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Using Client Based Projects (CBSs) in MBA Marketing Programs to Bridge the Gap between Theory and Practice

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ABSTRACT

The ability to apply marketing knowledge is a key skill needed by marketing graduates. This is especially true in MBA education. Historically, academics have stressed theory while practitioners have stressed practice. Experiential learning can bridge the gap between theory and practice. One important form of experiential learning is having students participate in client based projects (CBP).

Many professors are hesitant to take on CBPs because they appear to be time intensive and riskier to manage as opposed to traditional case studies; however, this paper shows a step by step process for implementing CBPs in the classroom that has been successfully implemented in an MBA elective course, Marketing Consulting, for several years.

There are two primary objectives to the Marketing Consulting course: 1) Gain an understanding of how to start and manage an independent marketing consulting business and 2) Gain experience conducting marketing consulting for a real client. These objectives are met using CBPs - students work with their first consulting client in the course. It is one thing to tell students what it is like to be a consultant; it is another thing to have them actually experience it. Students meet with a client, develop a proposal for the client, and conduct 50 hours of real marketing consulting.

The Marketing Consulting course, through its use of CBPs, has been effective achieving its learning objectives. Utilizing the Individual Development and Educational Assessment (IDEA) course evaluation system, over 90% of the students (100% in some instances) agreed that the course learning objectives were met. Furthermore, this course regularly rates in the top 10% (the highest category available) when compared nationally to other courses in the "All Classes in the IDEA Database." Beyond the benefits to student learning, the local business community also benefits by receiving "free" marketing consulting. Moreover, the university benefits through demonstrating its commitment to the local business community.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Dr. Lynn Dailey is the Moor Endowed Chair in Business and Economics and a professor in the School of Management & Leadership at Capital University. She teaches in both the undergraduate and MBA programs. Her industry experience includes positions in a wide variety of marketing-related roles ranging from sales to webmaster. For the past 14 years, she has been engaged in business consulting and training for national clients, not-for-profits as well as many small businesses.