

Submission Template for the 2017 OBTC Teaching Conference for Management Educators

1) Title, Abstract & Keywords

In your abstract, please include a brief session description (not to exceed 100 words), and three to four keywords. If your proposal is accepted, this description will be printed in the conference program.

Navigating the Business World: From Classroom to Practice

It is vital for students to have opportunities to apply their business knowledge in a “real world” setting. Structuring such opportunities can present challenges for faculty, especially in schools located in rural areas or when teaching online. In this session presenters will share their experiences using: 1) service learning in the capstone business course, 2) serving as faculty supervisor for management interns, and 3) leading a consulting practicum in an online MBA program. The use of these experiences in assessment for AACSB purposes will also be addressed. Session participants will have an opportunity to share their approaches to developing experiential learning requirements.

Keywords: 1) Experiential Learning
2) Service Learning
3) Internships
4) Consulting Practicum

2) Teaching Implications:

What is the contribution of your session to management pedagogy/andragogy? Specifically, please include your learning objectives, and describe what management and/or teaching topics are relevant to your session, and why. Also, include theoretical, disciplinary, or theoretical foundations that will help reviewers understand how your ideas fit within the broader field of management.

The goals of this session are to stimulate discussion about approaches to leading experiential learning through the use of service learning, internships, and the MBA consulting practicum. The presenters will initiate the discussion by sharing their experiences with these three forms of experiential learning. We will also comment on how we have managed these in a rural setting, and in the case of the MBA consulting practicum, an online program. We will describe how schools may build assessment for accreditation purposes into these experiences. Session participants will have the opportunity to ask questions, critique, and share their own experiences with service learning, internships, and student consulting experiences. The three experiential learning activities are described below.

Service Learning and the Strategic Management Capstone Course

Case studies and computer simulations have been widely used in the Strategic Management capstone course as a form of experiential learning. Some criticisms of these include: case studies are static in time and do not allow for interaction, and that computer simulations (although increasing in complexity) are generally oversimplifications (Keyes & Wolfe, 1990; Feldman, 1995) with limited decision options. The shortcomings of both of these pedagogical tools which attempt to represent actual decision making situations can be overcome if the students were embedded in real organizations as those organizations would actually be facing the situations requiring decisions. It is rare to find business organizations as willing partners who would allow students to participate in the process. Most business organizations worry about their competitive situation and desire to protect competitive secrets. Other business organizations favor decisions made by seasoned executives as opposed to college students whose inexperience may lead the organization to make wrong decisions - exposing the organization to risk. McKone and Bozewicz (2003) offer that wrong decisions are really learning opportunities. Few organizations are willing to allow their future to be jeopardized in a learning experience; hence, many are only willing to provide information in the form of a case study long after the decisions have been made. Non-profit organizations are real organizations that make real business decisions, and for the most part, have reasons to be very willing to provide an experiential learning option for college students.

For decades, scholars and educators have discussed the benefits of experiential learning (McKone & Bozewicz, 2003; Keys & Wolfe, 1990; Bowen 1987; Freedman & Stumpf, 1978). More specific to the Strategic Management capstone course, Feldman (1995) claims that experiential learning serves to "...provide a better forum for students to practice more complex skills and higher levels of abstract decision analysis and decision making under uncertainty than afforded by conventional teaching methods" (pp. 346-347). The purpose of this workshop is to introduce and discuss a generally untapped source of experiential learning in real organizations, working with real people, and planning for real decisions. Non-profit organizations within the communities of many of our institutions may represent ideal partners partly because they are in need of analytical/consulting services that they usually cannot afford. Non-profits do not compete for customers in the same manner as business organizations and as such, are not worried about safeguarding competitive and operational information. These organizations are also accustomed to working with a transient work force in the form of volunteers and are more tolerant of potential learning errors. Educators teaching the Business Strategy capstone could greatly benefit from the concept of 'Service Learning' that is growing on many college and university campuses. Service Learning is real world learning that links schools and communities into a pedagogy that can result in better learning outcomes than the traditional transfer of knowledge to passive students (Butin, 2003). A common definition of service learning is when students are organized to meet a community need in such a way that leads to further understanding of the material covered in the related course (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995). In many

forms, the result is students volunteering to serve the non-profit organization's mission in some capacity such as helping out in food banks, delivering meals to the homebound and the homeless, and others. The organizations benefit from the volunteer labor and the students learn more about the social/community issues they are discussing in class. Using service learning in the Strategic Management capstone course can provide a great deal more benefit for the students through experiential learning and for the organization in the form of business planning/consulting that they really need.

The objective of the experiential exercise in the Strategic Management capstone course is to allow students to experience analysis and decision making in a situation where the outcome is contingent on the impact of countless situational factors, not to mention the actions of other individuals and/or organizations that will support or counteract those decisions. As practice feedback (House, 1979), or as a self-assessment exercise (Bowen, 1987), this experiential learning option consists of posturing and moves that may occur and need adjustment continuously throughout the semester as opposed to the singular time nature of case studies. This allows students to experience successes and failures, learn from them, and formulate corrective responses. Students will also be forced to hone their communication and negotiation skills which is difficult to do with case studies and simulations. Like simulations and case studies, the methods discussed in this session also help members learn how to work in teams as well as about how those teams are perceived by outsiders. Teams work in real situations because of the synergy created by diverse individuals with different perspectives (Page & Donelan, 2003; Holter, 1994; Stoy, 1999; Schwartz & Teach, 2002). During the session, we will evaluate this method in the context of how it supports Bowen's (1987) "principles for the design and conduct of experiential teaching".

Non-profits are easier to bring on board. Many colleges and universities maintain some contact with non-profit organizations in their communities. Many such organizations make contact with the institution in search of assistance with particular issues. Some institutions already have a service learning office that may also be of assistance with finding partners and they may already have a list of nonprofits in the area who are open to service learning initiatives. Campus Compact is an organization promoting service learning boast over 1,100 member colleges and universities (see: www.compact.org). Our experience with this started with attending a service learning luncheon for which both faculty and directors of local non-profits were invited. By the end of that luncheon (and with little effort on our part), we spoke with and committed to six student teams to work on developing strategic plans for six non-profit organizations – one section of the Strategic Management capstone course. Most organizations in the area, upon finding out that we were a business professors, indicated that a major problem they were facing was the need for a strategic plan which was being demanded by parent organizations, sponsors, and other supporters. They also indicated that they had no idea as to how to perform this task. The response in the non-profit community was so great that during that first semester, we

developed a two semester wait list of organizations (including a regional hospital) that desired the same product – a strategic plan.

The results of early runs of this service learning project were promising. The institution's service learning office conducted a 141 item questionnaire (developed by Furco & Moely, 2005) and administered to student participants in all service learning courses. Students from the Strategic Management capstone who responded (46 out of 76 or 61%) indicated that the exercise was relevant to the course with an average response of 4.239 (five point scale where 5 = strongly agree). Students reported that the experience helped them learn and apply course content with 4.283 (same scale).

The true benefits of this example of service learning include understanding of an organization's dynamic environment, the effect of individual personalities on organizations (the team as well as the focus non-profit organization), experience in constructing creative solutions to problems that are evolving, and the benefit of clear and concise communication supported by thorough analysis. The activity proved especially rewarding to the faculty member.

Internships

Internships provide an extended period of experiential learning for students. D'Abate, Youndt, and Wenzel (2009) noted the importance of integrating experiential learning into the curriculum for student satisfaction and learning. Mello (2006) noted the importance of students having the opportunity to apply the concepts that they learn in the classroom. As part of the business core, business students at our institution are required to complete a 2-credit internship consisting of a minimum of 160 hours of employment. The internship program is structured with a specified minimum GPA and junior standing for eligibility. Students must complete the "principles" course in their concentration prior to their internship. Students must also complete a 1-credit professional skill development course as a prerequisite to the internship. The professional skills course includes developing resumes and cover letters, participating in mock interviews (with members of the business community serving as interviewers and providing feedback), learning about proper business dress and business etiquette, as well as participating in a business etiquette dinner (with faculty and members of the business community providing feedback). The internship requires students to apply the knowledge gained in the classroom to real business situations. Our internship program was noted as a best practice on a previous AACSB site visit. In the proposed session, I will describe our structured internship program.

Students, working with the support of the College's professional development center, are responsible for obtaining their own internships. Internships must include job duties that will give the students an opportunity to apply their knowledge of their area of concentration. The internship must be approved by the student's work supervisor, the faculty internship supervisor, and the department chair (who registers the student for the internship course). During the time that they are working, students are responsible for submitting weekly journals that include a

description of the work that they are performing and reflection on what they learned that week. At the end of the internship, the students must submit a formal report in which they describe and reflect on the internship experience as a whole. The assignments, particularly the journal and integrative report, are similar to the assignments recommended by Clark (2003) to enhance the educational value of internships. Students also complete a self-evaluation of their experience, and the work supervisors provide a formal evaluation using the College's evaluation instrument. All required materials (journals, report, self- and supervisor-evaluations) as well as the overall quality of the work experience are considered when grading the internship. The faculty supervisor contacts each student's work supervisor at least once during the internship. Finally, each student meets with his/her faculty supervisor for an exit interview. The purpose of the exit interview is to "close the loop" on internship feedback. In the session, the student and faculty member discuss the intern's strengths and areas in need of improvement from the perspective of the student, the faculty supervisor, and the work supervisor (using the formal evaluation provided by the work supervisor).

The internships provide valuable experiential learning to the students. They have an opportunity to apply and refine their knowledge of management. They are encouraged to reflect upon how their "real world" experiences fit (or not) with what they learn in the classroom. Students generally complete their internships during the summer between their junior and senior year. The internship often provides them with an opportunity to apply what they have learned in the classroom, and they often share their experiences in discussions in management courses upon their return. Given our small-town location, the summer internships are desirable because they allow students to work with organizations in a wide range of locations. As indicated, students are responsible for obtaining their own internship. The College of Business and Economics has established relationships through our advisory boards (both Corporate and Alumni), and our professional development center has established recruiting relationships with businesses that extend beyond those boards. Students also find internships through personal contacts. Further, particularly for students who choose to complete their internships during the academic year, there are valuable internship placements within our community including those with local businesses and with the Small Business Development Center affiliated with the University.

As noted in the literature on internships (e.g. Gault, Redington, & Schlager, 2000) and on employee recruitment and selection (e.g. Zhao & Liden, 2011), in some cases internships serve as an extended employee selection process for jobs after graduation. Gault, et al., (2000) found that starting salaries of new graduates who had interned were approximately nine percent higher than for those who had not. It is not uncommon for students to receive job offers at the end of their internship. Approximately 22 percent of our students receive employment offers. Further, because students generally complete their internships almost a year before they graduate, employers often note that they are interested in hiring the student after graduation if a position is available at the time the student graduates. It is also important to note that internships also give students an opportunity to discover when a particular job or organization does not result in

positive person-environment fit. On some occasions, students will indicate that even though the internship experience was positive, they discovered that the particular type of job or organization is not what they would like to pursue after graduation. Career exploration is thus, another positive outcome of the internship for the student and self-selection out prior to being hired for a full-time position is a positive outcome for the employer.

MBA Consulting Practicum

As part of the capstone experience in our online MBA program, a consulting practicum course allows students to engage in a practical application of concepts learned in their graduate level coursework. Students work in teams to facilitate a collaborative approach to interacting with a client. Teams are responsible for selecting and engaging a client. The team then works to develop a concrete proposal for a consulting engagement and then to complete a deliverable for the client. Proposals are presented to the client during the on-campus MBA residency with other students, faculty, and guests in attendance. Our online MBA program requires students to participate in a four day on-campus residency each summer they are in the program. The residency provides an opportunity for the students to engage in face-to-face interaction with one another and with faculty. Initial face-to-face interaction is a best-practice for building successful virtual teams (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007), and the teambuilding experience facilitates interaction through all stages of the program, but especially facilitating a consulting practicum in an online environment. In addition to conveying information to the client, the presentations allow us to assess oral communication skills and teamwork for AACSB accreditation purposes.

The consulting practicum is a vitally important experiential learning opportunity for our MBA students. When viewing the consultants' structured interviews as experiential learning, Cornell, Johnson and Schwartz (2013) found that the structured interview experiences of 117 students, including 32 MBA students, helped them internalize concepts from their classroom learning, enhance student confidence, and reduce anxiety. Munoz, Miller and Poole (2016) found that experiential learning activities among undergraduates fostered student-faculty contact, career exploration, and skill development, while also helping to increase their intentions to participate in professional student organizations.

The assigned text for the consulting practicum course is Block's (2011) *Flawless Consulting: A Guide to Getting Your Expertise Used*. Block opens the eyes of the students to concepts that will be helpful during the ups and downs of the consulting engagement period, including: how to prepare for the initial meeting with the client; listening skills as a prelude to developing trust; how to deal with resistance; how to uncover what is working well in documenting the "as is" condition; how to suggest a "harvest" plan as part of the "to be" goals and objectives; and how to foster the adoption of needed changes without them seeming to be forced or mandated. The students engage in a lively online discussion after having digested Block's book about the consulting process. The consulting practicum is also based in the work of Blake and Mouton (1983), Argyris (1993) and Pascale, Sternin, and Sternin (2010). Blake and Mouton (1983) set

up a framework for the consultation process, including awareness of degrees of focus on both people and production. Argyris (1993) deals with ways to deal with the very human element of resistance to change and the desire to keep with the status-quo. Schein (1998) reminds the consultant of the importance of building a trusting relationship prior to suggesting major changes. Pascale, Sternin and Sternin (2010) give examples of how out-of-the box innovative thinking from a fresh perspective can help stimulate positive conditions for change to be adopted.

Examples of clients served in the past four years include: a stationery store; wine trail tourist association; yoga studio; catering; rural wedding venue; mobile food truck; cultural arts center; a hot dog restaurant; and a mechanical contractor. Part of the screening process for prospective clients is their willingness to share accounting and financial data that can be used in a cash flow analysis. Once a client and team form a relationship, a written agreement must be negotiated to cover the scope and expectations of the consulting process. The teams learn to adopt actual milestone dates, develop strategic goals and objectives, generate alternative courses of action, conduct financial analysis based on various operational scenarios, and draft a final report that serves as an actual deliverable.

In the interactive session, a short overview of the practicum will be presented, including examples of past clients and the key steps in consulting process. I will also discuss possible changes in the course format, such as expanding the length of the course from seven to 14 weeks, to be aligned with another capstone course, Strategic Management and Business Policy, which has a heavy focus on case analysis. The same teams could then be assigned for both courses to help strengthen the reinforcement of how theory can be applied in a real world context. Doing so would also provide a less compressed timeframe for the various aspects of both courses. Another potential change would be to shift the assessment of teamwork from a student generated rubric tool under this course, to instead be conducted elsewhere during the residency as a separate exercise with third party oversight and scoring. This would help remove bias triggered by intra-team dysfunctions, which has little to do with overall program assessment.

The audience will have the opportunity to seek clarification, make suggestions, and share experiences with similar experiential course with a consulting component, including challenges that emerge from using an online course delivery format. Methods and options for assessment will also be explored.

3) Session Description and Plan:

What will you actually do in this session? If appropriate, please include a timeline estimating the activities will you facilitate: how long will they take, and how will participants be involved? Please remember that reviewers will be evaluating how well the time request matches the activities you'd like to do, and the extent you can reasonably accomplish the session's goals. Reviewers will also be looking for how you are engaging the participants in the session.

The three presenters will each provide a ten minute overview of their experiential learning topics – service learning in the capstone undergraduate business course, best practices for internships, and experiences in leading a consulting practicum for online MBA students. In the remaining 30 minutes participants will have an opportunity to ask questions, critique, and share their own experiences and best practices in connecting students with outside organizations.

4) Application to Conference theme:

How does your session fit with the overall OBTC theme of *Navigating the Changing Currents*?

There is an ongoing need for experiential learning to foster learning and students' ability to apply classroom knowledge to business settings. The service learning experience in the capstone course is a method of navigating students' needs for experiential learning while capitalizing on the willingness of non-profit organizations to share information and allow student participation. The structured internship program navigates students' need for focused experiential learning and overcomes the potential constraints of a rural setting by providing opportunities for internships in a wide range of locations during the summer as well as some established local opportunities during the school year. The MBA consulting practicum navigates the challenges of providing experiential learning in an online program by leveraging technology for some aspects of the experience and using the scheduled MBA Summer Residency for additional face-to-face interactions and assessment.

5) Unique Contribution to OBTC:

Have you presented the work in this proposal before? If so, how will it be different? Is this proposal under current review somewhere else? If so, please explain. How will your proposal be different for the OBTC conference?

The work in this proposal has not been presented previously, nor is it under review elsewhere.

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