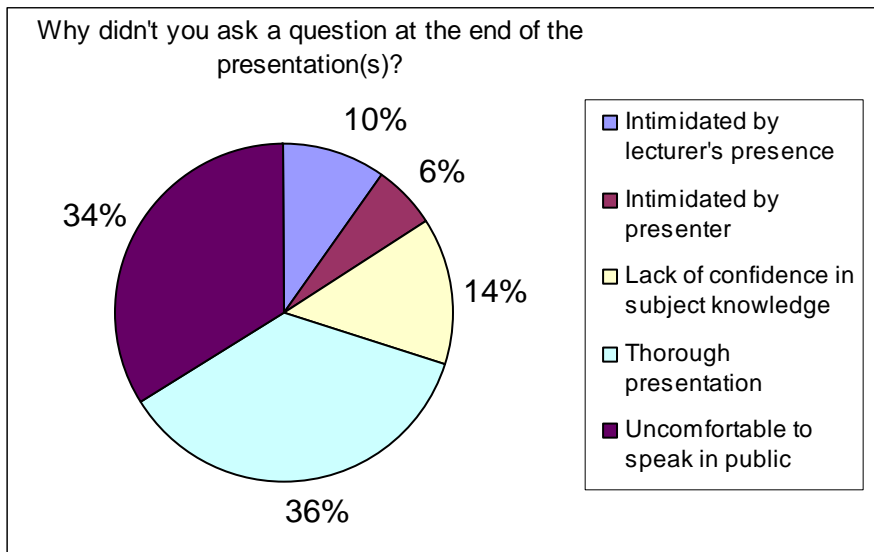
Findings

Company Visits

The majority of students found that, within the context of their course, the company visits had been very appropriate, informative, interesting, necessary, relevant and useful (see Company visits: Table 1, p.11).

Company Visits: Table 1
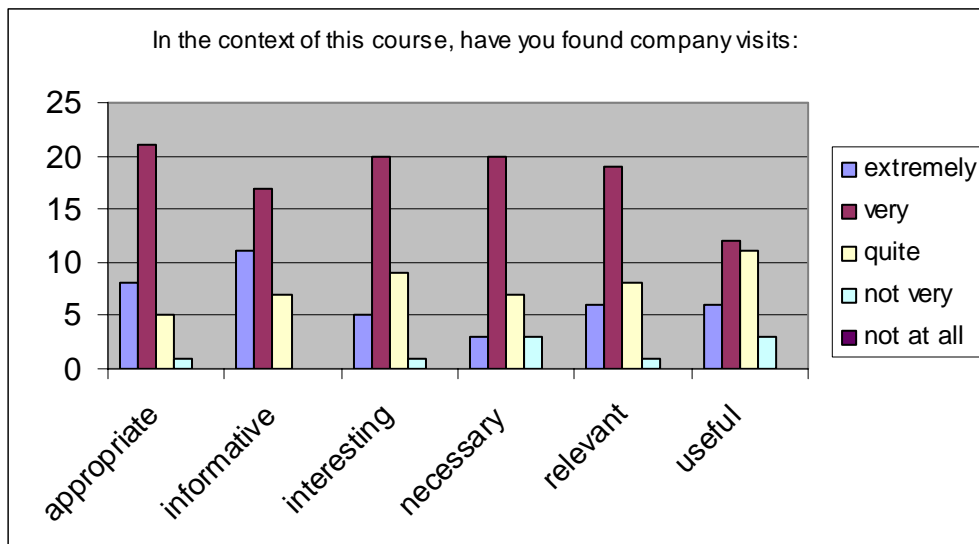
Yet, most students (89%) did not ask questions arguing that the presentations were either thorough or that they felt uncomfortable to speak in public. Some answered that they lacked confidence in their knowledge of the subject, others that they were either intimidated by the lecturer's presence or by the presenters (see Company visits: Table 2, p.12). Handing in written questions was recommended as a possible solution and may well benefit students lacking in confidence or international students self-conscious of their linguistic abilities.

Company Visits: Table 2

Why didn't you ask a question at the end of the presentation(s)?

10%
6%
34%
14%
36%

- Intimidated by lecturer's presence
- Intimidated by presenter
- Lack of confidence in subject knowledge
- Thorough presentation
- Uncomfortable to speak in public

A majority of students (49% versus 19%) also indicated that they wanted to receive prior information about the company; company factsheets were the preferred option, followed by examples of questions to ask and lastly academic references.

Most students were able to relate theory learnt in the class to professional examples discussed during the visits (see Company visits: Table 3, p.12). *"It was good to know that the things that we were learning were actually recognised and used by professionals in marketing".* 61% could arguably make use of the information presented in their Marketing Leisure assessment and 73% could re-use some of the information in other units of their course which are very encouraging results supporting active learning and transfer of skills issues as discussed earlier.

Company Visits: Table 3

Were you able to relate theory learnt in the class to professional examples discussed during the visits?

0%
5%
27%
22%
46%

- extremely
- very much
- a little
- not really
- not at all
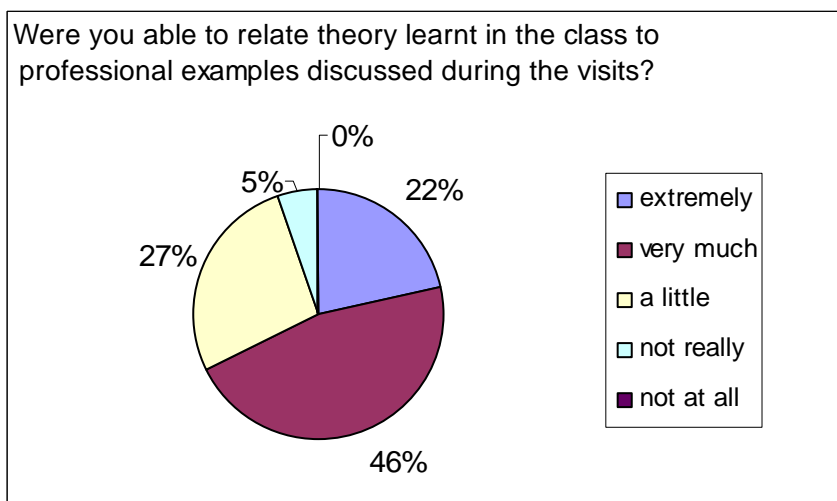
A staggering 92% felt that they should be given more opportunities to exchange with professionals and 97% said that these had been their first opportunities to visit companies in the course of their studies, which confirms Payne's views. Yet, the impact of such activities on their knowledge of the local business environment is potentially huge (see Company visits: Table 4, p.13) and could have far-reaching cultural or career implications due to a more enhanced visual and physical learning context. *"It is like learning on the job in many respects"*. 92% believe that all units on their course should include company visits related to specific subjects: *"Real-life situations make the course more realistic and relevant as we are able to see how theory relates to the practical. It helps to focus on types of jobs available and is useful in third year study. We are able to ask specific questions that could relate to a job. We are able to build up contacts for work purposes e.g. we could use the visit in an introductory letter for a job vacancy."*

Company Visits: Table 4

Contributing towards the cost of transport to visit companies was generally accepted with 89% of the respondents agreeing to the principle but to an absolute minimum of £1 to £2 for the majority. This would indicate a certain readiness to contribute to the visit (a token gesture to guarantee one's place on the coach – *"depends on visit, time, location"*), but highlights the fact that students expect such events to be an integral part of their course, mostly subsidised by their initial enrolment fees (see Company Visits: Table 5, p.13).

Company Visits: Table 5
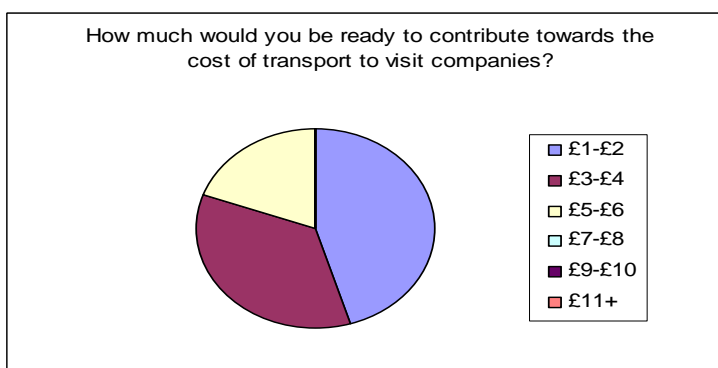
Guest Speakers' Presentations

Again, the majority of students viewed this experience as a very positive one: *"As with company visits, they allow us to get an insight into different companies and their marketing issues. I do feel like I am gaining knowledge of the marketing world, through direct speaking from members of an organisation".* Yet, there was more reticence in comparison to their appreciation of the company visits (see Guest Speakers: Table 6, p.14; refer back to Company Visits: Table 1, p.11) but, as mentioned in the methodology, when questioned, fewer students had heard of the company before, hence may have found it more difficult to find the talk relevant and useful to their course. The Coach industry is also often considered as less attractive compared to other sectors (airlines, holiday resorts etc.) and this may also have had a negative effect on the interest of some of the students.
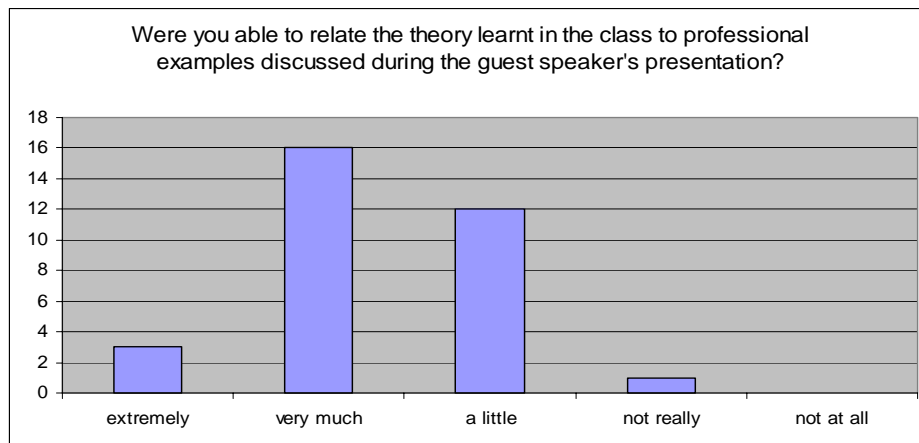
Guest Speakers: Table 6

In the context of this course, have you found the guest speaker's presentation:
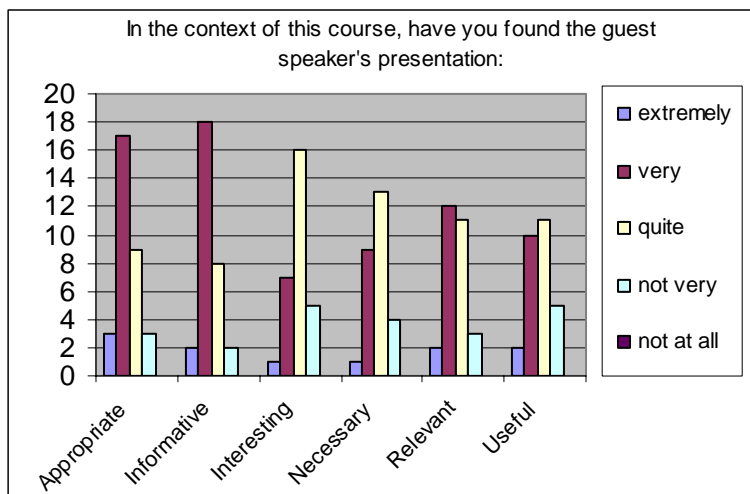
Again, the majority of students (94%) did not ask questions at the end of the presentation for the reasons outlined above, namely that the presentation was thorough (50%), some felt uncomfortable to speak in public (31%), they lacked confidence in the subject knowledge (16%) and were also intimidated by the presenter (3%). However, none seem to have been intimidated by the lecturer's presence in this instance and this might indicate that students feel more confident and less self-conscious in their normal class environment. In response to their initial lack of knowledge of the company, students' answers were evenly split as to whether they wished to receive prior information on the company; their preference was again for company factsheets (65%) followed by examples of questions to ask (18%) and academic references (18%).

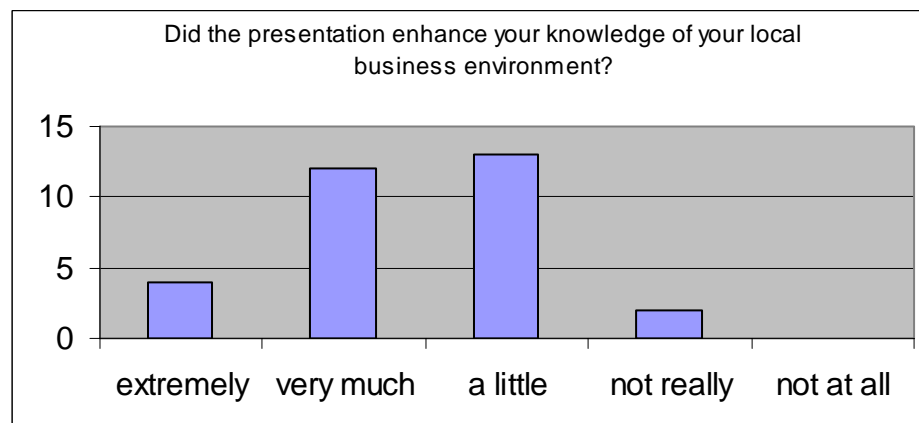The majority of students were also able to relate theory learnt in the class to professional examples discussed during the presentation (see Guest Speakers: Table 7, p.15). *"It really helps to hear information and to be able to relate to issues learnt in lectures. It brings the subject to life".* 82% of respondents believe that all units should include guest speakers' presentations related to individual subjects.

Guest Speakers: Table 7

Were you able to relate the theory learnt in the class to professional examples discussed during the guest speaker's presentation?

extremely	very much	a little	not really	not at all
3	16	12	1	0

However, fewer felt that the presentation had enhanced their knowledge of the local business environment compared to company visits (see Guest Speakers: Table 8, p.15).
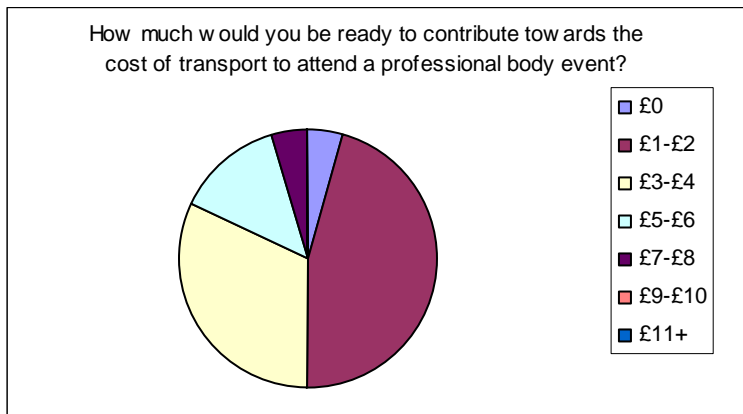
Guest Speakers: Table 8

Did the presentation enhance your knowledge of your local business environment?

extremely	very much	a little	not really	not at all
4	12	13	2	0

Professional Body's Event

Only 21% of the students interviewed attended the professional body's event which was scheduled at night, in a nearby town, out of class contact time. Reasons given for non attendance were difficulties to organise own transport arrangements, family commitments, university work, no interest, reticence to attend alone, prior social engagement, part-time work, money constraints or illness. Transport arrangements were the main deterrent and 64% of the students stated that they would have attended the event if their university department had organised transport for a fee, although the latter is again seen as a token contribution for the majority (see Professional Bodies' Events: Table 9, p.16).

Professional Bodies' Events: Table 9

How much would you be ready to contribute towards the cost of transport to attend a professional body event?

- £0
- £1-£2
- £3-£4
- £5-£6
- £7-£8
- £9-£10
- £11+

The students who attended the event found it extremely appropriate, informative, interesting, necessary, relevant and useful (see Professional Bodies' Events: Table 10, p.16).

Professional Bodies' Events: Table 10

Did you find the professional body's event:

- extremely
- very
- quite

All students were able to relate theory learnt in the class to professional examples discussed during the event (71% -extremely; 29% -very much), all wanted to enquire about possible job opportunities following the event, and all felt that the event was a good introduction to professional events that they may have to attend in their future career: *"If you choose to go into marketing, you will probably be expected to attend these events: good for networking!"*. Students felt welcome (40%), excited (27%) and "part of the profession" (33%); none felt intimidated nor ill at ease.

All students, whether they had attended the event or not, were asked about their perceptions of such events. They considered that professional bodies' events are:

interesting (33%); necessary (30%); entertaining (22%); optional (10%); boring (3%); or an imposition (2%). Students would also consider these events as aids to start networking (27%), circulate their curriculum vitae (22%), obtain employment (22%), introduce themselves to professionals (20%), and give out a card with personal details and course currently attended (8%). 77% students stated that this had been their first opportunity to attend a professional event and 88% believed that all units should give them the opportunity to attend similar events.

Company Visits, Guest Speakers and Professional Bodies' Events: Cross Comparisons

When both guest speakers and company visits were compared, 55% of students indicated that they found both experiences valuable, 39% preferred company visits to guest speakers (*"If you visit a company you generally tend to pay more attention"; "I gain more from seeing methods in practice"; "I find company visits more enjoyable as they are out of the lecture theatre"*) and 6% preferred guest speakers to company visits (*"Convenience"; "Better attendance, no transport problems, takes less time"; "Save the transportation fee"*).

As far as involvement was concerned, an overwhelming majority of students reiterated that both guest speakers' events and company visits made them feel more involved in their learning (78% and 83% respectively). With regards to students' awareness of the Leisure Marketing professional environment, again, most of the students felt that all events had raised their own awareness with 88% for guest speakers and 100% for both company visits and professional bodies' events.

But concerning attendance and assessment issues, results show a general split of opinions. Although attendance remains mandatory for the majority (*"with issues that I have struggled with (or not understood), elements of the visit made them clearer"*), most students feel that they should not be assessed on such events, hence tend to view them as a "necessary supplement" only to their studies: *"[should guest speakers' presentations should be part of the course assessment?] "no, because they are too informal"; "no, enhancing subject knowledge, like background reading"* (see Company Visits & Guest Speakers, Attendance and Assessment: Table 11, p.17).

Company Visits & Guest Speakers, Attendance and Assessment: Table 11

Guest Speakers Presentations				Company Visits			
Attendance		Assessed		Attendance		Assessed	
Mandatory				Mandatory			
Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
55	45	47	53	59	41	47	53

Finally, students were asked whether they would feel more inclined to re-contact companies following each event. Results indicate that getting further information takes precedence over enquiring about possible job opportunities, although the

trend reverses for professional bodies' events, probably due to the nature of the event in itself (see CVGSPB - Follow-up Activities: Table 12, p.18).

CVGSPB - Follow-up Activities: Table 12

	Company Visits	Guest Speaker	Professional B Event
Enquire about opportunities	46%	33%	100%
Get further information	54%	67%	71%

Conclusion

The research highlights the need for advance preparation in organising these events. Learning objectives should be clearly defined for maximum student participation and content retention. Students do feel more actively engaged and involved in their studies as they are given the opportunity to develop their awareness of possible work environments. The facilitation of such events, including practical issues (contacts database, transport arrangements etc.) and learning issues (companies factsheets, academic references, pre-prepared questions etc.), needs to be integrated in the overall university or departmental strategy. By helping to create a more fulfilling teaching and learning experience, such initiatives can bring lasting benefits. Students overwhelmingly support the use of these events.

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