

The University of Central Missouri Integrative Business Experience: An Intensive, Hands-on Foundation for Undergraduate Business Education

The Integrative Business Experience (IBE) is highly effective in building students' understanding of the "big picture" of how businesses operate because two key factors. First, it is an integral part of the core business curriculum. During the first semester of their junior year, IBE students are required to concurrently enroll in three junior-level core business courses (Marketing, Management, and Information Systems) and a practicum course in which IBE students are required to create and manage two significant enterprises: an actual start-up company (based on a bank loan of up to \$5,000) and a hands-on community service project. Second, because the content coverage and many of the assignments in the core courses are specifically sequenced to support students in organizing and managing their business and service ventures, students are able to make the conceptual connections across disciplines as a natural consequence of *using concepts and tools from all three core courses* to guide their decisions in the business and service organizations. In addition, students have the opportunity to: 1) develop interpersonal and group-interaction skills in a work-like setting, and 2) develop critical thinking skills through their experience in trying to apply key business concepts and analytical tools to solve a wide range of unstructured, but very real business problems.

IBE Program Elements

- 1) Students must simultaneously enroll in and be responsible for mastering the concepts of three required junior-level core business courses—Management, Marketing, and Information Systems (plus a three-hour Entrepreneurship and Community Service Practicum).
- 2) Students learn in classes in which the instruction is delivered using Team-Based Learning. Thus, instead of listening to lectures, most of their in-class time is spent working in a 5 to 7-member learning team that remains stable across the core courses for the entire semester.
- 3) Students work as an "employee" of a 20 to 35-member company that becomes a "laboratory" in which they apply concepts from the core business disciplines as they engage in two ventures—a start-up business and a service project on behalf of a non-profit community organization.
- 4) Students spend the first 7 weeks developing a business plan for a start-up company whose profits are used to finance a hands-on community service project. The plan is then be presented to a loan review committee (First Community Bank officers and local entrepreneurs) to obtain the capital (real money up to \$5,000) needed to implement their plan.
- 5) Students implement their business plan (i.e., they have 6-7 weeks to do enough business to pay off their loan and expenses and generate enough profit to finance their service work).
- 6) Students create a program portfolio that contains reflections on their experience and includes a set of "artifacts" that will enable them to communicate their what they have learned to potential employers.

IBE Program Outcomes

At the University of Central Missouri, a total of 380 students participated in IBE between the first pilot in the spring semester of 2004 and the spring semester of 2008. These students formed and managed 20 remarkably successful companies. In total:

- 1) IBE student businesses received \$57,911 in loans and have generated a total revenue of \$185,431 and a total net profit of \$105,135.
- 2) Community service and/or voluntary non-profit organizations received:
 - o \$105,135 in direct financial support from the profits of IBE student businesses.
 - o 4,298 hours of community service from IBE student-organized activities and projects.

The key to the success of IBE is that the practicum experience produces an extremely high level of student engagement in the learning process. As one UCM student put it, "It's one thing to talk about a business plan or even write one (that's what we do in other classes), but it's something else to have to generate an idea from scratch and turn it into a profitable business—all in 15 weeks."

For Additional Information on IBE

Contact Dr. Larry Michaelsen at lmichaelsen@ucmo.edu (660) 543-4124 or visit

<http://www.ucmo.edu/news/ibe07.cfm> -- a news release on the IBE companies in Fall 07

http://www.ucmo.edu/Media/tv_ibe_60_final_256K.wmv -- a 60-second TV add featuring IBE

<http://ibe.ucmo.edu> -- the official UCM/IBE website