

COMPETENCY AND PROJECT BASED BACHELORS OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

Brian K. Jorgensen, Nancy Panos-Schmitt, and Joel Watson,
Gore School of Business, Westminster College, 1840 S. 1300 East, Salt Lake City, UT 84105;
bjorgensen@westminstercollege.edu, npshmitt@westminstercollege.edu,
jwatson@westminstercollege.edu

ABSTRACT

This special session presents and discusses a unique project-based degree completion program in business, the Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) for working professionals who have previously acquired associates degrees. The students for whom this program has been designed differ from traditional students in that they are older and more likely to be engaged in demanding jobs or careers. Moreover, many adult learners learn better through experiences and projects than through traditional classroom sessions. Hence, the program described here and currently being implemented at Westminster College is a project-based integration of the important business concepts.

In the session we will:

- present the theory and reasoning behind the development of the program,
- introduce and describe the program itself,
- more fully explore the way in which marketing education is woven into the program,
- address successes and challenges of the program to this point, and
- discuss and answer questions from session participants.

While traditional programs at Westminster College rely heavily on classroom-based learning, this program uses a markedly different pedagogy best described as an experiential approach. Students combine learning and mentorship provided by Westminster College faculty with previously achieved life and professional learning to complete a series of projects that demonstrate mastery of program learning goals and competencies. Learning in this program does not occur in a classroom environment; instead, it occurs through interactions with faculty as students complete learning experiences largely delivered via the web. Students also come to campus for residencies - - two day intensive workshops with students and faculty - - that augment their learning and to foster relationships between peers, faculty, and the college.

The manner in which learning occurs is clearly different in this program, and is best illustrated

through an example. When a student enters the program, they attend an orientation session. This two-day orientation is an opportunity for students to meet with faculty, meet others in the program and to receive instruction about progression through the program. At that point, each student meets with their Program Mentor, a full-time faculty member the student will work with throughout their time in the program. The student will subsequently use a series of learning experiences – seminars, readings, workshops, videos, or other material – to augment their existing knowledge and to successfully complete the project. When a student completes a project, that project is evaluated by a Project Coach, a full-time faculty member assigned responsibility for one of the five Major Projects, who evaluates the performance on the project according to a pre-established rubric. If a student successfully demonstrates mastery, they move to the next project; if they do not, they are given specific feedback with additional recommendations for learning experiences, and then allowed to recomplete the project.

The learning goals and competencies expected of students in this competency and project-based program are highly aligned with the College's traditional business program. The primary difference between programs is where student learning occurs and the role of the faculty member. In traditional programs, learning is heavily dependent on the classroom; in this program, learning occurs with the student working on faculty-designed learning experiences with faculty coaching and mentorship outside the classroom. However, it should be noted that in the end, learning should be the same in either case. A second difference between this program and traditional programs is the orientation to a series of projects for measurement of student learning. This program requires that all students (regardless of prior experience) complete all projects to demonstrate mastery of competencies and learning goals. The projects are designed for students to demonstrate their knowledge of a concept and **demonstrate** their use of this knowledge in a business context. This requires a synthesis of learning.

PROJECTS

The projects in this program are the means by which students demonstrate their learning. Projects are built on five major tracks. These tracks are based on the structure of the current undergrad program, national business curricula, and business needs. The tracks require students to place themselves within the business organization, analyze the internal operation of a company, examine and respond to external market factors, and develop strategies for leading the company. The projects within a track are designed to build upon this same structure (self, business, markets, and strategy) within a specific track. As a result, the projects continually build upon prior learning. The final project is student directed to allow for greater focus on skills they wish to develop further and/or ideas they wish to investigate. The resulting project integrates all the prior learning in a rich and meaningful experience for the student.

Projects are designed around the clustering of specific competencies. Students learn certain aspects of a competency and are prepared to complete a project by coupling this knowledge with

their previous knowledge and experience. The integrative projects are particularly important as they integrate most if not all of the competencies developed in the earlier projects. At the end of the program students will have demonstrated mastery of all learning goals and competencies numerous times.

An important component of the program is the residencies. For each project sequence, there is one on-campus residency that students must attend. During the residency, students gain additional knowledge about the project, spend time interacting with students and faculty, and have opportunities to practice techniques that work best in a face-to-face or group format.

CONCLUSION

This new program promises to fill a gap between the educational needs of a particular group of students and the educational offerings of most business programs. It requires a new way of thinking and a new way of interacting for marketing and other business faculty. Nevertheless, a program like this offers substantial rewards to both students and faculty.