**It’s all about the students…or is it?**

Business administration programs and educators are perfectly positioned to engage students in real life-real time experiences. We are surrounded by business owners and public officials who welcome student participation and observation, and often challenge them to recommend (and justify) viable alternative solutions to problems. In a symbiotic way, it is also an opportunity for members of the communities to “give back” to our students.

One successful strategy I utilized during my tenure as an educator was to create projects that required student teams to interact in some way with their respective communities. The requirements of the project assignments would range from simple observations to full data collection, analysis, recommendations, and reporting back to the clients. Clearly, the students came away with new insights ranging from the practical recognition of the work it takes to create something an organization wants and will use to an understanding of the varying skills and levels of motivation team members bring to the table. In addition to the practical applications, students were required to conduct a scholarly research of the literature to support and defend their recommendations and put their experiences into context.

As the course facilitator, I also gained a great deal from these projects. First, I had to be very clear about what I wanted the students to learn. This was accomplished by establishing practical student learning outcomes for each project. Then, community partners needed to be identified and contacted, which required me to keep my networking skills current and my social capital account “full.” Depending on the university’s policies, I often had to clear the project with the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which helped me stay abreast of human subject research requirements. As projects got underway, I was never quite sure what issues would arise, giving me the opportunity to use my communication and public relations skills. Finally, I needed to stay organized and well-informed, managerial functions that are essential to the success of any team project.

The annual case study competition held by IACBE provides all of the above benefits to students and to their faculty advisors who have helped them prepare. In addition to the normal preparation for a case presentation, participants must also raise the funds and arrange the logistics long-distance trips require. It is true that, after investing so much in terms of time, emotion, and energy, a team can’t help but be disappointed if they don’t win; however, in my view, the experience itself is a win—for everyone.

This special issue of JEBE is intended to share the insights gained and lessons learned by some of the participants of this extraordinary event.

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