

Chapter 2

Extra-Curricular Undergraduate Student Field Trips



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Abstract Student field trips have a venerable history in business education that dates to early days of business schools. This essay shares the experience of a senior faculty member who has been a long-time advisor to his department’s undergraduate Economics Club. The “how-tos” of setting up, funding and executing meaningful field trips are presented. Networking with the school’s alumni base—especially those alumni who were former students of the faculty member—can be a key to success. Four examples of field trips ranging from afternoon trips to week long spring break excursions are described.

2.1 Introduction

The first four articles in the February 1913 issue of the *Journal of Political Economy* are about the curriculum and course of study at the then recently-established schools of business and commerce at universities and colleges in the United States.¹ The articles cover numerous pedagogical topics in business education, including the importance of ensuring business students obtain: “a considerable amount of contact with actual (business) conditions (Marshall 1913, p. 100).” In a footnote to the article the author, Leon C. Marshall the Dean of the then University of Chicago Business school, noted:

The courses themselves will be run on the problem basis, as far as possible, and plans are under way for securing “case” material. In addition, the students will be taken on “field trips” and lecturers will be brought in from outside. It is recognized that *these field trips must*

¹For a more extensive review of the issues colleges of business and commerce faced in their early years see Bohanon (2008).

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be so conducted as to make them real studies and not pleasure jaunts. It is also recognized that the outside lecturer is a real problem. However, neither field trips nor outside lectures present *insuperable difficulties*. Properly managed, they can be made to constitute two of our best pedagogical devices (Marshall 1913, p. 100). (emphasis added)

In a similar vein Dartmouth College Tuck School's future dean, H.S. Person reported:

Every possible method is employed to enable students to meet business men-lecturers-personally, and the lectures of such men are followed by a simple luncheon intended to enable the second-year men to meet the lecturers informally. Finally, the idea that thesis work shall be based upon *visits to industrial plants is encouraged by the desire that our students shall see and feel such a plant in action* (Person 1913, p. 124). (emphasis added)

The field trip, therefore, has a venerable history in business education. This article will catalogue more recent field trips taken over the last decade by this author as faculty advisor for the undergraduate student Economics Club at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana.

The first section outlines what are in this faculty member's opinion the three basic requirements for executing an effective field trip for undergraduate students. The second section offers four examples of successful field trips. Note from the outset that all of these field trips have been for undergraduate students as a purely extracurricular activity. Nevertheless, the basic requirements for and examples of field trips are readily extendable to co-curricular activities at an undergraduate or graduate level. It is hoped that today's reader will concur with this faculty member and Dean Marshall that such trips have real value and present no "insuperable difficulties."

2.2 Basic Requirements

Educational field trips go to a location. The first and most obvious requirement is that there should be a *contact/sponsor* at the location to facilitate the group's activity. The purpose of the field trip is tied to the location and should usually entail formal participation by someone at that location. However, this latter requirement does not hold absolutely. A faculty member could, for example, self-direct a field trip to a museum taking students to exhibits to make points. Or simply release students in the museum and have them report back. However, even in the most accessible public venues, (think Art or History Museums, Public Parks etc.) it is useful to make contact with someone at the institution. Informing managers of a visit by a large group is a matter of simple courtesy. More important, such contact can often, if not usually, facilitate special programming by the institution that enhances the students' experience, often unlocking access to resources not typically available to the general public. Of course, a contact/sponsor is essential to gain entry to a private or public workplace, or to meet with an individual dignitary.

So where does a faculty member find these contact/sponsors? Many larger institutions such as Federal Reserve Banks or Museums have programs dedicated to accommodating student groups. Communications with those who facilitate these groups well in advance of the planned trip is essential. In addition, this faculty member has found that many of his university's alumni are quite willing to host student groups. This is especially true if the faculty member had the alumnus(a) as a student. Several years ago, this faculty member was cleaning the office and came across a class list from 20 years earlier. Several of these former students were contacted and were very happy to facilitate visits to their workplace by current students. In addition, the faculty member spearheading student trips can often find opportunities through their professional and social network. Many professionals are willing to host student groups and help design the field trip.

A second issue for a student field trip is *funding*. Even the afternoon trip to the local factory or non-profit agency requires access to transportation resources that the faculty member and students neither prefer nor should be expected to cover out-of-pocket. For longer trips other expenses come into play. Often funds for such trips are available within department, college, university or student affairs budgets, although it usually takes a bit of searching and cajoling to crack them open.

It has also been the experience of this faculty member that alumni, again, often former students, have been willing to make financial contributions to these efforts. Finally, there are number of Foundations that are willing to support such endeavors. It is obviously a good idea to construct a field trip description, timeline and budget for any individual trip before approaching a funding source. This faculty member has found that including current students in the planning process is itself useful and educational.

Once a field trip has been planned at a location with a contact/sponsor and financial arrangement have been made there are a number of *logistical* issues that must be addressed to ensure its smooth operation. In this faculty members experience his University requires a list of students who are going on the field trip—even if no university transportation is being used. At this university students may be excused from other classes if the field trip is approved by the Dean. It is important to note that these lists and approvals have to be finalized at least 3 days, more often 1 week in advance. A persistent issue is obtaining student commitment to the trip. A 10% attrition rate is typical, and University procedures make it almost impossible to add students at the last minute.

Of course, the mode of transportation must be procured before the trip. Most universities and even small colleges have available motor pools. For shorter trips with smaller numbers of students, faculty or approved students can drive. For longer trips with more students the school's transportation services may provide a certified driver for the trip. This, of course, must be arranged ahead of time and be part of the field trip budget. For longer trips that require air or train travel a professional travel agent should be used, especially if the group is large.

For longer trips provisions must be made for meals. Often specific restaurants have been contacted and are able to accommodate a large group with a common meal: a buffet or limited option menu. In other cases, students have been 'on their

own' for meals and have borne the financial burden for their meals. In some cases, it has been possible to give students a university determined *per diem*. All these systems work, as long as all parties are well informed as to the arrangement. For any common meal it is important that dietary restrictions be communicated and accommodated. This is easily accomplished by surveying students before the trip.

For longer trips lodging of students becomes an issue. This faculty member has always insisted on same-gender room accommodation—and never had an issue with the arrangement. It this faculty member's experience safety and convenience to the locations to be visited are the most important factors in accommodation choice. Students have been packed four-to-a-room with little negative feedback.

It is quite important for all trips to communicate behavioral expectations to the student travelers *before* the trip. This can be accomplished via emails, often more than one. It is recommended, especially for full-day or longer trips that the students meet as a group, usually the day before the trip for a briefing about the trip so behavioral expectations can be established. Clear dress guidelines should be articulated, as well as expectations about student deportment in the presence of the hosts who will be visited—such as attentiveness on the part of the students to hosts and the expectation that students will ask informed and interesting questions.

It is very important that the efforts and resources expended by the host/sponsors be recognized and appreciated. In conjunction with the students and the university the field trips of this faculty member have routinely include small gifts of university branded 'swag' for the hosts/sponsors. Handwritten thank you notes have also been promptly sent by this faculty member after the trips and students are also organized to send personal thank you notes. Typically, the faculty organizer(s) and students meet for a debriefing session after the trip to organize thank you notes, and reflect on ways to improve the experience for future groups.

2.3 Four Examples

Four examples of the Economic Club's field trips are offered ranging from the simplest to the most complex.

2.3.1 Late Afternoon Trip to Local Factory: Progress Rail

Progress Rail is a division of Caterpillar Corporation with a production facility in Muncie, Indiana, the location of Ball State University. The factory makes locomotives for trains sold around the world. At a regular meeting of his Rotary Club, this faculty member became aware of Progress Rail having opened a Visitor Center eager to accommodate group visits. The visitors would learn of the history, production, marketing strategy, and employment opportunities of the company. The visit was further facilitated by a recent Ball State graduate who worked at the plant.

In the Fall of 2018 this faculty member along with a colleague accompanied a dozen students to the Progress Rail facility.

The group was met by a local manager and the recent Ball State alumnus who explained the firm's operations and the market conditions it faced. Students asked questions, left resumes and were exposed to a multi-national manufacturing operation. The trip left the college campus at 3:45 in afternoon on a university bus, toured the Visitor Center, leaving at 5:15 and arriving back on campus by 5:30.

2.3.2 All Day Trip to Indianapolis

This field trip has become a tradition for the third Thursday in October. The 2019 field trip commenced at 7:30 AM as twenty-three students (including one student from the university sponsored laboratory high school) and two faculty members left the Ball State campus on a university bus. The group arrived at the Indiana State Capitol at 9 AM. The group proceeded to tour the State Capitol guided by a volunteer trained to direct such groups. They then proceeded to the Indiana State Senate chamber (not in session) where a state elected officer, a legislator and a number of professional state employees gave short lectures about the functions of their offices.

The tour has been spearheaded through the years by a Ball State alumni who had been a student of this faculty member and gone on to obtain a law degree and now serves as legal counsel to the legislature. Several students brought resumes for internships for various positions at the State Capitol. The program ended at noon and was followed by a lunch delivered to the Senate Chambers.

The afternoon portion of the trip has traditionally been spent at a cultural institution in Indianapolis. Locations have included the Indianapolis based educational institution Liberty Fund, the Indianapolis Art Museum—known as Newfield's, and the Indianapolis Zoo. In all cases officials in the organization made presentations to the students and fielded questions. This year the group visited the Ray Bradbury museum and library located on the campus of Indiana University-Purdue University in Indianapolis (IUPUI). The group was met by the museum's director who gave an overview of Bradbury and the museum. The group was then allowed peruse much of its collection including Bradbury's personal effects and memorabilia. The director was pleased to note this group was among the largest ever to visit the museum.

2.3.3 Three-Day Trip to Chicago

Like the Indianapolis trip the Chicago trip has a long history with the Economics Club. In the spring of 2003, a then current student suggested the Club take a field trip to Chicago. His family was willing and able to host a group of five students and this faculty member in their home in suburban Chicago.

The 2019 field trip was arranged well in advance and students were excused from their regular classes. The seventeen students, two faculty members, a Ball State alumnus who had been on the original trip and the alumnus's 10-year-old son, left Ball State campus at 8:30 AM on Thursday morning on a chartered bus for Chicago.

Over the years as the size of the group has grown. The alumnus who had originally instigated the trip in 2003 was able to arrange access to the facilities of the Union League Club of Chicago for accommodations. The students had been apprised of the Club's dress code and were always in compliance. Breakfast at the Club for both Friday and Saturday morning were included in the stay.

Upon arriving in Chicago, the group checked into the Union League Club and proceeded to the Chicago Board of Trade (CBOE), a 5-min walk from the Club. At the CBOE the group was met by an CBOE educator who explained the nature of the exchange, details of option positions and led the group to the floor of the exchange where live trading was observed. The group then left for the Federal Reserve Bank, a few minutes away by foot, for a presentation on the activities and policies of the bank by a Federal Reserve educator. This was followed by the group touring the Fed Museum at the same location. Students ended the day with dinner on-your-own. On this trip students received a university determined per-diem for this meal.

Friday consisted of visits to various workplaces and institutions in Chicago including the headquarters of Grub Hub, the downtown office of Whirlpool Corporation and the Newberry Library. The workplace visits were hosted by Ball State alumni and other contacts this faculty and the Chicago alumni have become acquainted with over the years.

Students were given three options for visits for both morning and afternoon and were accompanied by individual faculty. The individual groups were no larger than seven. This is an ideal size from a host's perspective and allows more one-on-one interaction between the host and the students. Many hosts encouraged students to bring or send resumes to their firm. Friday evening was completed by a buffet dinner at the Union League Club. The group left from Chicago on Saturday morning and arrived at Ball State campus midafternoon.

2.3.4 Spring Break Trip to New York City and AIER

The Ball State Economics Club's most extensive field trips have occurred during the University's spring break in early March. Destinations have included New York City and Washington D.C. In 2020 a group of ten students and two faculty members spent the bulk of the break at the campus of the American Institute for Economic Research (AIER) in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. The AIER campus accommodated each student in a private room and provided meals and hospitality. Activities included a visit to the nearby Norman Rockwell Museum.

The main focus of the trip, however, was to discuss in a group format a set of readings on trade, liberty and monetary policy during six, 90-min sessions led by

AIER staff. All the student and faculty participants read over 200 pages of material in preparation. Students remarked that this is what they wished college could be like! The topics covered were:

- Session 1: Harwood and classical liberal debate
 - Readings from E.C. Harwood
- Session 2: Introduction to monetary theory
 - Readings from David Hume and Karl Menger
- Session 3: Future of money
 - Readings from Armen Alchian, George Selgin, and William Luther
- Session 4: Introduction to trade
 - Readings from Adam Smith, Frédéric Bastiat, and David Hume
- Session 5: Regulation and trade
 - Readings by David Ricardo and Henry George
- Session 6: History of economic freedom
 - Reading from Deirdre McCloskey

The time at AIER was preceded and followed by time in New York City. This time included meeting informally with Ball State alumni, visiting historical and cultural sites in New York and the group attending the Broadway production of *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

2.4 Conclusions

The financial costs of these field trips have ranged from under a hundred dollars to nearly ten thousand dollars. The Ball State Economics Club has been very fortunate to be able to offer these opportunities to students at minimal out-of-pocket expense to the students. This has occurred because of the generosity of the Department, its alumni base and outside Foundations. This faculty member's advice to other faculty who wish to cultivate similar educational opportunities is two-fold: start small and grow; and work your network.

It is also very important to report the activities in a timely manner to donors. Once this is done the best approach is to expand on what worked and ask for more! The obstacles are not "insuperable." This faculty member has found that the students who select into such activities are inevitable among the best and the brightest. He is very grateful for the support from them, his colleagues, his former students and supporting foundations for helping develop these unique educational opportunities, that have clearly gone beyond mere "pleasure jaunts" and constituted "real studies."

References

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