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Wooing Employers with an Experiential Learning Program: Six Steps to Human Resource Management Career Opportunities for Your Students

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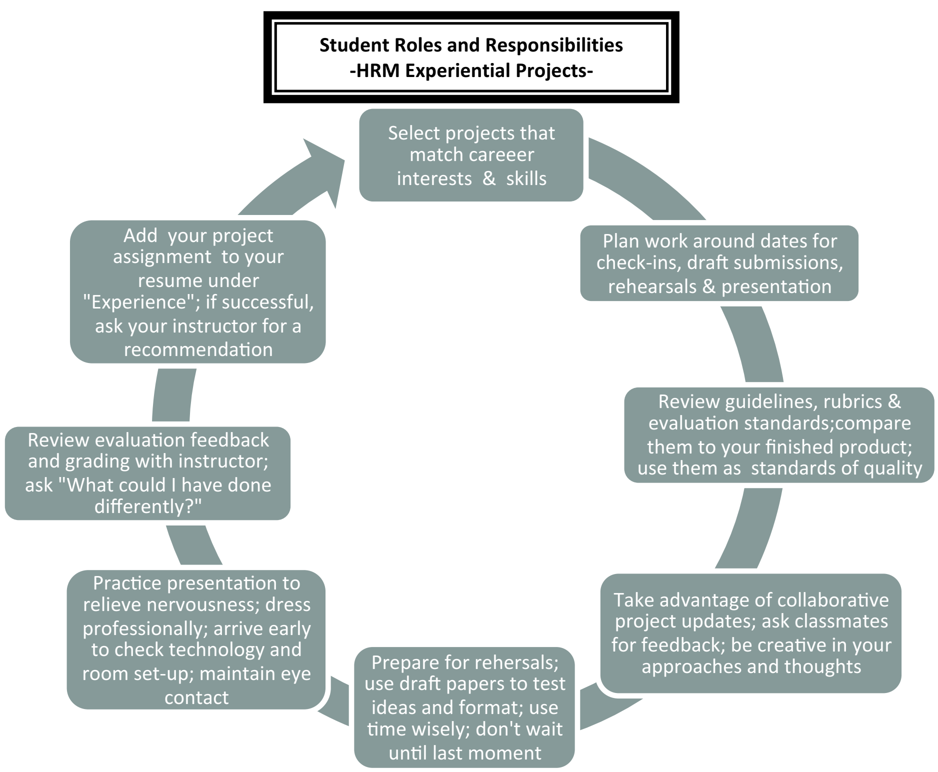
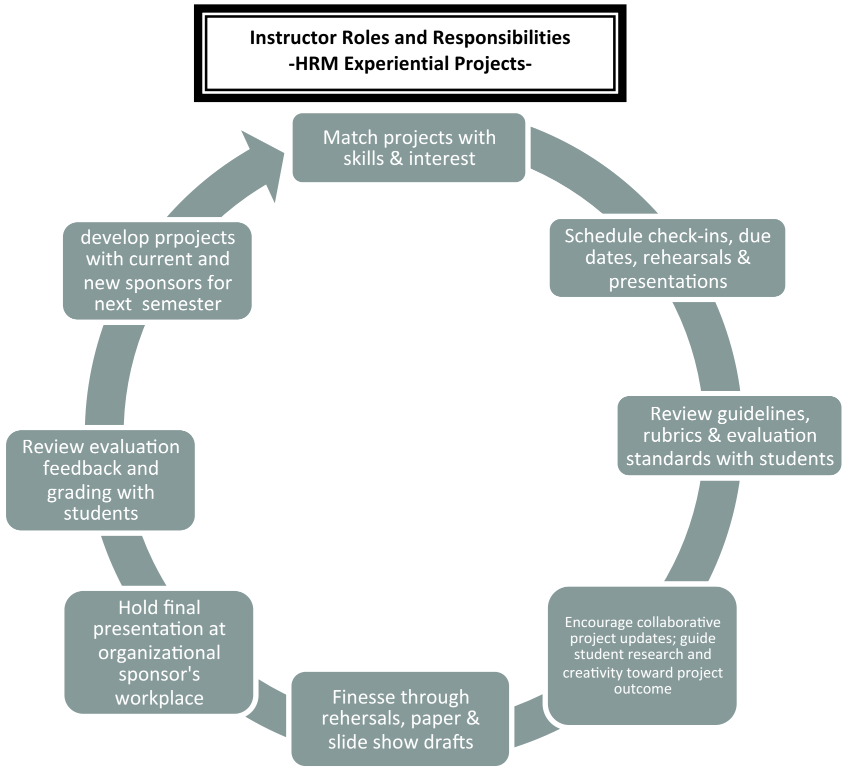
I present in this paper a teaching methodology for introducing students to the workplace through collaboration between a Bachelors of Science in Business Administration (BSBA) Human Resource Management (HRM) program and an organization with needs appropriate for entry level employment assignments. My intention is for this article to act as a blueprint for professors, as well as organizational sponsors, in undertaking an experiential learning partnership. In order to provide the reader with such a guide, I highlight rubrics necessary for a successful collaboration, including anecdotal results from 9 semesters, project topics, career placements, frequent challenges and ongoing collaborations. I focus solely on pedagogy appropriate for undergraduate business programs, which adapt well to basic operational and topical research projects. In addition, to provide context and validation, I note applicable academic research on experiential learning.

In 2007, with entry level jobs drying up before my students' eyes, I initiated a Human Resource Management (HRM) major with the intent of creating an experience that would ready my students for the workforce in a concrete and practical manner. Neither an internship nor a cooperative program, yet not a traditional curriculum, my concept was rooted in my own career progression and my identification with those students who entered a business degree program with few professional role models. The same "deep obligation" to my students that George Gore articulated in his 1968 article calling for management educators to provide students direct and meaningful contact with the business world (Gore, p. 164), prompted me to create a guided experience where students unfamiliar with a business environment were introduced to the workplace and professional assignments. This article outlines my experience in doing and provides a guide for faculty interested in functioning as a liaison in developing learning opportunities and materials that support experiential learning success. The following diagrams present the flow of the program from both the student's and instructor's perspective.





My concept began, quite simply, as a method to insure workplace experience for all students enrolled in the HRM major. A resume reflecting professional experience linked to an academic program would, I believed, distinguish my students from the thousands of others in our metropolitan area searching for entry-level positions. I encouraged students in the HRM program at Saint Joseph's College of Maine, to commit to extended, 10 to 15 week internships at local businesses. However, as the economy faltered, internship opportunities were difficult to unearth in the under budgeted function of human resources. If internship slots did still exist in the economically challenged area of Southern Maine the competition was staggering and the positions were often unpaid. The lack of pay, albeit for a position that often could carry academic credit, limited students' ability to secure these opportunities.

Julianne Malveaux, president of Bennett College for Women, notes that "the ultimate consequence of unpaid internships is an increased opportunity gap between the haves and have-nots" resulting in a situation that is "implicitly unfair to low- and moderate-income students because those students need to earn income to pay college costs" (Malveaux, 2007). Indeed, as I informed my human resource management majors about unpaid internship opportunities at local firms, their answers became predictable: "I can't give up $9 an hour at the sandwich shop for a 45 minute drive one way to a non-paying job, no matter how good it will look on my resume" (Paladino, 2008). Even with the possibility for academic credit, the reception to the unpaid internship remained negative. Additional credit often meant additional tuition. The divide between the students who could afford unpaid work and those who had to work their way through school grew wider (Yagoda, 2008).

The "have/have not" divide in my capstone HRM course gave rise to a distinct possibility of creating a difference in academic achievement. However, I was unwavering in my belief that HRM majors had to have applicable work experience in order to practice in the work place their learning derived from the classroom lectures, case studies and guest speakers' advice. Without organizationally-situated experiential learning, these students would not, upon graduation, present as attractive candidates for entry level human resource positions. Internships would provide an experiential or action based approach to learning human resource theory and concepts, critical within the context of a thinning job market, where reduced budgets translate into less time and money spent on training. But was this assumption, based on my personal anecdotal research, substantiated? Data from my College's Career Services office clearly indicated that experience is critical to students' eventual career success, as internships lead to full time jobs. This connection is also supported by current literature.

Guiding Literature and Models

Internships and co-op programs are, indeed, one of the most effective recruiting tools, offering an expectation of success to the point that some employers will not consider a candidate for employment who has not completed an internship (Gardner, 2008). Employers and students both acknowledge, however, that an internship is successful only when the intern has the benefit of a supportive supervisor, training and responsible, challenging opportunities (Gardner, 2008). The declining economy impacts each step of this cycle: the availability of internship positions; the availability of internship supervision; the level of college hiring, and the availability of university resources to generate a robust internship or co-op program (Fletcher, 2009) (Gardner, 2008). Michael Reynolds and Russ Vince of Lancaster and Hull Universities assert that learning and knowledge in management education are derived from and integral to everyday tasks and experiences at work (Reynolds & Vince, 2004), thus leading to students taking responsibility for their learning (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). Internships offer a ripe environment for making this learning-experience connection, providing organizations with more valuable employees resulting in higher retention and lower costs (Fletcher, 2009) (Gardner, 2008) (Gutner, 2009).

Many firms are interested in *hiring new college graduates* because it is simply less expensive compared to *hiring* job seekers with work experience (Gutner, 2009). The ramifications of that hiring decision are complex and time-consuming. Relationships with entry level college graduates cover a spectrum of interaction, from mentor-like guidance on proper behavior and dress, through management guidance on effective and efficient work habits, to supervisory direction on performance standards and training opportunities (Gardner, 2008). Add to this scenario the complexity of introducing college graduates into a workforce suffering from recent layoffs and baby-boomer retirements. Institutional history has been depleted, workloads increased and the number of potential role models reduced. Consequently, relevant work experience in the hiring decision of recent college graduates continues to gain importance (Fletcher, 2009).

The financial benefits of the lower pay associated with entry-level positions in an unpredictable economy justifies the hire of a new college grad. Patricia Johnson, Director of Staffing and Development for Fairchild Semiconductor ("Fairchild"), a Fortune 1000 manufacturer of power management computer chips, stated in November, 2008 that the good news from her company was the expansion of its number of entry-level positions geared for new college graduates while reducing its number of experienced hires (Quimby, 2008). The key to such a strategy, noted Johnson, is to hire the recent graduate who possesses skills that allow "an immediate return on the hiring investment" and that applicant most commonly originates, for Fairchild, from a pool of co-op students nurtured through the academic year (Johnson, 2008). Although Johnson hoped to maintain the Company's 2009 pool of 35 to 40 work study positions for college students, flagging sales resulted in the elimination of several co-op opportunities, with emphasis on reducing work study positions in the company's administrative departments such as Human Resources. Just a month prior to Johnson's hopeful prediction, the National Association of Colleges and Employers projected that the number of jobs available for the Class of 2009 would remain flat, with 52 percent of the companies surveyed expecting to hire fewer graduates than last year (Quimby, 2008).

Given hiring situations such as that managed by Fairchild, one of only a few large employers in southern Maine, where over 20,000 college students reside, how can colleges support the career aspirations of their students, especially those focused on the non-technical areas of corporate administration? Professors, directing students toward internship assignments, hope and, admittedly, expect, the internships to teach students something that often evades the classroom: how to actually apply classroom concepts to workplace tasks. These expectations, however, are often not realized as companies lack the money for paid internships, the personnel for intern supervision and the time to identify work assignments that actually teach and finesse business skills (Fletcher, 2009). It was the tension between the need for experience and the current economic climate, and the resulting dearth of paid internships that became the foundation of my HRM experiential program. If internships were scarce or unpaid yet represented a necessary action-based approach to business education, especially for students at a small liberal arts college with little notoriety, the development of an alternative model was critical. A hybrid concept based on cooperative education methods with internship-like trappings as a course requirement seemed the only way to secure for the students the experience they needed while avoiding higher tuition costs and unpaid work.

Cooperative education programs, which peaked in popularity approximately 15 years ago, are currently in place in 400 colleges and universities in the US, with the vast majority of enrollment in about two dozen relatively large schools, such as Northeastern University and Rochester Institute of Technology (Chapman, 2009). Cooperative education is a structured educational strategy integrating classroom studies with learning through productive work experiences in a field related to a student's academic or career goals. (About Cooperative Education: NCCE) To fit the models espoused and supported by the National Commission for Cooperative Education, the program must provide progressive experiences in integrating theory and practice, and be a partnership among students, educational institutions and employers, with specified responsibilities for each party. (About Cooperative Education: NCCE) These programs provide students an integrative course of work and study, guided by an on-campus cooperative education coordinator, therefore reflecting formal recognition by the school of cooperative education as an educational strategy and the financial support required. (About Cooperative Education: NCCE) However, since the federal government discontinued financial assistance, colleges must now rely on companies and agencies that are able - and willing - to take on young, temporary employees (Chapman, 2009). Consequently, colleges not currently supporting a co-op program are relying instead on computer simulations, case studies, guest speakers and most often, internships, increasingly unpaid, to introduce students to the real world of business (Gore, 1968) (Josji, Davis, Kathruia, & Weidner II, 2003) (Houghton, 2007).

Program Development

In a serendipitous course of events, I was able to quickly test an HRM experiential program. During a conversation with a former corporate colleague, I listened to her describe her depleted budget and overwhelming amount of work necessary to "keep current", for which her human resources staff had neither the time, the consulting assistance nor budget to complete. (Johnson, 2008) I immediately proposed that my capstone HRM class of 8 senior business students alleviate her overwhelming workload by taking on projects for her over the course of an academic semester, at no cost to her and under my supervision.

Under my supervision, the students could finesse a project statement for corporate approval, conduct research on best practices, current legislative activity - anything required - and present their findings both in a fully supported research paper, as well as conduct a live PowerPoint presentation. All I asked from her were three things: (1) that someone from her human resource department visit the class at the beginning of the semester and talk about the company and its human resource strategies, giving students a context for the projects; (2) that each project have a corporate sponsor who would be available via email for questions or limited direction, and (3) that the students be allowed to present at the company's offices in front of as many people as possible, all of whom would be willing to fill out an evaluation at the end of the presentations. She agreed to take the concept back to the company's HR executive. A week later I received a hearty "It's a go!" email with a list of five potential projects (Appendix 1).

Six Steps toward Experiential Learning Success

Since the brainstorming lunch of 2007, I have continually refined the HRM experiential program until it clearly presented six definite steps that led to successful experiences for all involved. The partnership projects, now a requirement imbedded in each of the upper level human resource management courses at Saint Josephs College of Maine, follow a standardized process from initiation by the organizational partner through final student presentation and evaluation. This process has evolved over the course of three academic years, finessed and reformulated as results appear.

Step One: Develop a Clear and Actionable Project Statement

I ask the organizations interested in working with my HRM students to develop a project concept by addressing the following requirements:

1. The project concept must either ask a question or questions that must be answered by the student(s) <u>or</u> clearly state the expected outcome of the work and/or final product.

Example - Question: What are some specific ways in which to recruit Generations X & Y to Hospital? What is the preferred source of communication- how can we best reach this target group? What benefits are important to this generation? What do they want to see in an advertisement and where should the hospital advertise in order to get their attention? What are other companies - healthcare and non-healthcare - doing to target these generations? (Author, Recruitment Selection and Training Spring 09 Projects, 2009)

Example - Outcome: Conduct quantitative and qualitative research into the use of social media by higher education institutions with a focus on adult students. The outcome of this research will be a fully documented research paper entitled "The Use of Social Media by Higher Education Institutions to Attract Adult Students". The final presentation will review the research and demonstrate the use of the social media by other institutions (Author, Recruitment Selection and Training Spring 09 Projects, 2009).

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The question or outcome requirement has proven to assist organizational partners with framing their projects and clarifying expectations, for themselves as well as for the students. The first set of projects in 2007 resulted in research requests with little articulation of what the students were to conclude from the research. The following project statement was interpreted by the students as a request for pure research with no expected analysis or conclusion:

> Executive Compensation Comparisons: Historical Research of CEO and Top 5 Executive Pay (Based, Bonus, Equity) against a select peer group (to be provided) using public 10-K and proxy filings (Author, 2007).

During the final presentation of this Executive Compensation project, the assigned students were asked by staff members of the sponsoring organization for conclusions that the students did not anticipate and therefore did not address through analysis of the semester's research. Although the analysis and resulting conclusions may have seemed obvious to seasoned human resource practitioners, the same was not true for undergraduate business students, particularly given the topic of executive compensation. As a result of this first semester's experience, I instruct my students to establish their corporate partners' expectations, seeking clarification until the students are able to articulate the expectation in a project statement which is then approved by the sponsoring organization. In addition, I encourage corporate sponsors to present desired outcomes specific enough to give the student guidance toward expectations for the final product, without presupposing conclusions and broad enough to allow creativity and alternate solutions. If the sponsor has not done so, it is the students' responsibility to work with the sponsor until clarification is reached and a project statement is approved by the corporate sponsor and the course instructor.

2. The project concept must state data requirements or collection processes if critical to the desired outcome.

Example: After we have appropriately recruited Gens X & Y- how do we effectively retain them? With the baby boomers beginning to retire in larger quantities and the ever- unstable economy, what can we do to retain our Gen X & Y employees? What makes them stay with an organization/job? A survey taken from people of these generations, with a focus on employees of healthcare organizations, is a requirement of this project (Author, Recruitment Selection and Training Spring 09 Projects, 2009).

Example:

a) Conduct quantitative and qualitative research into the use of alternative recruitment methods by national law firms, with a focus on internet - based recruitment methods, including, but not limited to, the use of social media tools.

b) Conduct interview or survey based research with Law school career service offices into the recruitment methods observed and/or preferred by those offices.

c) Conduct interview or survey based research with current law students and current 1st year attorneys to determine the job search methods used and/or preferred for entry level attorney positions (Author, Recruitment Selection and Training Spring 09 Projects, 2009).

The desire for specific quantitative processes is helpful direction to those students who have not been exposed to market research techniques in other business courses. No student enrolled in my HRM courses has yet to complete a traditional research methods course, reserved for the social science majors in academic departments such as psychology and sociology and not offered in the BSBA program. This data collection requirement necessitated the addition of rudimentary research methods to the human resource course curricula. This instruction also benefits those students who had not held professional part-time or summer positions, where they would be more inclined to use survey tools or participate in data collection or compilation.

Over the course of 7academic semesters in 10 courses, the development of project statements has evolved significantly, primarily through trial and error, embarrassing moments at presentations and fresh thinking of college undergrads. A comparison of the first projects with the second set of projects, undertaken during the spring semester of 2008, and those of spring semester 2009, as presented in Appendix 1 indicates a growing focus on clarity, expectations, outcomes, data, analysis and conclusions.

Step Two: Develop Project Teams based on Complimentary Skills and Work Styles

During the first semester of project assignments, in the fall of 2007, I collaborated with the students to assign projects so that students had a say in what they were doing. I decided, rightly, as I learned, that when they were doing something that they chose they were more likely to excel. A simple concept, yes; but when instructors are accustomed to assigning work to avoid competition for plum topics, research teams made up of best friends, and baseball teammates who don't necessarily work well together, dictating assignments seems far more preferably than asking the students for preferences. However, this test class had formed, stormed, normed and performed over the course of a few weeks of difficult, action-based assignments and clearly knew who worked well together and what they wanted to do. (Bion, 1968).

I made the mistake, after a successful experience with the test class choosing their own subjects and partners, of directing the next class to do the same. Roommates chose roommates and pitchers chose their catchers. Bedlam ensued. Relationships were harmed and roommates moved out after students with superior work ethics saw friends procrastinate, act irresponsibly or ignore project requirements, making their team look bad and receive low grades. Catchers refused to play with certain pitchers. The varsity baseball coach inquired about the course's impact on his team. I became a counselor, having many frank discussions about work ethic and behavior with students who had never been handed as much responsibility as the experiential projects required.

In future courses, when the projects are the semester's curriculum and there is less time for the group to coalesce, I now intervene more often to insure balanced assignments, complimenting skills and even division of work. This is made easier by the small student population at Saint Joseph's College of Maine, allowing personal insight into individual skill level and motivation.

Step Three: Define a Clear Project Timeline

The next question posed after "Who can I work with?" is always "When is this due?" Early in the semester, I set presentation dates with each of the corporate sponsors, allowing me to work backwards in developing the class schedule as I invite guest speakers to share their insights into human resource strategy. This also allows busy executives to schedule the presentation on their calendars and secure access to corporate board or conference rooms. The presentation dates are typically the week before the end of the semester, allowing additional class time following the final presentations for potential rescheduling, debriefing and evaluations.

Due dates, however, need to apply to more than just the final presentations. Time management is not uniformly mastered at the college undergraduate level and those practices play a distinct role in educational achievement, having proven to impact the quality of the Project outcome (Britton & Tesser, 1991). Students' time is prone to interruption. Athletics schedules, campus weekend celebrations, relationships, jobs and late night dorm parties tend to erode the best intentions. Indeed, those students who do not select, prioritize, and monitor their goals, sub-goals, and tasks, and who therefore seem disorganized, regardless of ability and intention, accomplish relatively little (Britton & Tesser, 1991, p. 406).

Left to an open-ended project completion schedule and providing only a firm presentation due date, the initial class members were not uniform in their management of the project steps. Consequently, I added to the project curriculum interim due dates for various deliverables and goals: class meetings to check-in on research progress; dates for research completion; drafts of sections of the research paper; student discussions with the entire class on challenges, road blocks and confusion; multiple run-throughs of presentations, with alternate foci on presentation style and slide composition; drafts of final papers and peer evaluation of presentations the day prior to the final presentation. Because students must present their updates orally to the entire class, the dynamics of the session are beneficial in their own right. As others have experienced, "benefits include sharing references and data sources, receiving specific comments on improving draft components, and active classroom discussions about solutions to particular problems" (McElroy, 1997, p. 34).

Despite a clear timeline, I found students failing to deliver the assignments required seem not irresponsible but confused and scared. Kolb notes that successful experiential learners must "be able to involve themselves fully, openly, and without bias in new experiences (Kolb, 1984, p. 30). The projects as described above represent drastically new experiences for each student. Institutional demographics indicate that nearly 60% of Saint Joseph's College's students are first generation college goers (Hagerman, 2010). My business students have little exposure to formal organizational settings and no exposure, typically, to HRM strategies, issues or concepts outside of classroom instruction. Consequently, the transition from traditional classroom lectures and case-based projects, to self monitored projects based on an expectation of contact with outside professionals leaves students flummoxed. Paralysis caused by fear of the unknown and resulting self doubt leads to procrastination. I have found that the pedagogical cure for this initial state has been weekly verbal and written "check-ins" to the entire class, including a mandatory explanation of challenges or, as past students have coined them, "no-clues". A "check-in" requires addressing the following topics:

a) Brief introduction of project, required each session to orient the presentation, as well as provide a context for observation and reflection.

b) Work accomplished since previous check-in.

c) Progress made on proposed project outcome as a result of work accomplished. Students will find themselves sometimes reporting on work that sounds impressive and important but has little impact of progress toward the final work product.

d) Challenges, concerns, lack of knowledge or lack of direction.

Step Four: Provide Clear Composition and Presentation Guidelines

Admittedly, I had little idea how much assistance students would need in developing the heart of the project assignment - what to do and when to do it. I anticipated - wrongly, it turns out - that the presentation would be the most difficult aspect of the assignment, as students often shake at the concept of presenting in front of others. True, they are nervous when we enter corporate board rooms - no more so than me, it turns out - but where they truly flounder is in choreographing their research methodology and developing their final written product.

Research and Composition Guidelines

The formats of the research paper and project presentation are tied to the research guidelines, which reflect the project statement. Directions for research techniques have consistently proved necessary due to the recent elimination of the research paper from the college's Freshman College Writing curriculum. This change in the introductory writing class has left upperclassmen without detailed instruction on research and composition often until their senior year business seminars.

Research based solely on internet searches is to be commonly a point of confusion and contention as well. "Just Google it" seems to be students' answer to anything unknown. The familiarity and ease with which students' access and use the internet seems to have created a void in the student's information literacy, leading to a tendency to not verify data or anecdotal information by checking multiple resources (Walker & Engel, 2003). The HRM projects depend on formal, peer reviewed research documentation but often rely on, as well, anecdotal research and data produced from survey and interview sources. A research guide provides students with a uniform starting point for project development and sets requirements for the foundation of research and analysis. (Appendix 2) In addition, a visit early in the semester from the College's research librarian not only demystifies the peer review academic journal, but divulges the internet accessibility of the library's research databases (Wellehan Library).

Composition guidelines take into consideration the spectrum of the potential readers, ranging from the company's human resource and senior executives to entry level human resource staff tasked with continuing research. The suggested format presents information in a logical and thorough manner and standardizes the use of: sections and subsections to help make the paper easier to follow or understand; font by using only 12 point Times Roman, and citation guidelines by uniformly following APA guidelines. The research paper format is as follows:

1. Title Page
2. Table of Contents
3. Executive Summary
4. Objective
5. Methodology
6. Findings and Analysis
7. Conclusions
8. Appendices
9. References
10. Author biography

The inclusion of an executive summary acknowledges the limited time available from senior executives to dedicate to review of the material. I use class time to introduce the concept of an executive summary and review samples from previous research papers. The objective is a restatement of the project statement and acts as an introduction to the purpose and content of the paper. A section on methodology is required so the students may explain the process upon which they relied to gather data and information; this assists the corporate sponsor to continue the work, if it wishes, using the same or a purposefully different methodology. Students also include appendices made up of raw data, examples of best practices, or critical resources. Class time is used to introduce the role of Appendices and differentiate between the use of a resource citation and that of an appendix.

The final paper requirement is a brief author biography. Students enrolling in the courses for which projects are required are often interested in employment with the corporate sponsors. The biography gives them an opportunity to put their work in context of their academic major, work experience and honors. The biography must be professional, brief and contain certain basic information; apart from these requirements, I do not edit or recommend changes to the biography.

Presentation Guidelines

Presentation guidelines are less format driven, relying instead on encouragement of creativity and development of texture. Each student is, or has previously been enrolled in a Business Seminar, the capstone course for the entire BSBA program, where presentation techniques, including the formatting of PowerPoint slides, are one focus of the curriculum. The HRM projects are presented according to these same requirements, noted below. Rehearsals of the presentation are scheduled for the two class sessions prior to the formal presentation; the first rehearsal is an informal rehearsal where students are allowed to ask questions of me and their classmates, discussion potential approaches during the presentation and edit slides. Classmates are encouraged to provide feedback, suggestions and assistance to help make the presentation the best it can be. The second rehearsal is a formal dress rehearsal, in professional dress, where classmates in the audience take notes and offer feedback after the presentation is completed. The collaborative nature of the rehearsals has been one of the most gratifying aspects of this process, as I have seen all students understand that the better their friends present to a potential employer, the better the College is perceived and the more valuable their degree becomes.

PowerPoint Presentation Guidelines

1. Conservative yet appealing template
2. Include the company symbols, logo, etc. to tailor it to the company
3. Presentation should follow format of written report
4. Use bullets with phrases for ideas, not extensive verbiage
5. Slides should contain charts, appropriate pictures, diagrams, etc to illustrate the work
6. Feel free to include audio, video, other examples to peak interest and bring texture to your presentation.
7. Be prepared to discuss the meaning and context of charts, graphs, etc on slides
8. NO READING FROM SLIDES – use slides to prompt a discussion of more detailed info
9. Use note cards if necessary

Step Five: Understand Your Role as Instructor

As the academic sponsor, I, as the course instructor, carry full responsibility for oversight of the Project, providing ongoing guidance to insure that the final result addresses the initial project description and follows the direction provided by the organizational sponsor. I have found that the role of teacher in a course containing an experiential learning-based project must be entirely learner-centered and consist of facilitator, questioner, supporter, advocate and devil's advocate, rather than as a disseminator or imparter of knowledge (Robertson, 2005).

The paradox inherent in the role of teacher of an upper level curriculum containing organizationally-sponsored projects is critical to acknowledge (Robertson, 2005). As a former Human Resource executive, I called on former colleagues and professional acquaintances to sponsor student projects, albeit to be completed under my supervision… but not by me. My concern was admittedly egocentric. I initially wanted my students to present a work product that could have been completed by me, evidenced by a facile grasp of industry jargon, and sporting complex critical analyses and flawless grammar, even if my work never actually achieved that level of quality.

The clear paradox is that even though companies, by partnering in these projects, are able to have work completed that otherwise may not have been, that work is assigned to a college undergrad with little or no experience in a corporate setting, and rarely exposure to a human resources department. The work is costing the company nothing in actual money spent and little in terms of time allocation. My expectation was that the work should be professional; I admittedly found myself the night before final presentations, heavily editing the students' drafts, changing simple phrasing to that of a seasoned practitioner.

Following Robertson's advice, I acknowledged the paradox, not only to myself but to the corporate sponsors and the students. I could not correct everything. Learning would only occur with risks taken, mistakes made and spectacular blunders such as a company name misspelled on every one of 25 PowerPoint slides. I now teach the tools to prevent the blunders from occurring. Class time is spent reviewing grammar check and change tracking tools in Microsoft Word, typically demonstrated by students. I request corporate sponsors to offer projects appropriate for entry level human resource employees and alert them that mistakes most likely will occur. “To teach is to learn twice” (Robertson, 2005, p. 189).

Step Six: Provide Opportunity for Clear, Comprehensive and Timely Evaluation and Feedback

Several semesters of HRM projects has shown me that students work better and receive more value from this course when expectations are clearly set. This is true as much for presentation guidelines as it is for evaluation and grading rubrics. Consequently, I review the evaluation forms (Appendix 3) and grading rubric (Appendix 4) with the students during the first month of class, as the projects get underway. They use this information to identify what they expect from themselves as well as their expectations of their teammates.

Students view evaluations as the most important aspect of the projects. The feedback from the organizational sponsors is constructive, specific and quantifiable, and useful as much to the instructor as to the students. Feedback from the instructor is also valuable to the student, as it integrates the instructor’s professional perspective on the organizational feedback with the course requirements and personal knowledge of the student’s skills and abilities.

As I noted earlier, one of the requirements to act as an organizational sponsor of an HRM project is the completion of evaluations by employees attending the final project presentation. The formal sponsor evaluation form does not relate to the research paper but focuses only the presentation and provides feedback on ten aspects of presentation skills and ten characteristics on the material content. Students examine the evaluation form each semester it is used and critique the format so to illicit the most constructive information possible.

Students are keenly interested in my feedback on their work, from content knowledge to dress to presentation skills. My feedback is guided by an evaluation form which is anecdotal and addresses the students’ efforts throughout the entire semester, as well as by a grading rubric which is points-based. I incorporate the paper and presentation guidelines into the entire evaluation, as well as the students’ ability to follow direction from the instructor and peers given during presentation rehearsals. I review the instructor evaluation form and grading with each student during a private feedback meeting. These meetings allow conversation about successes, challenges and frustrations, performance, team dynamics, but no negotiation on grades. A completed instructor evaluation form is attached as Appendix 5.

CONCLUSION

In the fall semester of 2010, I found myself in front of a class of 20 students, all enrolled in the capstone HRM course introducing the five experiential projects for the current semester. I had to turn away students in their junior year, to keep the class manageable, and turn down several requests from area businesses for projects, convincing them to hold off until the spring 2011 semester. The Six Steps once again provided guidance, as 15 of the 20 students were close friends through varsity athletics and all 15 wanted to work together…and shouldn’t. A review of the project requirements, evaluation forms and grading rubrics had some of these students rethinking their choice of partner and the rigor of these standards caused two students to drop the course. The first check-in was rampant with “no-clues”, but I sensed that the projects would be providing sheltered students with opportunities to experience actual, professional work assignments.

The community interest in the programs has led to newspaper coverage and college alumni magazine highlights. Such well known businesses as L.L.Bean, Unum, Fairchild Semiconductor and Woodard & Curran have names that catch students’ attention and add substance to their resumes. Admittedly my experiential courses have benefitted from the current economic need for operational staffing leverage within administrative departments such as human resources. The program has also been served by support of local Society for Human Resource Management chapter which made meetings open to students at no charge, encouraged corporate members to become project sponsors and sponsored a project as a meeting presentation on Social Networking Best Practices for Human Resources. Projects are currently scheduled through the spring semester of 2011 for each 300 and 400 level human resource management course. The projects have provided local companies with not only “free” research, but a clear perspective of Generation Y.

The long term impact of the project partnerships is now evident: full time positions have been offered to 7 students participating in the projects by their project sponsors; new annual giving relationships have been established with 4 of the corporate sponsors, and a “permanent” partnership has been established with a local hospital, resulting in an internship per semester and one each summer for human resource majors and two projects per semester for the upper level human resource courses.

Although the project processes, as reflected in the Six Steps, are continually evolving, the benefits of the curriculum have impacted the entire college. As Mark Cook, Director of Employee Benefits for L.L.Bean noted when discussing his company's role as an organizational sponsor of a 2010 project, ""It's work I didn't have to do and spend time on, and it was very helpful to me. … (this program is) at the forefront of connecting academics to the transition into the work world" (Hardiman, 2010). Andrew Paladino, a student enrolled in one of the 2009 HRM experiential courses, described much more simply and succinctly the impact of the course on him. "It prepared me for life after college" (Hardiman, 2010).

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Appendix 1: Project Statement Comparison

Fall 2007: Presentation Projects

1. Human Resource Metrics : Best practices on use of Metrics in HR departments
2. College Semiconductor Programs: schools with semiconductor related curriculums and the number and type of foreign nationals at these schools
3. Updates to H1B Visa Program Requirements: potential strategies/solutions to deal with our governments H-1B visa caps
4. Deemed Export Regulations: potential strategies/solutions with high tech companies to be in compliance with deemed exports to countries of concern
5. Executive Compensation Comparisons: Historical Research of CEO and Top 5 Executive Pay (Based, Bonus, Equity) against a select peer group using public 10-K and proxy filings

Spring 08 Projects

1. **Orientation Program** - evaluate BANK's current program and advise whether it is effective. If you determine it is not, develop ideas and a structure that would work better for new employees. BANK will provide the resources for students to use to conduct research with other community banks and survey BANK newly hired employees. Students will attend a BANK orientation program to give them an idea on what BANK includes and the paperwork that is involved.
2. **Recruiting venues**: what avenues, tools, media, etc to use to recruit successfully for banks. Where did the successful employees come from? New ideas for recruitment. Analysis of present techniques.
3. **Testing of BANK employment candidates**: is BANK testing adequate for hiring the right people? Analysis of what is being used now versus retention and success on the job; what do other banks and financial services use for testing; recommendations for revisions to current testing protocol. Comparative study of testing results, education and experience with retention and tenure on job. Determine patterns; report on findings, and make suggestions based on findings.
4. **Interview protocol**: What questions and techniques during interviews will best allow BANK to determine whether a candidate is qualified and will stay in the job? Research state-of-the-art interview techniques, analyze BANK's current interviewing, and recommend changes.

Spring 2009 Projects

Hospital Project: Recruitment and retention of Gen X and Y

a) What are some **specific** ways in which to recruit Generations X & Y to Hospital? What is the preferred source of communication- how can we best reach this target group? What benefits are important to this generation? What do they want to see in an advertisement and where should we advertise in order to get their attention? What are other companies – healthcare and non-healthcare - doing to target these generations? A survey taken from people of these generations is a requirement of this project.
b) After we have appropriately recruited Gens X & Y- how do we effectively retain them? With the baby boomers beginning to retire in larger quantities and the ever- unstable economy, what can we do to retain our Gen X & Y employees? What makes them stay with an organization/job?

Law Firm Project: Alternative methods for the recruitment of law students for summer associate and 1st year associate positions.

a) Conduct quantitative and qualitative research into the use of alternative recruitment methods by national law firms, with a focus on internet –based recruitment methods, including, but not limited to, the use of social media tools.
b) Conduct interview or survey based research with Law school career service offices into the recruitment methods observed and/or preferred by those offices.
c) Conduct interview or survey based research with current law students and current 1st year attorneys to determine the job search methods used and/or preferred for entry level attorney positions.
d) Develop an alternative recruitment methods plan for Law Firm, with the necessary detail and guidelines to enable the firm to impellent the pan for its 2009/2010 recruitment year beginning in August 2009
e) Implement the plan for its 2009/2010 recruitment year beginning in August 2009.

Appendix 2: Human Resource Projects Research Guide

Every project must involve these resources and research activities, if appropriate:

Recent academic research: look for data, conclusions, etc. Peer reviewed journals are necessary, and the better known, the better your audience will receive the information. Harvard Business Review and other business periodicals by the better known Universities are the place to start. Then, branch out widely. The Research Librarian is always a resource for your work and is aware of these project assignments.
Current trends – anecdotal rather than research based. Use SHRM, on-line and hard copy business periodicals, etc. Periodicals that can help you get started include The Wall Street Journal, Fortune, Forbes, Business Week, The Economist, as examples. Also consult industry trade groups (American Banking Association, etc) and any periodical that is relevant to the industry you are working within (Supermarket News, etc).
Generated data: Your own research into other companies' activities. Figure out what companies to approach, and do so as soon as possible. Let people know that you are working on a research project and if they need to hear from me, I am glad to get in touch and verify what you are doing. DON'T RELY ON EMAIL. You may have to make blind calls to companies or find a contact to get info. Feel free to use my office phone to make long distance calls and the fax in the Faculty Secretary's office is available to you, as well – just tell me and I will set it all up for you.
Legal considerations: Make sure to research recent lawsuits, challenges, new legislation, proposed legislation, etc. regardless of your project topic. You might even want to interview an employment lawyer or two – see me for suggestions.
Examples: Be ready to have examples of what you are recommending, whether in hard copy, online demonstrations, videos, etc. Think about this now so you get copies of what you need. Be creative.

Appendix 3: Presentation evaluation form

Project Sponsor and Title: Student name(s): Presentation date:

PRESENTATION SKILLS Ratings:	1 (low)	2	3	4	5 (high)
1. Topic Knowledge	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Ability to stay focused on the topic	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Ability to hold your interest	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. Pace of presentation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. Effective responses to questions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. Use of relevant examples	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. Clarity of spoken words	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. Evidence of preparation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. Use of eye contact, gestures, voice	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10. Overall presentation performance	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

OVERALL MATERIAL CONTENT Ratings:	1 (low)	2	3	4	5 (high)
1. Organization of materials	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Usefulness of information presented	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Ability to hold your interest	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. Clarity of information	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. Content of responses to questions	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. Use of time	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. Formatting and relevancy of slides	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. Creativity and originality	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. Accuracy of information	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10. Overall material content	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Comments on overall material content: What parts of this presentation were most helpful? What parts of this presentation were least helpful? Suggestions for the presenters: **ADDITIONAL FEEDBACK**: This presentation is representative of the focus of an experiential upper-level course in the Human Resource major within the Business Dept. at St. Joseph's College. Students are, for often the 1st time, exposed to actual issues challenging human resource departments and to the daily workings of businesses. Any feedback you have for the students or the instructor, particularly suggestions for improvement, are very much appreciated.

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Appendix 4: Grading Rubric for HRM Experiential Projects

1. **Individual Effort**: Everyone gets graded individually on the effort he/she puts into the project: Seriousness, attitude, sense of urgency, meeting deadlines, responding to what is required and suggested, effective team member. 25 points
2. **PowerPoint**: Shared grade: The PowerPoint presentation guidelines must be followed. In addition, demonstrate professionalism, creativity, techniques to keep people's attention. 25 points
3. **Paper**: Shared grade: You must follow the paper format requirements. Each grammatical error (including spelling) in the final paper will result in a one point reduction in the paper grade. 25 points
4. **Presentation**: individual grade: looking for confidence, expertise on the material, evidence that the role in the presentation has been practiced; clear and articulate presentation; good use of slides; organization; ability to answer questions reflecting knowledge of your material. 25 points

The final project grade is an average of these 4.

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Appendix 5: Instructor Evaluation

Project evaluation and grade Student: John Doe Project: **Wellness ROI – COMPANY**

Individual Effort: John Doe, I appreciated your enthusiasm and interest. You do need to know, though, that of all of the evaluations that mentioned a part of the presentation that was least helpful, all but one noted that it was your food section. The audience did not see a clear connection between the nutritional section and the ROI research to support **COMPANY**'s wellness program. I do believe this happened because there was nothing about **COMPANY** that you specifically mentioned having to do with nutrition. I had suggested to you a number of times that you talk about nutrition-related actions the company could take, like addressing the content of their vending machines, but you never introduced that focus on the company. In addition, you were very slow to do the research on ROI and how it related to nutrition, to the point that I virtually ended up doing it for you…which IS NOT my role. I did a simple Google search – it wasn't even an EBSCO search through the library database - and I found two very current presentations that contained some of the information you needed…which, unfortunately, you did not use to its fullest potential in your section. Additional constructive feedback I have is that you should have, *as a team*, paid more attention to Guest Speaker's presentation and what he planned to do. Guest Speaker was mentioned in one evaluation as the part of the presentation that was least helpful. All others mentioned the food section. **Grade: 80**

PowerPoint The PowerPoint point was generally creative, used a good mix of text, charts, data and video and related well to the points you were making to the audience. It flowed well, was organized logically and was an interesting part of the entire presentation. John Doe, your slides could have used more variety and creativity – talking about foods and nutrition, you had a good opportunity for pictures, videos, etc. **Grade: 90**

Paper: The paper took many drafts to get to the final product, but that product was excellent. The paper followed well, was well researched, after some considerable prodding by me, and was formatted in a way that made it easy to read and understand. The one part of the paper that was missing is a discussion of the plan that COMPANY was implementing in January. Ideally, you should have contacted the company and integrated that information into your paper and therefore your presentation. The issue that I have with the process of creating the paper was the need for TEAMMATE 1 to rewrite the short term ROI section and the lack of research and writing that was done by TEAMMATE 2. The section written by TEAMMATE 2 was confusing, poorly organized and used wording that was awkward. From what I can tell, instead of bringing the paper to the writing center and redoing it, nothing was done until TEAMMATE 1 simply re-did the entire section. This is unacceptable as far as the responsibility of the team for the production of the final paper. I am going to consider this, in part, in the grade for the paper as well as in the grade of individual effort for various team members. **Grade: 90**

Presentation: John Doe, your presentation was good and you demonstrated some solid expertise in your subject matter. You knew your material well, but relied on your note cards too much, sometimes losing track of your place in slides. The evaluations note this tendency a number of times. The evaluations also note that you went into too much detail with the food (recipes) and not enough detail on what they were interested in (ROI). **Grade: 85** **Project grade: 86**