

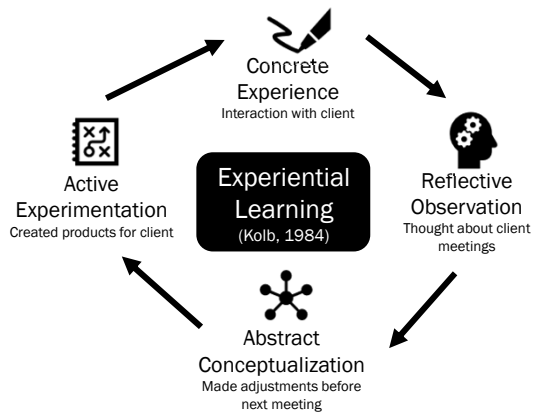
# In Times of COVID: Student Reflections of Working with Clients in an Agricultural Communications Service Learning Course

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## Introduction/Need for research

- Service learning connects classroom instruction with real-world community partners (Cress et al., 2013).
- In 2020, as traditional face-to-face courses were forced to shift online, this change in modality created additional obstacles for those teaching service learning courses (Morton & Rosenfeld, 2021).
- Need to document how the shift to online or hybrid learning during the COVID-19 pandemic impacted students' experiences when working with clients in agricultural communications courses.

## Theoretical Framework



## Methodology

- 25 students enrolled in an agricultural communications course at Texas Tech University.
- Students worked with a self-selected client to complete three writing assignments.
- At the end of the semester, they submitted reflection papers about their experience, which served as the data for qualitative analysis.
- Used the constant comparative method to establish themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).
- Completed efforts to establish research rigor (Erlandson et al., 1993).

## Findings

### R01: Describe the working situation students experienced with their clients.



#### (Prior) Relationship is Key

"I knew the client previously, and so I had their trust."



#### Location, Location, Location (of Meetings)

"The most challenging part...was the distance and having to do all of my interviews over the phone."



#### Scheduling is Hard

"The most challenging part was finding times that work for both parties."

### R02: Identify the key concepts students learned as a result of this experience.

#### Time is Valuable

"[The] major concepts I learned...were to be timely, time management, and to be prepared when I meet with my client."



#### Strategic Client Selection

"Select someone you already worked for, currently work for, or at least know personally."



#### Writing is Key

"Learning how to write for different aspects of the media was my biggest takeaway."



#### Question Preparation

"I learned the importance of having good and broad questions in order to collect more information."



## Conclusions

- Students enjoyed working with real clients.
- They moved through each stage of Kolb's (1984) model of experiential learning.
- Students learned skills related to client satisfaction, effective meetings, and communication methods.
- They also improved their writing ability through the assignments connected to the service learning experience.
- Notably, students did not fixate on the obstacles COVID-19 may have created; they gained valuable skills despite the challenges.

## Implications/Recommendations

- Although this course had to be adjusted to meet the COVID-19 safety protocols and hybrid modality, the students' feedback supports the decision to keep the service learning approach.
- Based on the student reflections, we recommend continuing this service learning experience, helping students select "good" clients, and adjusting assignments to allow some flexibility with the types of products they create.
- Research should explore the "workforce ready" skills students gain in a service learning course.

### References

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