Flashes of Brilliance: Collection of Best Teaching Practices
MBA Faculty

In 2010 the MBA faculty met with a group of employers to provide feedback on the knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviors they look for in MBAs. That process was repeated in 2017. In addition, in 2017 the MBA faculty was provided feedback from student surveys and from a focus group made up of currently enrolled MBA students. The message has been consistent. Make and keep our course content relevant and teach in a way that engages students. To help meet those goals some of the MBA faculty meet to discuss their best practices and others provide feedback to be included in an on-going collection of "best practices". The following is that collection organized in two categories: Course Content and Classroom Activities.

Course Content

- For all key concepts, I ensure that I have "recent" and "reliable" examples from the business world.
- Where possible, I invite guest speakers from industry to come and talk about their real-world experience that is connected to course material
- Bring in guest speakers that assign students some sort of "challenge". The speaker then comes back a few weeks later and the students have to present their analysis and recommendations to the guest speaker. The speaker will sometimes bring members of their executive team with them to listen to presentations and provide feedback. This is analogous to a "live case" study in some ways.
- Bring in practitioners for class presentation and ensure time is available for Q&A session
- Encourage students to think about their own current experiences and to consider how they can apply the material in class to their situations. This is done informally through discussions and formally through individual reflection assignments.
- In creating course reading lists selected material from reading assignments used in off campus senior executive programs. This allows the students to be reading what senior leaders are currently reading and thinking about.
- Continually read "practice" literature to watch for evolving trends. In addition to trade magazines selected foreign newspaper are also read (Financial Times, London)
- Work off campus on senior leader development programs. In developing curriculum for these programs one stays current since the curriculum reflects the current and future state of organizations. To develop these program opportunities to meet with senior leaders are provided as are the chance to recruit and evaluate presenters who are globally recognized in their fields.
- Observe best in class presenters and understand their perspective on issue and current practices. Determine how to bring this perspective back to MBA courses.
- Meet at least twice a month with senior leaders in the region or globally. During these conversations ask them what they are looking for in their new hires and those they promote. Use this feedback to help create course content and behavioral expectations.

- Use actual and most up-to-date case studies from well-known companies. Use varied sources to help create course content (WSJ, White Papers, Industry Bulletins, Etc..)
- Use up-to-date textbooks.
- Use student's actual work problems/issues to create case studies
- Engage in joint-writing projects that focus on current topics in organizations. These project can be regional or global. Use these vetted topics as basis for course design.
- Find an employer willing to enter into a consulting engagement with the students. The employer will define the problem and students will conduct a study and provide recommendations at the end of the semester. This can be used as nominal paid consultancy for the students. They could apply what they earned to their tuition.
- Constantly research articles written for executives (MISQ Executive)
- Use last edition of Text
- Create compare and contrast activities on most key concepts
- Regularly meet with practitioners in Sacramento Region (ISACA –Information Systems Audit and Control Association, for IS security. Bring current concerns of practitioners into course content
- Attend seminars/workshops hosted by industry organizations and bring subjects discussed into the classroom
- Subscribe to Technology Newsletters electronically delivered to you daily. Bring those topics into class.
- Check latest development proactively and use what learned in developing course material
- Attend conferences each year. At conference talk to prospective employers to determine their needs. Talk to presenters who work with our Student Investment Fund students to determine their needs. Attend the on-site visits (such as INTEL) and listen to their current employees. In all cases continually listen for statements about what they need in an employee.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

In their unfiltered feedback to us our students provide a map for us to follow as we work to improve the quality of the educational experience. Our students are telling us to stop reading and lecturing from the book. They want help integrating theories from texts into current applications. They also want us to connect with them at a person level. This can be done by sharing personal experiences with the material we are teaching and to take the time to get to know them as people not just numbers in a classroom. The following are some activities our colleagues are engaging in to improve the learning experience:

LIVE CASE STUDIES

- Students complete projects for real organizations ("clients") and deliver their analysis to them

- For me live case studies come in two flavors: small business and non-profit. Small business cases come from the CBA's Center for Small Business (CSB) and non-profit cases come from the Community Engagement Center (CEC). About half the cases I use come from the CSB and half from the CEC. I believe the only weakness in my process is in gathering feedback from the clients. I get reactions after the projects are complete but they tend to be verbal and difficult to compare to each other because there isn't a standard collection method yet. I intend to add a post-service survey that will allow clients to give feedback on a variety of elements as well as provide any anecdotal comments in an open text field.
- **CSB CASE STUDY** – Working with the CSB is easy. The paperwork is minimal, clients usually have extensive needs which provide ample case opportunities, they offer a token stipend (currently $100 per case), and the staff of the center is very helpful. However, challenges with clients can include expecting more from students than is reasonable (one wanted the students to literally take over his business and run it for him after the semester was over), having a constantly evolving project scope, and failing to respond to communications from students in a timely fashion. To mitigate these potential issues, extensive vetting prior to accepting the case is necessary but can be accomplished in the weeks prior to the start of the semester. The CSB doesn't require much of this but the process I follow is detailed below.
    - Submit a request to the CSB for applicable cases. Brian Baldus and Andrey Mikhailichenko are my contacts.
    - After receipt of the list of potential cases, make initial contact (attempt by both phone and email) to schedule a phone call to determine whether their challenge is a good fit for the course. See attached for template.
    - If the challenge is not a match for the course, notify the client that you will turn their case back over to the CSB for reassignment to another faculty member. The CSB is good about taking feedback on whether there was a match and any anecdotal information on the quality of the client, which they consider prior to reassignment. If a match exists, meet with the client at their location to better understand both their business and the challenges) they are facing. Go over the course content with the client so that they understand what the students are learning.
    - Invite the client to come into class (and provide parking passes) during the second week of the semester to give a 15-minute presentation on their organization and challenge. See attached for template.
    - Form student groups with 3-6 members (depending on class size and number of partners). There are two methods to accomplish this. Students can form groups and then rank their partner preferences. This will mean you must assign partners to groups and it is unlikely that everyone will get their first choice. The scenario might even be that to give 5 groups their first choice, you have to give the 6th group their last choice. Offering the 6th group additional support can help but it still isn't ideal. An alternative to this is to have students self-select onto teams based on the partner they want to work with. The challenge here is that you may have some very large and some very small teams. This may require you

to move some students to another team to work with a partner that was not their first choice. Despite the challenges with this second method, it has proven to be more effective than the former method.
  - Have students fill out the Student Waiver form provided by the CSB.
  - Have the teams write a pre-service reflection. See attached assignment.
  - Connect the teams with the clients. See attached for templates.
  - Require that students meet in person with their client early on to align on the scope of the work.
  - Have student groups turn in a project proposal after they meet with the client to ensure a three-way understanding (you, the client, and the team).
  - Conduct checkpoints throughout the semester to ensure that progress is being made on the project and that there are no client issues, research challenges, or other obstacles students are facing.
  - Have students write an in-service reflection. (See Addendum for assignment details.
  - Have the student teams turn in a draft of the project toward the end of the semester. Redline the document and correct for grammar, punctuation, and spelling to ensure a polished final product. Have the teams correct errors and address deficiencies. You may also want to have the teams review each other's drafts if appropriate.
  - Have the teams turn in a final draft to both you and the client.
  - Have the student teams turn in a post-service reflection. See attached assignment for details.
  - Thank the client for their participation and invite them to engage in the future if the outcome was positive. See attached for template. Have the client fill out the Assistance Completed form provided by the CSB.
- **CEC CASE STUDY**– The CEC can provide cases with organizations that are larger and more mature. The process is more robust and there is more paperwork but the cases can be quite valuable. Clients are usually more reliable and organizations more stable. I have had many repeat clients from the CEC. All clients I have partnered with are non-profit organizations. As such, they are thrilled to get smart labor for free. There is no stipend associated with taking cases from the CEC. The process I use is a modified version of the process above.
  - Contact the CEC and let them know you are interested in Service Learning. They will ask you to come in to meet with them so that they can understand the types of courses you teach and assess your understanding of the process and commitment to executing it. They may also suggest that you join a Faculty Learning Community centered around service learning. You can start by reviewing the Service Learning Tool Kit document (See Addendum).
  - Review the list of community partners supplied by the CEC. Each partner on the list has been vetted by the CEC and has signed a waiver. You may also want to ask the CEC for suggestions on organizations to partner with. They are very familiar with all partners and can help you determine what organizations might be best aligned to your coursework.

- After receipt of the list of potential cases, make initial contact (attempt by both phone and email) to schedule a phone call to determine whether their challenge is a good fit for the course. See attached for template.
- If the challenge is not a match for the course, notify the client that you will turn their case back over to the CEC for reassignment to another faculty member. If a match exists, meet with the client at their location to better understand both their business and the challenge(s) they are facing. Go over the course content with the client so that they understand what the students are learning.
- Invite the client to come into class (and provide parking passes) during the second week of the semester to give a 15-minute presentation on their organization and challenge. See attached for invitation template.
- Form student groups with 3-6 members (depending on class size and number of partners). There are two methods to accomplish this. Students can form groups and then rank their partner preferences. This will mean you must assign partners to groups and it is unlikely that everyone will get their first choice. The scenario might even be that to give 5 groups their first choice, you have to give the 6th group their last choice. Offering the 6th group additional support can help but it still isn't ideal. An alternative to this is to have students self-select onto teams based on the partner they want to work with. The challenge here is that you may have some very large and some very small teams. This may require you to move some students to another team to work with a partner that was not their first choice. Despite the challenges with this second method, it has proven to be more effective than the former method.
- Have students fill out the Student Waiver form on line provided by the CEC.
- Have the teams write a pre-service reflection. See attached assignment.
- Connect the teams with the clients. (See Addendum for templates).
- Require that students meet in person with their client early on to align on the scope of the work.
- Have student groups turn in a project proposal after they meet with the client to ensure a three-way understanding (you, the client, and the team).
- Conduct checkpoints throughout the semester to ensure that progress is being made on the project and that there are no client issues, research challenges, or other obstacles students are facing.
- Have students write an in-service reflection. (See Addendum for assignment details).
- Have the student teams turn in a draft of the project toward the end of the semester. Redline the document and correct for grammar, punctuation, and spelling to ensure a polished final product. Have the teams correct errors and address deficiencies. You may also want to have the teams review each other's drafts if appropriate.
- Have the teams turn in a final draft to both you and the client.
- Have the student teams turn in a post-service reflection. See Addendum for details).
- Have students turn in a Time Log as required by the CEC.

- Thank the client for their participation and invite them to engage in the future if the outcome was positive. See attached for template.

CASE STUDIES

- Use case studies that challenge students to think critically and prepare detailed data analysis (e.g. quantitative components where students have to integrate/synthesize information. This can be done during structured in-class activities or outside of class and presented by teams.
- After preparing an analysis of a case each team takes on a role of an individual in the case and presents their material through the lens of that individual. The instructor acts as senior executive and listens to the presentation of the various individuals and facilitates a discussion about best course of action for the company to take.
- Do final group project on a significant (problem, opportunity, issue) an organization is facing. The class must engage in actual research to support their recommendation. Once project is done each team reports back to the class.
- After each case study conduct a Q&A session.
- Use role playing on case studies. They can be the employer, employee, consultant, customer or client.

IN CLASS DIALOG

- I don't particularly like being talked at and I imagine students don't either. I allow for many pregnant pauses, ask a lot of questions, and add elements that get students up and talking. Some examples: start the class by asking for "awesome stories" which allows students to voice personal/professional successes (and I get everything from drop-the-mic successful work projects to engagements to narrow escapes from death), 2-minute ice breakers used throughout the semester (especially during 3 hour classes when folks are tired after working all day), and 10-minute student topic presentations (used this in class this semester with smashing success).
- Encourage debate and communication skills by assigning students a case/article and them have some groups advocate "for" or "against" a relevant decision in the case. Students can then present/defend/debate each perspective.
- Assign a very comprehensive list of books and articles that the class will be responsible to read and teach-back to each other. The class will be broken into different reading teams each week. The team will be assigned a book or article that they are responsible for mastering for the following week. In addition to reading the literature and preparing a teach back to other team members they are required to create five multiple choice questions on the material they have read. In class they are assigned to a new group composed of people from other teams. They then have five minutes to teach an article and ten minutes to teach a book. At the end of the round robin teaching session. The class takes a test on the material they have been taught.

- Create a Learning Team – Have the class member divide up in groups of two the first day of class. Once in the group have them interview their colleague to determine what is the one thing they have accomplished that make the feel pride. It cannot be work or school connected. Have each person tell their colleagues story to the rest of the class. In about week four repeat the process. This time the interview is about a struggle the person had and how they overcame that obstacle in their life. Again have the students share their colleagues story. This approach is based on group development theory where teams can only perform at a high level if there is a deep personal connection to their team members.
- Structure class so there is active participation in giving feedback, sharing personal experiences on issue/concepts/theories by taking turn talking and listening.

MULTIPLE ASSESSMENT METHODS

- Grades are dependent on a variety of elements including group and individual written work, exams which incorporate both multiple choice and written or mathematical sections, presentations/speaking assignments, participation, client management for live cases, and simulations. I don't use all methods in every course but customize to the student group and curriculum.
- Instructor Assessment – Conducting a mid-semester survey allows me to pivot on content and methods in a way that is meaningful to the current class. End-of-semester surveys are great too but are too late for the group providing the feedback. I use Qualtrics (Brian Baldus can provide set up help). I have them rate the textbook, rate the professor, rate the group format, comment on topics of interest not included in the course, and add any additional comments
- Have students evaluate the quality of other team's presentations on case studies. The evaluation must include specific feedback on strengths and weaknesses of presentation. The class then votes to determine which team provided the best presentation and why.
- Provide a comprehensive test on bodies of knowledge to be taught. The same test is given at the end of the semester. The students grade for the test is based on either score on first test plus percentage change. Or the highest of the two tests. This helps deal with the "I learned this in my undergraduate class perception".
- Students received constant feedback throughout the course. They are evaluated by their peers on their ability to teach back the contents of a book or article, their teammates evaluate them on their contribution to the team, each week their written critique of an article or book is graded and they received written feedback on that work product. In addition, their performance is scaled by their teammates since each team member must force distribute (provided the greatest contribution to the team to the one who provided the least contribution to the team) each week. The forced distribution is not used to provide a grade but lets the student know how their teammates see their level of contribution.

OTHER WORTHWHILE IDEAS

- WORKSHEETS – Prepare worksheets on the theories, models, or formula used in class. Have the class fill out their worksheets and explain their thinking.
- FIELD TRIPS – Taking students to see curriculum in action is a powerful way to enhance understanding and retention. Trips have included: Intel, VSP The Shop, and Siemens Rail.
- GUEST SPEAKERS – None of us is as smart as all of us (Blanchard). When I find someone who knows more than I do about an element of a course, I bring them in to speak to the class. Guest speakers have come from many organizations including VSP, Intel, Siemens, Franklin Templeton, Chevron, Bank of the West, and the Project Management Institute.
- HUMOR – Sometimes a little humor can do more to reenergize a class toward the end of a three-hour presentation than anything else. I use videos, cartoons, and standup. While standup comedy isn't exactly a natural talent of mine, infusing a bit of bat-shit crazy humor has proven a useful tool. I gather new material every semester and test it out to see if students respond. I keep what works and toss what lands flat.
- EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING - Team dynamics is taught by having the class engage in a physical activity outside the classroom that requires them to demonstrate: leadership, communication skills, group membership skills, and how they handle failure. The activities are those used to build executive teams in off campus seminars. Peak Adventures is a good resource if this is not something you are comfortable with. At the end of each part of the activity do a debrief which focuses on the ideal end state and what the group needs to do more of to get to that place (appreciative inquiry versus blame game)
- Pop Culture/Current Events- Work to bring in examples for the most current events.

ADDENDUM

Drawer Statements

Contact Initiation

Subject: CEC/CSB Case for BHON 160 Project Management

Hello,

I was given your information by the CEC/CSB and understand that you are looking to work with a group of students on a Project Management issue. I am teaching Honors Project Management and have the capacity to assign a group of 4-6 students to work on your project or project related challenge for the semester. I'd like to get a little bit more information on the issue you are facing so that I can ensure that this is the correct course to address your issue and so that I can properly direct the team throughout the semester. Would you be available to talk over the phone early next week?

Thanks!

Deanna Daly
Faculty, College of Business Administration
Sacramento State University

Open House Drawer Statement

Subject line: Sac State BHON 160 Project Management Project – business name

Hello,

Thank you for your willingness to work with a group of Sac State students studying Project Management. As an introduction between your organization and these students, I am holding an open house as discussed on Thursday, September 10 at 6pm in Tahoe Hall room 1004. This is intended to allow you to share some information about your organization (and the challenge you are facing) and for students to ask questions. We will have access to a projector and computer (you can even send me your file ahead of time if it is helpful). Presentations can be 5 to 15 minutes long and will be followed by Q&A.

Attached is the Waiver of Liability form for the Center for Small Business. You will need to complete and sign the form prior to the open house.

I will be requesting a parking pass for you and can either mail it (please provide mailing address) or meet you in the parking lot a few minutes before class so you can put it in your car. Please let me know what you prefer. The closest parking lot to the classroom is Faculty/Staff Lot 6 (toward the south end of campus). Attached is a map of the Sacramento State campus for your reference. I look forward to seeing you in class!

Thanks,

Deanna Daly
Faculty, College of Business Administration
Sacramento State University

Client/Group Pairing Drawer Statements

For the Client…

Subject line: BHON 160 Client/Group Pairing

Hello,

Your organization has been paired to work with a BHON 160 team for their semester project! To get things started, I wanted to give you a few dates. Below are key milestones and associated dates for the project. You should expect to hear from the team before each of these intervals. There are also several checkpoints throughout the semester but they won't typically require involvement from your organization.

October 1 – project proposal submission
November 12 – work product draft submission
December 3 – final work product submission and presentation

The amount of time and number of times you meet with your BHON 160 team is purely up to you and the team. I only require that there be one in-person meeting so that the team has a clear understanding of your organization and challenge. This meeting should take place sometime before the October 1 submission if at all possible.

The team assigned to you is comprised of the following members. I have provided them your contact information and they should be reaching out to you within a week to get details and any needed clarification and/or to schedule a time to meet.

Joe Adams
Rita Hanes
Angela Gomez
James Robinson

Please let me know if you have any questions now or any time throughout the semester. I am excited about our partnership and look forward to the results of the project!

Thanks,

Deanna Daly
Faculty, College of Business Administration
Sacramento State University

For the students…

Subject line: BHON 160 Client/Group Pairing

Hello group 1,

You have been paired with Girl Scouts Heart of Central California (GSHCC) for your semester project! Below are key milestones and associated dates for the project. You should be talking to your client before each of these intervals. These dates have been shared with the client so that they know to expect communication from you prior to these deadlines. There are also several checkpoints throughout the semester (see schedule for dates) but they won't typically require involvement from the organization. They are simply intended for you to summarize your progress from the previous checkpoint.

September 25 – project proposal submission
November 1 – work product draft submission
November 17 – final work product submission
November 29 – presentation

The contact for your partner organization is Julie Odonnell and she can be reached by phone at 916-452-9181 or by email at julie.odonnell@girlscoutshcc.org. Please reach out as soon as possible to get the dialog going and to determine what information you will need from the organization for your project. I have provided your names to the client so that they know who will be contacting them. Also, please note that all group members must meet in person with your client at least one time. This meeting should take place prior to the Project Proposal submission on September 25 if at all possible.

If you choose to appoint a partner organization liaison, please let the client know who the point person will be for communications. Should you choose to adopt this structure, the liaison should always include all team members on email communications with the client. Any verbal communication between the client and the liaison should be summarized by the liaison for the team as soon as possible.

Please let me know if you have any questions now or any time throughout the semester. I look forward to the results of the project!

Thanks,

Deanna Daly
Faculty, College of Business Administration
Sacramento State University

Client Thank You

SUBJECT LINE: Sac State BHON 160 Project Thank You

Hello,

Thank you for working with your student consulting team in BHON 160, Honors Project Management. At this point, the student group has finished work and delivered the final report to you. You provided a rare opportunity for students to work with an organization on a real challenge that has all the complexity, ambiguity, and industry nuances that real problems have. This experience cannot be adequately mimicked with written cases or theoretical learning. You let them learn through their experience and emerge better for it. Thank you for providing this meaningful learning opportunity.

This project provided a truly impactful experience for these students. Many students at Sac State come from humble backgrounds. About half of our student base comes from families that make less than $38k per year and more than half are first generation college students. These figures indicate that we are providing a significant trajectory change for an extremely vulnerable population. In essence, this educational experience is lifting up those that would otherwise have few opportunities, ending poverty in their family lines forever.

This kind of support from community business leaders like you provides our students with a superior knowledge base and skill set when they leave our institution. As such, we are developing the next generation of regional leaders. Since 70% of our alumni stay local, you are making a tangible difference in the region we call home.

Again, thank you for giving this group of students the chance to learn from the process of addressing your unique business needs. Our hope is that your business has also gained some insight provided by the perspective and ideas from your student consulting group.

Thank you,

Deanna Daly
Faculty, College of Business Administration
Sacramento State University