

# Journal of Business & Leadership: Research, Practice, and Teaching (2005-2012)

---

Volume 8  
Number 1 *Journal of Business & Leadership*

Article 6

---

1-1-2012

## The Business Core Application Seminar: Using Student Teams and Integrated Projects To Leverage Learning and Build Soft Skills

Elizabeth Towell  
*Northern Illinois University*

Kenneth Elliott  
*Northern Illinois University*

Barbara Fox  
*Northern Illinois University*

Joan Petros  
*Northern Illinois University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/jbl>



Part of the [Business Commons](#), and the [Education Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Towell, Elizabeth; Elliott, Kenneth; Fox, Barbara; and Petros, Joan (2012) "The Business Core Application Seminar: Using Student Teams and Integrated Projects To Leverage Learning and Build Soft Skills," *Journal of Business & Leadership: Research, Practice, and Teaching (2005-2012)*: Vol. 8: No. 1, Article 6. DOI: 10.58809/JZDA1938  
Available at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/jbl/vol8/iss1/6>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Peer-Reviewed Journals at FHSU Scholars Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Business & Leadership: Research, Practice, and Teaching (2005-2012)* by an authorized editor of FHSU Scholars Repository. For more information, please contact [ScholarsRepository@fhsu.edu](mailto:ScholarsRepository@fhsu.edu).

## THE BUSINESS CORE APPLICATION SEMINAR: USING STUDENT TEAMS AND INTEGRATED PROJECTS TO LEVERAGE LEARNING AND BUILD SOFT SKILLS

Elizabeth Towell, Northern Illinois University

Kenneth Elliott, Northern Illinois University

Barbara Fox, Northern Illinois University

Joan Petros, Northern Illinois University

*This paper proposes an upper division business course, The Business Core Application Seminar, which supports three related notions in business education: integrated learning, active learning and the development of soft skills. The course encompasses a variety of student team projects culminating in a Global Expansion Feasibility Project which is described in detail. The course described has been delivered at a major Midwestern university for many years and was recently recognized in an AACSB competition as utilizing creative and unique strategies for advancing the quality of education in business schools.*

### INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses an award-winning upper division Business Core Application Seminar and describes key projects as they are mapped to desirable learning outcomes.

In the first half of the 20th century, business schools were considered to be trade schools with the singular mission of preparing practitioners. In the booming postwar economy of the late '50's, both Ford and Carnegie foundations provided funding for improvements in business school research and theory, and business schools at leading universities began to develop significant academic underpinnings. Since that time, business schools have claimed a dual mission of educating practitioners and creating knowledge through research. This has frequently led to criticism of business schools and business school faculty as overemphasizing theory and neglecting real world experience (Bennis and O'Toole, 2005). While business school enrollments have grown rapidly there is debate as to how effectively business schools prepare students for business careers and even whether business school research influences management practice (Pfeffer and Fong, 2002). It is important to note here that authors of this paper believe that academic expertise exists that can and does influence management. Practitioners should look to academics to provide the kind of curricular innovation necessary to support the tremendous changes that have occurred in terms of how businesses operate. We believe, however, there is a need for more development in terms of how business students are educated. A junior level course is described which includes a semester-long, set of team-based student projects. These projects help students apply the business core content to a real-world scenario.

### INTEGRATION IN THE BUSINESS CORE

A number of reasons have been offered for integrating the core disciplines in business schools. Almost without exception the principal reason given is based on changes that

have occurred in the business world today. Common organizational issues span multiple disciplines and cross-functional teams in the work place are now commonplace (DeMoranville, Aurand, and Gordon 2000). An integrated B.S. curriculum reflects these interrelationships and interdependencies and prepares students to work more effectively in organizations. Indeed, curricular integration in the business core is encouraged by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), the premier accrediting body for business schools. The AACSB asks "How do (your) degree programs achieve integration of core areas and include application of cross-functional approaches to organizational issues?" (AACSB, A Self-Assessment Primer for PreAccreditation, p. 16). This movement towards the cross-functional approach has been reinforced by the business community, especially small businesses. The vast majority of new businesses are small businesses. An integrated curriculum especially lends itself to employees working in entrepreneurial or small business organizations. Even very large corporations, however, see the benefit of cross-functional approaches to instruction. Corporate leaders such as General Electric have funded major educational reform based on team-based or cross-disciplinary courses (Brunel and Hibbard, 2006). In companies both large and small, the transformational role of technology (Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software for example) has further blurred the disciplinary boundaries (Management Education at Risk, AACSB, 2002).

It is surprising then, that most business schools continue to teach the core business principles in stand-alone discipline-based courses (Athavale, Myring, Davis, Truell, 2010). Business schools lag behind the business community in moving from a functional orientation to a process orientation (Buttermore, 2011). Approximately 23% of AACSB accredited programs are integrating functional disciplines in their curriculum (Athavale, Myring, Davis, Truell, 2010).

There are opponents to the integration of core business principles (Borin, 2004; Hartenian, Schellenger &



Frederickson, 2001; Campbell, Heriot & Finney, 2006). Practical problems cited include resources, academic freedom, credit hour determination, transfer credit, assessment, time, and commitment. Others suggest that you have to establish functional area expertise before it is possible to integrate across those areas. One might argue, however, that you cannot teach the functional areas without some degree of integration with other core business areas. In that case, we feel strongly that this integration should be orchestrated and intentional. Researchers have studied the most successful approaches to this integration. Buttermore (2011) suggests several critical success factors for success in

delivering integrated business curriculum including the right people, unwavering support by faculty and administrators, good planning, and the right infrastructure. There are a variety of methods employed to integrate the business core including integrated tools (e.g. ERP or simulation software), real-world business management, comprehensive cases, project-based or experiential learning courses, and use of current topics in multiple courses. Integrated courses can be taught as a block or in lock step fashion. A number of highly ranked business schools now integrate the core principles in the upper division – junior and senior years (see Table 1).

TABLE 1

**Examples of Business Schools with Integrated Curriculum in the Upper Division  
(Junior and Senior Years)**

<b>Business School</b>	<b>Curriculum Description</b>
Boston University	Cross functional core (FINA, IS, MKTG, OM), students complete new product development project
Indiana University - Bloomington	2 credit discussion taken with FINA, MGMT, MKTG, and OM, students are assigned culminating case study
College of William and Mary	Integrated foundation semester 11 credits (MKTG, computer skills, MGMT, Process Management) curriculum involves simulations, presentations, corporate memorandum, business strategy
Cedarville University	1 credit course integrating material from separate courses in MKTG, MGMT, and FINA, where students run their own company
University of Virginia	12 credits in fall and 9 credits in spring integrated core seminar taught to blocks of 40 students junior year
University of Oklahoma	Participation in the First Fidelity Integrated Business Core involves launching a real business which satisfies MGMT, MKTG, and Legal Environment requirements
Northern Illinois University	9 credit block (FINA, OM, MGMT, MKTG) plus 3 credit application seminar

Other schools are making integration of principles in the lower division a priority. Kansas State University (KSU) and Bloomsburg University of PA (BU) have both redesigned freshman level courses to tackle integration in the earlier stages of the academic career. KSU's GENBA110 is a freshman level foundation of business course that is facilitated by more advanced student ambassadors. A central goal of the College of Business Education at KSU is to make each course in the curriculum as multidisciplinary in scope as possible. This is, of course, may be more possible in behavioral disciplines such as marketing and less possible in technical courses such as accounting.

BU has also revamped its freshman level Intro to Business BSED 101 to be much more integrative than in the

past. This course is part of a brand new endowed Zeigler Institute for Professional Development (ZIPD). ZIPD helps students cultivate professional skill sets while developing a deeper understanding of how the functional areas of business interrelate. Eventually ZIPD will systematically prepare students across all four years to gain a better understanding of the interconnectedness of the primary areas in business documented in a portfolio. Freshmen develop their first business plan and attend a business conference as well as working on goal setting, career exploration, values exploration, and networking.



## THE BUSINESS CORE APPLICATION SEMINAR

The College of Business at a major Midwestern university (MMU) is broadly recognized for innovative programming related to ethics initiatives, experiential learning and integrated curriculum. MMU is near a very large U.S. city and has strong connections to its alumni in the region and throughout the U.S. The College of Business (COB) strives to achieve its tagline, "where the classroom meets the business world." Business alumni visit the college on a daily basis for projects, presentations, interviews, advisory board meetings, and a variety of other reasons.

Over the past 15 years, the College of Business at MMU, has delivered the Business Core content in a nine credit integrated lecture course, UBUS310 (Bishop et al, 1998). An additional three credit Business Core Applications Seminar, UBUS311, was designed to be supplementary and complementary to UBUS310. The first iterations of UBUS311 started with a combination of a large number of small group sessions and a pooling of those small group sessions into a large group lecture. Students attended one small group session per week and one large group session on the same day, providing three contact hours each week for UBUS311. The three UBUS311 instructors, known as Team Leaders, each taught six small group sessions each week, typically organized around three small group sessions on Tuesdays and three different small group sessions on Thursday. From the beginning, the three Team Leaders attended and participated in the large group sessions, also on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The Team Leaders who were recruited were Professionally Qualified (PQ) practitioners hired to bring their business experience into the classroom. They operated similar to a self-managed work team and were housed in a common office with tables and chairs to accommodate meeting with student teams. They did their own grading but coordinated grading of each project and compared results. This overall structure for UBUS311 remains in place today.

The UBUS 311 experience takes place during the student's junior year. It requires students to apply their cross functional knowledge of core business principles to problem solving projects which simulate real world scenarios. Their soft skills and self-confidence are elevated by working on challenging projects and being assigned to a team for the entire semester. Ethical decision-making is introduced to help students understand business decisions and potential ethical dilemmas that may occur.

The planning, coordination, and execution of the small group sessions of UBUS311 are under the control of the Team Leaders. The large group sessions of UBUS311 are coordinated with the professors teaching the nine credit Business Core (UBUS310). In the early years, the large group session for the Business Core Applications Seminar was viewed as a recitation for the Business Core content. Over time, the subject content of the Business Core

Application Seminar large group sessions evolved to its current focus on delivering support information for the small group session exercises.

Two of the three major applications projects developed for UBUS311 in the early years are still found today, some fifteen years later. Case Analysis remains one of the major pedagogical tools that get the students actively engaged in applying the concepts from the Business Core lectures. The second major project that has survived the test of time is a Global Expansion Feasibility Project. Student teams are assigned a country and a product line. They investigate the feasibility of expansion with that product line in that country for a hypothetical firm that has been historically only operated within the United States. This project is explored in greater detail in the fourth section of this paper.

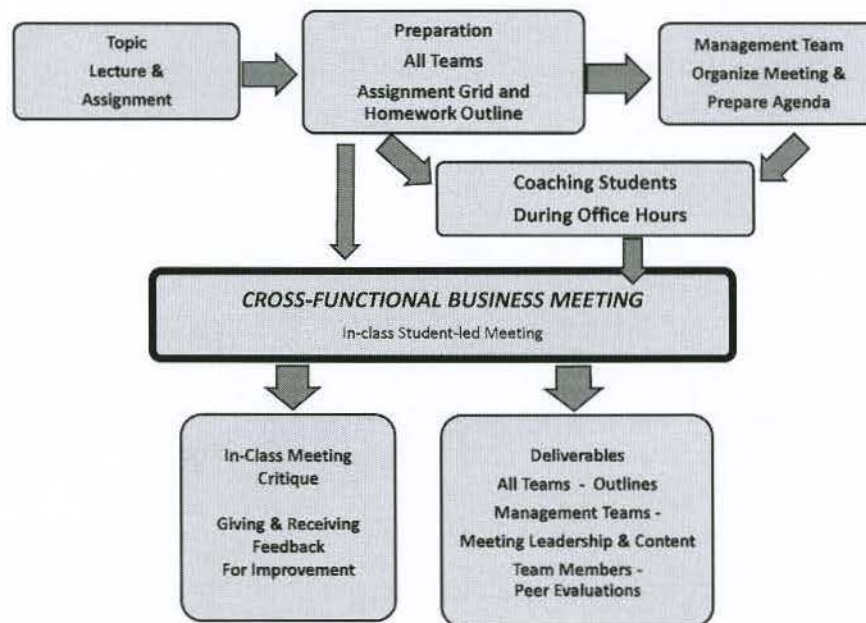
Development of the Business Core Applications Seminar in the early years included some underlying objectives that the Team Leaders felt were essential to the understanding of the Business Core subject areas. These "soft skills" are considered essential for business success. Oral presentation and written communications skills have been evaluated by the Team Leaders from the beginning. Student teams have been used from the beginning to work on the application projects. Role playing and active student involvement in the learning process have consistently been included in the application process. With the advancement of computer technology, development of computer skills, especially the use of Microsoft Office Excel, became part of the underlying objectives.

The Case Analysis and the Global Expansion Feasibility Study projects have been integral parts of the Business Core Applications Seminar, UBUS311, from the beginning. The third major project has been the most dynamic over the years. Initially the course included a second round of case analysis presentations. The second case analysis gave way to a series of four current event topics. Each week a team was responsible for making a presentation in the small group sessions on the assigned readings on the topic and/or role playing, followed by open discussion. The current event topic presentations have evolved into the current format of a four week sequence of Cross Functional Business Meetings. Each Business Meeting addresses a current business scenario. Each of the four teams in a small group section is responsible for role playing one of the four functional areas covered in the Business Core. The team role playing the Management Team has a dual responsibility for leading the class in a 45-minute business meeting and representing the management function. Specific goals and objectives are established for each week's business meeting. Goals and objectives are aimed at guiding the teams in a problem solving approach to address issues developed in the scenarios. Each of the teams is tasked to represent its assigned functional area's perspective during the problem solving process (Figure 1).



FIGURE 1

## Cross-Functional Business Meetings Project



Over time the Cross Functional Business Meeting Project has developed as a reinforcement of the decision-making process introduced in the Case Analysis Project. The initial Business Meeting reinforces understanding the current situation and environmental analysis as the student teams identify and discuss issues encountered by the target company. Student teams then develop alternative solutions leading to the selection of a recommendation for the target company. The second Business Meeting focuses on the evaluation of alternative solutions, employing decision criteria, leading to a decision and its justification. The third Business Meeting focuses on the development of implementation plans. The fourth Business Meeting elicits a cross-functional discussion on whether the target company should be acquired as an application of the financial valuation of a firm.

The Cross Functional Business Meeting Project provides some unique opportunities to the students. First, all students are actively involved in the business meetings. Students have to prepare prior to the meeting. This typically involves some detailed discussion of the topic within the team. Students gain a deeper understanding of the role of each functional area in making business decisions. Students of all majors are learning from each other in open dialog and students must assume a leadership role in leading the business meeting. Students are also experiencing a decision making process first hand while experiencing how meetings

are conducted in the business world. The meetings are critiqued each week by the class and the Team Leader at the end of each session.

The Business Core Applications Seminar continuously evolves. Continuous improvement keeps the material fresh and relevant in meeting the needs of our students and the needs of companies looking to hire them. The flexibility and adaptability built into this course keep the College alert to the changing environment and the adjustments needed to prepare the business leaders of tomorrow. One of the more recent targets of change is the inclusion of ethical dilemmas in each of the projects. Due to an observed overall gap in understanding the differences between business decisions and potential ethical dilemmas, the identification of potential ethical dilemmas was added to assignments and discussions throughout the semester.

The timing of UBUS311 is critical to provide soft skills during the junior year, prior to interviews for internships and senior level courses, such as the business capstone course where faculty demand advanced skills. An immediate benefit perceived by students is that they have a better idea about what to expect when placed in an actual job-related situation and are able to use these experiences to create more polished performances in subsequent courses and professional activities.

In UBUS 311, students form teams at the start of the semester and remain on their team for the entire semester. A



Team Charter is developed by team members to document work performance expectations for group assignments. It is used throughout the semester to facilitate discussion of team achievements and issues. Team members are accountable to one another. Individual grades are impacted by perceived lack of effort or performance. Reading and responding to a Business Code of Conduct are also required.

At the end of the semester, each team evaluates its performance and scores itself based on the Team Charter.

A peer evaluation is also completed by each individual to assess the contributions of every member of their team for the entire semester. The following evaluation categories are scored: Analysis/Creativity, Contribution, Effort, Reliability/Cooperation, and Achievement.

The UBUS311 course is an integral part of the College of Business Assurance of Learning process. All four of the College of Business learning goals are addressed in the projects in the course curriculum (Table 2).

TABLE 2

### Assurance of Learning - UBUS311 Helps Achieve the COB Undergraduate Learning Goals and Objectives

College of Business Assurance of Learning	
Learning Goals Our graduates will....	Primary Active Learning Activities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be effective business communicators</li> <li>• Demonstrate business ethical awareness</li> <li>• Demonstrate problem solving skills</li> <li>• Demonstrate common business knowledge</li> </ul>	<div style="display: flex; align-items: center;"> <div style="font-size: 3em; margin-right: 10px;">}</div> <div> <p>Case Analysis Project*</p> <p>Cross Functional Business Meetings (4)*</p> <p>Global Project*</p> </div> </div> <p>*Each project supports all four learning goals.</p>

### DISCUSSION OF GLOBAL EXPANSION FEASIBILITY PROJECT

The Global Expansion Feasibility Study is a comprehensive cross-functional team project covering components of the Business Core curriculum. Throughout the course and culminating in the Global Expansion Feasibility Project, the principles students learn in the Business Core are incorporated into their thinking and vocabulary. Their self-confidence, teamwork, willingness to ask questions and consider alternatives prepares them for

upper level courses. The project gives them a robust "real world" experience that builds their appreciation for the complexity of foreign operations and provides job-related experiences in the classroom.

The Global Expansion Feasibility Study represents a comprehensive application utilizing all functional areas of business core studies (Figure 2). Throughout the semester, the cross-functional application of business issues embedded in the projects preceding this assignment, serve to build the skills and understanding necessary to execute this project.

FIGURE 2

### Global Expansion Feasibility Study - A Cross Functional Approach





Students derive many benefits by navigating their way through a challenging and complex project at the junior level of their academic experience. As student teams work through the various phases of the project, they learn to manage ambiguity, perform research using information, organize and follow-through on assigned tasks, seek help from various sources, develop their own recommendations, and communicate creatively. For some students, there may

be frustration as they struggle to find the right source of information, reach consensus, or engage in equal distribution of efforts. However, others are invigorated by the challenges. On presentation day, most students rise above the details and present surprisingly well. As students reflect on the journey, they have a great sense of pride and satisfaction in what they have accomplished (Table 3).

TABLE 3

## Global Expansion Feasibility Study - Student Quotes from Fall Semester 2011

---

*"It really made it so we needed to work with our group and figure out if it was possible to expand and why."*  
*"It gave me an opportunity to work with wonderful people and increase my knowledge of international business."*  
*"I developed my public speaking skills and problem solving skills."*  
*"It was interesting to learn about all of the things you need to think about when expanding a business."*  
*"The paper was extremely difficult, but the whole project was definitely a great experience."*  
*"It was difficult work, but it allowed us to take everything we learned and put it to use."*  
*"It allowed me to apply all the things I was learning in class into a real-life example."*  
*"I feel like this was the whole point of the class. Everything we were taught went into a final presentation."*  
*"The project and article analysis greatly contributed to my research, problems solving and people skills."*  
*"The article analysis was fun and interesting. The presentation and paper were stressful and challenging, but I learned a lot."*

---

To complete the project, student teams must select a product, perform industry and country research, and write and present a formal report. The deliverables in this project also allow students the opportunity to further strengthen soft skills such as teamwork and public speaking.

The business scenario requires team members to assume they are presently employed by a fictitious successful U.S. manufacturing company, which currently conducts only domestic operations within a certain industry. The company desires sales growth and increased profits via expansion within the same industry into a specific foreign country. The objective is to recommend business activities that will allow the company to gain a competitive advantage and to recommend if and how the company should establish a foreign presence. Students are required to study and apply concepts from all core business curriculum areas and to move the study from a project plan to a specific set of "go" or "no go" recommendations including an implementation plan.

The required project components are sequenced over the entire semester with the highest demands occurring during the second half of the term (Figure 3). Specific content areas and skill building is aligned over the entire semester via various projects and team experiences. This progressive learning approach ultimately brings all acquired knowledge and skills into one final project. The entire project includes both team and individual components and is worth

approximately 33% of the course grade. The learning objectives for the Global Expansion Feasibility Study are noted in Table 4.

Areas of particular interest include the use of marketing decision criteria to evaluate desired attributes for a foreign marketplace and the potential to increase sales by gaining more customers in an underserved market. The criteria include applying the 5 Ps of marketing, identifying a desired target market of direct customers, and an understanding of the end consumers who ultimately drive demand. The impact of local culture on market acceptance is considered an important variable for consideration. The selection of an appropriate business form to facilitate and support sales activities is addressed as part of the implementation plan.

Evaluation of the external environment in which the business would be conducted links marketing activities to the management function's concerns of control, legal and political risks, and corporate and business level strategies. Opportunities and barriers to entry such as import/export duties and free trade agreements for the marketing and manufacturing decisions are considered. The positioning of the company to best serve customers and fit with desired competitive strategies is addressed by using manufacturing decision criteria to prioritize and apply operations management considerations of location and materials strategies.



FIGURE 3

## Global Expansion Feasibility Study - Sequencing of Project Components Throughout the Semester

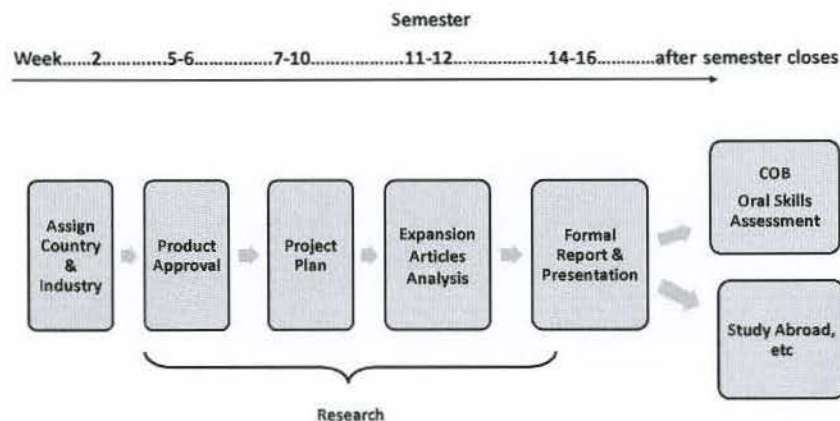


TABLE 4

## Global Expansion Feasibility Study - Learning Objectives

- Perform in-depth research of cross functional business issues for an assigned foreign country and product line,
- Identify corporate and business level strategies,
- Analyze information by using decision criteria to evaluate and prioritize research findings,
- Develop and evaluate alternative solutions,
- Develop a recommendation and justification for selection that supports corporate and business level strategies,
- Develop an implementation plan,
- Demonstrate an understanding of global expansion concepts, and
- Develop professional skills including: project management, leadership, in-depth research, critical thinking, ethical decision-making, public speaking, written communications, technology, teamwork, and interpersonal communication skills.

Research is conducted to evaluate in-country availability of materials, labor and facility needs to further develop and support recommendations. Supporting infrastructure concerns of logistics, technology, and cultural impacts on product design are considered and local regulations are identified to determine if they influence recommendations. Cost assumptions are made based on supply and demand as well as economic factors which lead to a manufacturing recommendation.

Additionally, teams research the critical supporting infrastructure necessary to facilitate communication, technology, and logistics requirements to determine if operations and/or marketing needs would be met in the

foreign country, and if the cost assumptions made would support this activity as reasonable when compared to existing U.S. operations.

This research allows the team to apply finance concepts in order to determine if the profit objective may be met. The type of business form is considered in order to render an opinion on the conceptual impact on profits. Questions considered include "does an underserved market exist that can increase sales?" or "are there favorable conditions to drive down labor and material costs?" Additionally, currency exchange rates, potential futures contracts, and tax rates are identified. Students must convert foreign currency amounts to U.S. dollars and identify and interpret the



exchange rate fluctuations for a two year period. Expansion options are addressed based on selected decision criteria structured to address desired levels of risk, reward, and ownership control. The evaluation of the criteria provides students with exposure to in-country requirements for foreign investors such as legal forms for business organizations and customary business practices. Additionally, students have the opportunity to practice and apply critical thinking skills, since there is no one "correct" answer. Recommendations must be properly supported with a justification.

The implementation plan is used to move the ideas for business activities to a realistic plan and expose students to the business form alternatives available to create a foreign presence. High level considerations of desired risk, profit sharing, and control are used to develop a recommendation for the business form, which may range from the lowest risk model of exporting to the high risk model of a wholly-owned subsidiary, and an entry technique that addresses build vs. buy considerations.

Students receive the initial information for the Global Expansion Feasibility Study in week 2 of the semester when teams organize and team assignments are provided. Each team is assigned a foreign country and North American Industry Classification Code (NAICS). The use of NAICS applies the marketing curriculum for evaluating specific industries. Instructions are provided on how to find the code and industry information from which teams will choose a product for their fictitious U.S. company.

The first formal project component is the product approval form and is assigned and due in weeks 5-6. Its purpose is to provide preliminary descriptions of a team's existing U.S. company. Students are required to research the assigned NAICS code, select a product produced within the industry, and perform light research. They determine inputs required to manufacture the product and identify components of the end-to-end supply chain. The timing initiates project activity early in the semester and helps ensure teams are selecting products appropriately within their assigned industry. This activity serves to reinforce teams' understanding of the supply chain and potential end consumers. Also, it begins the feedback dialog with instructors.

Next, about mid-semester, teams submit a project plan that serves to : 1) define the U.S. company by identifying its product, core competencies, and strategies, explaining supply chain activities, and selecting decision criteria; 2) initiate research on the assigned foreign country; and 3) establish project milestones and reach consensus within the team for timely completion of the formal reports. Basic project management techniques are applied through the use of this deliverable. For most students, this will be their first major project in the COB that spans a majority of the semester. The project is completed with a team that works together for an entire semester. Students self manage the interim deadlines and instructors serve as coaches when students need guidance on managing project requirements and/or team conflict (Figure 4).

FIGURE 4

## Global Expansion Feasibility Study - Project Organization Flowchart





The project plan serves to help launch an organized and timely approach to conducting research and timely completion of project requirements. When the project plan feedback is returned to students, the study moves to center stage in the curriculum. Detailed project instruction is provided to facilitate students understanding of the project objectives, structure, and deliverables.

The expansion articles analysis follows shortly thereafter and the resulting deliverable allows the team to confirm its strategies, decision criteria, supply chain, and expansion forms/modes of entry. Moreover, it gives instructors another opportunity to evaluate the team's project setup and provide feedback. It also provides an application for understanding the strategies utilized by a "real world" company. Historical and current business articles are provided depicting real world examples of companies experiencing global expansion. Teams are required to identify various strategies utilized in the examples and apply the appropriate terminology. Specifically, the exercise includes business level strategies, expansion alternatives for business forms/modes of entry, and the end-to-end supply chain for both the real company and the team's fictitious company.

The final requirements of the project are the formal reports, which consist of a written report and oral presentation to "senior management and outside consultants." The presentation and paper are due on the same day, when two of four teams in the class will present their findings. Each team presentation is 23-27 minutes in length, followed by a short question and answer period. The content must include an introduction, analysis, and recommendations utilizing Microsoft PowerPoint software. Creativity is highly encouraged and students often demonstrate this by creating a prototype, simulating a process, including pictures, etc. Presenters must wear formal business attire while audience members must, at a minimum, wear business casual.

The audience is recognized as a critical factor for the oral presentation; therefore, requirements also exist for this role. Students are encouraged to be professional and attentive. Attendance by non-presenting members is required as well as class participation by asking at least one question of a presenting team.

The written report is more comprehensive than the oral presentation and includes both a detailed research paper and an executive summary. The research paper includes the same parts as the oral presentation and is further supported by several required exhibits and a bibliography.

The introduction sets up the problem by identifying the product and company specifics, corporate and business level strategies and prioritized decision criteria. Next, the analysis is performed describing U.S. business activities and the

external environment of the foreign country. Report content is developed based on structured content questions. Research findings of potential business activities of manufacturing and marketing are explained by prioritizing decision criteria and using a pros and cons approach to evaluate each criterion. Expansion alternatives are also evaluated using selected decision criteria. Finally, the team's business activities recommendations are presented. This is followed by an implementation plan that includes a business form and entry mode along with a strong supporting justification based on all decision criteria. If the recommendation is "no go" for both activities, teams present a "what if" for the implementation plan. As part of the grading process, the instructor provides written feedback to each student about his/her oral communication skills. The results are forwarded to the COB assessment team.

Planned and deliberate sequencing of learning leads to the Global Expansion Feasibility Study deliverables (Figure 5). The final deliverable for this project consists of formal oral and written reports, which are due at the end of the semester. The project also includes several lead-in components to better prepare students.

Initially, the project was assigned and completed as a stand-alone project mid-semester. And, a final exam was used for assessment of student learning. When it was determined that a phased approach to learning would be better for students, it was decided that this project would be an excellent experiential final project and more suitable for an applications-based class. Existing projects were re-ordered so assignments that once followed the Global Expansion Feasibility Study would instead set the stage at the beginning of the course and serve as a platform for several projects including the global project. Overall, this made the project more robust.

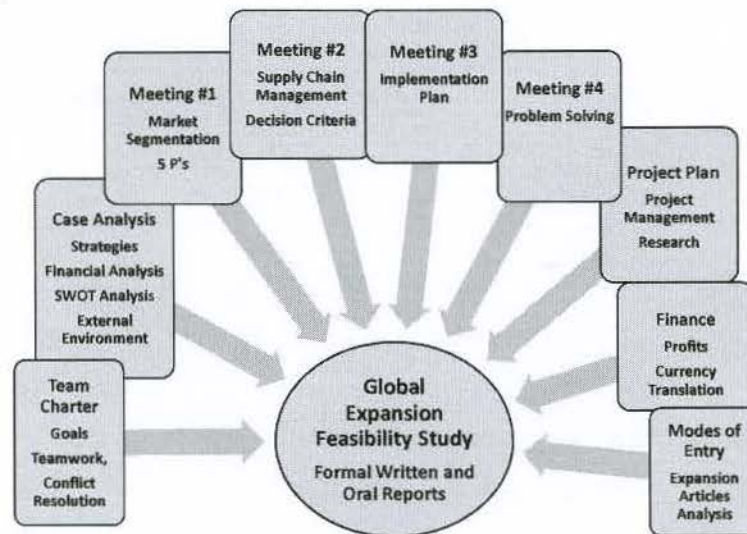
Alternatively, some requirements initially added to the global project, were later inserted into early semester assignments to allow more instruction and practice with the technique or application. For example, students struggle to understand and use decision criteria techniques properly. While initially introduced in the global project to add more focus for research efforts, students did not apply it well. As a result, the first introduction of the technique is now presented earlier in the semester as part of the supply chain management business meeting; it was a natural fit with that project.

Figure 5 provides an overview of the course components which support the Global Expansion Feasibility Study. This project could be utilized as is in other courses in its current form; it could be ramped up in difficulty level for senior level or MBA courses; or it could be simplified to allow for research in a specific area and/or to serve as an introduction to conducting a feasibility study.



FIGURE 5

## Lead-in components for the Global Expansion Feasibility Study



For example, more detailed assumptions could be provided about one form of business activities and students allowed to perform research on the external environment, expansion, etc., depending on what focus the faculty member is trying to achieve. The project can be utilized with or without the sequenced activities that lead into the final reports depending on the academic background and level of the class participants.

## SUMMARY

The overall UBUS 311 experience takes place during the student's junior year. It serves to apply the student's cross-functional knowledge of core business principles while elevating soft skills and self-confidence by adapting classroom applications to real world experiences. Students also gain a better appreciation of the interconnectedness and interdependence of the functional areas operating together within a business organization in making and implementing business decisions. This appreciation of how the functional areas fit together is important as the students move into upper division courses focused in their academic major. This cross-functional integration is brought out again later in the strategic management capstone course.

This timing is critical as it occurs immediately prior to interviews for internships and upper division course work. An immediate benefit perceived by students is that they feel they have a better idea about what to expect when placed in an actual job-related situation and they are able to use these experiences to improve skills for subsequent activities such as job interviews.

## REFERENCES

- AACSB, A self-assessment primer for preaccreditation (2004). Retrieved from [http://www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/process/documents/Self\\_Assessment\\_Primer\\_PreAccreditation.pdf](http://www.aacsb.edu/accreditation/process/documents/Self_Assessment_Primer_PreAccreditation.pdf) on August 16, 2012.
- AACSB, Management Education at Risk (2002). Retrieved from <http://www.aacsb.edu/publications/metf/METFReport-ExecutiveSummary.pdf> on August 16, 2012.
- Athavale, M, Myring, M., Davis, R., & Truell, A.D. (2010). Factors influencing success in integrating the four-year business school curriculum: implications for business educators. *The Delta Pi Epsilon Journal*, 52(1), 4-15.
- Bennis, W. G., & O'Toole, J. (2005). How business schools lost their way. *Harvard Business Review*, 83(5).
- Bishop, T. R., et al. (1998). A cross-functionally integrated undergraduate business core curriculum. *Mid-American Journal of Business*, 13(2), 65-71.
- Borin, N. (2004). An integrated business core: Hindsight evaluation and recommendations. *Journal of College Teaching and Learning*, 1(10), 1-6.
- Brunel, F. F., & Hibbard, J. D. (2006). Using innovations in student teaming to leverage cross-functional and marketing learning: Evidence from a fully integrated undergraduate core. *Marketing Education Review*, 16(3), 15-23.



- Buttermore, J. (2011). The team-taught cross-functional core: insights from a long-term undergraduate program. *Journal of Education for Business*, 86(4), 240-247.
- Campbell, N.D., Heriot, K.C., Finney, R.Z. (2006). In Defense of Silos: An argument against the integrative undergraduate business curriculum. *Journal of Management Education*, 30(2), 316-332.
- DeMoranville, C., Aurand, T. W., & Gordon, G. L. (2000). The delivery of an undergraduate, cross-functional business principles program: One university's continuing journey. *Marketing Education Review*, 10(3), 29-41.
- Hartenian, L. S., Schellenger, M., & Frederickson, P. (2001). Creation and assessment of an integrated business course: One college's experience. *Journal of Education for Business*, 76(3), 149.
- Pfeffer, J., & Fong, C. (2002). The end of business schools? Less success than meets the eye. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 1(1) 78-95.

**Beth Towell** is the Associate Dean for Undergraduate Academic Affairs in the College of Business at Northern Illinois University (NIU). In this position, Dr. Towell has oversight responsibilities for several all-college programs as well as maintenance of AACSB accreditation. She is currently teaching a freshman seminar on ethics which is part of a "themed learning community." The College of Business at NIU is well known for integrated curriculum, experiential learning and ethics education.

**Kenneth S. Elliott** is an Instructor and Team Leader in the UBUS Business Core Applications Seminar in the College of Business at Northern Illinois University (NIU). In this position for over fifteen years, Dr. Elliott has responsibility for coaching student teams through classroom experiential activities, and delivering instruction in coordination with other faculty who teach in the Business Core. He also serves as an Instructor in the Department of Management teaching Strategic Management. Prior to joining the College of Business at Northern Illinois University in 1993, he was an Active Duty Infantry Officer in the United States Army for twenty years. Kenneth Elliott and his wife Marcia own and operate a retail business in Sycamore, Illinois.

**Barb Fox**, CPA, MAS, is an Instructor and Team Leader in the UBUS Business Core Applications Seminar in the College of Business at Northern Illinois University (NIU). In this position, Mrs. Fox has responsibility for coaching student teams through classroom experiential activities, and delivering instruction in coordination with other faculty who teach in the Business Core. She also serves as a faculty member in the NIU CPA Review, Department of Accountancy. Prior to joining NIU in 2000, she worked for DEKALB Genetics Corporation and Monsanto Company where she held staff and management positions, including Director, Corporate Tax.

**Joan Petros** is the Director of the Experiential Learning Center (ELC) in the College of Business at Northern Illinois University (NIU). In this position, she connects teams of enthusiastic, talented NIU students with real organizations to solve real business problems during a semester-long project. Joan previously was a Team Leader for UBUS 311, Business Core: Applications Seminar, for more than nine years, was an ELC faculty coach for 14 projects, occasionally taught Strategic Management, and held Leadership seminars for the Global Programs within the College of Business.