

REAL WORLD PROJECT INTEGRATION INTO THE CLASSROOM

Justin Haigh, Annette Nemetz and Debora Sepich, George Fox University

With government funding and financial institutions curtailing services to entrepreneurs, many emerging local businesses and non-profits need help. Colleges and universities can provide support in research, strategic direction, operational issues, project management, marketing and branding, team dynamics, and financial modeling. The authors have designed an experiential learning program called EntreExcell. The program seeks to integrate real world projects into the classroom, actively engaging entrepreneurs and local small business for future student placements and internships.

Entrepreneurs and local small businesses enter a cross-disciplinary “circle” of advisors, consisting of experienced faculty and MBA students, in which business problems and issues are evaluated. Recommendations are provided through the context of multiple projects within classes. In addition to meeting the needs of these businesses, the projects create a basis for developing real-world context and develop future platforms for internships.

This workshop will explain how education can fill the gap and create a road map for implementing this program and for developing deep, meaningful relationships with local small and medium-size businesses that seek well-trained and competent employees.

Executive Summary

The purpose of the workshop will be to exemplify the approach and to offer a variety of interactive exercises and processes. Headed up by three Professors from George Fox University Business School, the workshop will cover the following;

Justine Haigh, Associate Professor of Marketing will focus on providing details on the existing EntreExcell program, providing timelines, procedures, and support services delivered. Incorporated into this presentation will be case studies of businesses that have gone through the program. The results of the engagement and student placement opportunities will be explored, including how these relationships develop into lasting associations that profit all parties involved. Spotlighted will be cross-disciplinary work with other university departments who have also benefited from EntreExcell projects and contacts. Hands-on, interactive exercises will consist of designing the support documentation, use of Google Docs and other communication tools to facilitate the interaction and discussions with local businesses, faculty, and students.

Annette Nemetz, Assistant Professor of Management will consider how businesses are identified and the manner by which specific classes across disciplines are chosen to address program requirements. The process of developing questions, and engaging with local community will be discussed including a format for capturing information that makes the review process work effectively. The criteria for selecting projects will also be reviewed, allowing the workshop participants to develop his/her own method based on the mission of the university served. Also discussed will be the process for engaging with Small Business Development Centers, entrepreneurs, business managers and local community organizations such as the Chamber of Commerce and Rotary Club. The use of existing university outreach programs in development and marketing and GFU’s newly developed internship program are included as other potential avenues of engagement. Expectation setting with chosen program participants will be explained as a critical success factor.

Debora Sepich, Assistant Professor of Entrepreneurship will provide an inside look into classroom dynamics. A series of real time videos capturing the enhanced relationships between the business owners and students will be reviewed. The use of video to capture learning moments and unique classroom management tools will be presented, including an iPhone/Pad/Pod enabled "Highlight" application. The EntreExcell program has a unique emphasis on technology use in the classroom. Development of a value delivery tool that enables the students to track time spent on projects (project costing) and captures the value of the final project delivered to the business will be reviewed. Using this approach the School of Business has been able to apply a monetary value to the project delivered at no cost to the associated business.

The types of industries that have been assisted by the program include; restaurants, cosmetic companies, local housing organizations, community supported agriculture (CSA), health and fitness programs (YMCA), and not-for-profit organizations (church plants and autism awareness). Internships have developed in each of these areas either during or after class projects.

Overall, the workshop offering specific program details and interactive exercises will provide a road map and jump start for implementation at the attendee's home institution.