

Assessment of Stone Soup Course Experience

This questionnaire is for faculty who have used a “Stone Soup” Project assignment or activity to describe and assess their experience with it. Your response will be posted on the Indisputably blog and may be disseminated in other ways as well. It would help if you would describe specifics of your experience, but do not include information that could identify any student or subject of a Stone Soup assignment or activity.

1. Faculty name: **Charlie Irvine**
2. School: **University of Strathclyde Law School, Glasgow, Scotland**
3. Course: **LLM/MSc in Mediation and Conflict Resolution**
4. Semester: **1 [Fall 2017]**
5. Number of students in the course: **20**
6. Briefly describe the Stone Soup assignment or activity (e.g., interview or focus group class). If you assigned students to conduct an interview, summarize the type of subjects and focus of the interview. If you conducted a focus group class, describe the speakers and issues discussed.

The assignment asked students to interview a mediation practitioner about a recent case that was significant for them. The instructions were adapted from the suggested guidance from the Stone Soup materials – somewhat cut down for postgraduate learners. Support was offered in locating mediators but no students asked for it. The case studies were of a generally high standard, with the best of them covering both the story of the case and well-supported analysis of the mediator’s approach. Case types were diverse:

Family – 4

Workplace – 4

Homelessness - 3

Court-annexed – 2

Commercial and general civil – 2

Special educational needs – 1

Elder care – 1

Other – 2 (dispute over a cat and a family business dispute)

Some of the students focused on the story at the expense of analysis. Many were keen to establish whether the mediators were influenced by a transformative approach; in reality this was less significant than pragmatic adaptations of practice to particular contexts. One key instance here is the amount of pre-mediation or ‘intake’ work involved in the community and

homelessness mediations – in one case three pre-mediation meetings with a young person.

7. Was the assignment required, one of several options, or for extra credit?
Required
8. If students were to write a paper, how long was the paper supposed to be (in double-spaced pages)? **2000 words [or about 8 double-spaced pages]**
9. When was the assignment due (or when did you conduct a Stone Soup activity)?
6 November 2017
10. What percentage of the grade was allocated to the assignment? **30%**
11. Did you discuss in class the results of students' work? If so, what did you and the students learn from this discussion? Was this a good use of class time?

We have not discussed the assignment in this class. However, all student simultaneously take a compulsory class entitled 'Mediation in Practice'; there were quite a few references to the Stone Soup interviews during the intensive practice weekends.

12. What did students learn that they wouldn't have learned without the Stone Soup assignment or activity?

The assignment has been very useful for these students. They have had a glimpse of mediation in reality, rather than in the books. They have met a real practitioner. They have grappled with the much more delicate pragmatic questions that emerge in real-world practice – how to keep people onside, the nuances of negotiation, the tactics, the inner dialogue of the mediators. I am very positive about the assignment (subject to some adjustments, below) as it gave the students a rich source of insight to aid their engagement with mediation theory and critiques.

13. What worked well with the assignment or activity?

Students seemed to have had little difficulty in locating willing mediators to participate – this was pleasing in a jurisdiction like Scotland where mediation has not been mainstreamed by the justice system. As above, the insights provided by the practitioners were a useful counterweight to the more theoretical or abstract 'models' of mediation in the books. The students have also made contact with at least one practitioner. As many of them wish to be employed in mediation this is useful networking.

14. What would you do differently if you do it again?

At postgraduate level the guidance is too simplistic. Adult learners don't need as much detail about how to conduct interviews or be polite when approaching practitioners. However, what I will do differently next year is specifically request some analysis of the mediation alongside description. I found myself giving higher marks (grades) to students who related practice to theory, especially when well referenced, but it felt a little unfair that the instructions didn't make this clear. The weaker studies simply told the story – at PG level this isn't as useful a task.

15. What would you advise other faculty considering using a Stone Soup assignment or activity?

Tailor the question to the capabilities of your students. If you want them to write critically or analytically, make sure this is spelt out in the instructions. Bear in mind the possible need for ethical approval for research involving human subjects. At my (UK) institution this meant that I had to complete an ethical approval form to cover all the students. That in turn meant I had to complete a Risk Assessment, which brought to my attention the potential risk for students going to visit mediators or other legal practitioners. While most mediators clearly present little risk, in the end we had to maintain a record of which students were visiting which practitioners.