

## **IMPROVING STUDENT LEARNING IN SERVICE MARKETING: BETTER BUSINESS BUREAU CUSTOMER SERVICE AWARD**

**Jeffery M. Ferguson, College of Business and Administration, University of Colorado at Colorado Springs,  
1420 Austin Bluffs Parkway, Colorado Springs, CO 80918; jferguso@uccs.edu**

**Tracy L. Gonzalez-Padron, College of Business and Administration, University of Colorado at Colorado  
Springs, 1420 Austin Bluffs Parkway, Colorado Springs, CO 80918; tgonzale@uccs.edu**

**Carrie Anne Oyloe, Windstar Studios, Inc., 525 Communications Circle, Colorado Springs, CO 80905;  
carrie@windstarstudios.com**

### **ABSTRACT**

By their very nature service marketing courses lend themselves to experiential learning. Most often, students are both service consumers and service employees providing them with significant opportunities to understand how their own experiences relate to course concepts and tools (Gremmler et al. 2000). Experiential learning capitalizes on existing student experiences to enhance student engagement and participation in the learning process. Bobbit et al. (2000) suggest that instructors should create a learning environment in which students actively participate in the learning process. Application projects supply such an opportunity. This paper describes an experiential team project that has students work with the local Better Business Bureau (BBB) to assist businesses in completing an application for their Excellence in Customer Service Award (EICS).

#### **WHAT IS THE EXCELLENCE IN CUSTOMER SERVICE AWARD?**

The BBB established the Excellence in Customer Service award to honor the best customer service programs in their region. The local program is a comprehensive exercise for applicants to analyze and enhance their customer service initiatives and promote the adoption of a continuous improvement philosophy throughout their organizations. The award uses rigorous evaluation criteria based on the prestigious Bald ridge National Quality Program.

#### **STUDENTS' ROLE IN EICS**

The student's role in this program is to serve as consultants to complete a service audit based on the EICS Award criteria as part of a services marketing

course. Students spend considerable time interacting with managers to help understand,

clarify, document, and recommend improvements in service execution. Students share examples of best practices and recommend processes to assist the applicant businesses.

#### **IN-CLASS SUPPORT FOR EICS**

Student effort is organized and facilitated through a formal action plan that has students work with clients to answer questions related to the award criteria. In addition, class time is allocated for the exploration and application of service tools and concepts. Each week in class the students complete an exercise directly related to the individual service audits. These exercises reinforce the link between the course and the project.

#### **VALUE TO STUDENTS AND BUSINESSES**

The key benefits both students include: a) experience applying service marketing concepts in real world setting, b) opportunity to interact as consultants with business managers at a higher level in the organization, c) development of analytical, critical thinking, and problem solving skills, d) opportunity to network with business leaders in client companies and BBB, and e) experience management culture first hand.

For businesses the key benefits are: a) objective outside examination of service operations, b) analysis, documentation, and recommendations on service operations, c) opportunity to explore new ideas and tools in customer service, and d) assistance in areas of business where business lacks expertise.

**References available on request**