Experiential Learning Projects for the Networked Curriculum

Problem Statement
The Robinson MBA program strives for innovative approach to teaching, learning, and assessment. For example, the highly successful MBA 8000 course involved Robinson professors flipping from a traditional model of multiple instructors teaching this interdisciplinary course to one where instructors “learn” about areas outside of their expertise, resulting in a common instructor for the entire course. This innovation worked well. A new Robinson initiative is the networked curriculum in which faculty will strive to provide students with a comprehensive view of business and how various facets interact in a multi-disciplinary manner.

In Vision 2020, the strategic plan for Robinson College includes developing a “networked graduate and undergraduate curricula,” in the belief that “successful business leaders must have an appreciation of the complexity of business problems” and “the ability to apply tools and techniques that span disciplinary boundaries” as well as “the ability to effectively communicate” (robinson.gsu.edu). Creating and executing an effective networked curriculum is a daunting challenge. Initiatives involving the MBA networked curriculum will come from two sources: 1) a top-down strategic initiative from the dean’s office; and 2) a bottom-up, “organic networking” to complement the planned networking that will come from individual faculty (MBA Dean, personal correspondence). This proposal is intended to contribute to the bottom-up approach by developing team “networked projects” that are interdisciplinary in nature.

The University of Michigan’s center for Research on Teaching and Learning notes that students develop skills in “analytical thinking and reflective judgment” through “reading and discussing complex, real-life scenarios” (http://www.crlt.umich.edu/tstrategies/tscbt). Here, this description is broadened to include experiencing novel, complex situations. Since there are very few problems left today where one person with one skill can solve them (Curtis Carlson, CEO, SRI International), innovation involves critical thinking, effective communication, and collaboration. Thus, projects that will impact student learning should be innovative and experiential. To gain genuine knowledge from an experience, a student must: be actively involved in the experience; able to reflect on the experience; use analytical skills; and possess problem solving skills to use new ideas gained (Kolb 1984). These are characteristics desired in our P/MBA students. In addition, we strive to provide opportunities for critical thinking and analysis. The proposed networked projects developed in this innovation are intended to address the networked curriculum, while providing experiential learning and requiring critical thinking.

Proposal Objectives
The objective of this proposal is to create a set of innovative, experiential, and interdisciplinary team projects that could help initiate the networked curriculum. These “networked projects” will provide students with an opportunity to experience projects that might be “housed” in one area,
but networked to related areas. Although faculty members often execute projects in the areas in which they teach, usually, students must do the integration on their own. I envision a situation where a networked project will be used for multiple courses simultaneously, e.g., the PMBA cohort program. This could involve joint class sessions for project presentations with faculty in different areas who teach the same cohort, underscoring the networking of the two disciplines.

**Student objectives:**
- Improve the richness of experiential learning through multi-disciplinary networked projects
- Promote collaborative problem solving on real world problems
- Increase student awareness of their capabilities and need to carry out multi-disciplinary work as required in contemporary business practices.
- Experience preparing and presenting a professional presentation by reporting the completed projects for evaluation on both content and communication (consistent with communications courses).

**Faculty objectives:**
- Create a repository of experiential, networked, team projects that can interact with multiple courses, as an organic way to initiate the networked curriculum.
- Create a set of assessments (grading, peer-evaluation, rubrics) for each project
- Learn about other disciplines through the execution of the networked projects.
- Create an environment where faculty and students from different disciplines can engage in experiential learning.
- Provide a student-generated report on perceived value of the networked projects.

**Method**

I have been teaching P/MBA 8125 (information technology management) for a number of years. During this time, I have developed experiential team assignments, based upon discussions with MBA Steering committee members, faculty, alumni and business professionals. I invite outside experts to my classroom to provide assessment and feedback on students projects to create a real world experience. Each team completes and presents a different project with topics such as green information technology, social media, etc. These projects are: 1) information technology based; 2) experiential; and 3) include peer (and possibly external) feedback. The projects have been well-received based upon informal, student feedback. With information technology becoming so ubiquitous, P/MBA 8125 could support other disciplines because all organizations have become technology dependent, at least to some degree (Gallaugher, 2014). Hence, it is reasonable for information technology to network to other areas. I have also been involved in one similar, initiative with information technology and intellectual property with a law class. To carry out the teaching innovation, I will both expand existing projects to incorporate a “networked” component and create new projects, with sample topics shown in Table 1.
### Table 1: Proposed Networked Projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Related discipline</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Web analytics</td>
<td>Create a promotional video for a marketing campaign, post it on YouTube and/or other social media, distribute to contacts, and perform web analytics to evaluate how it was received in the marketplace.</td>
<td>Marketing analytics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Global sourcing</td>
<td>Source real world project to provider in any part of the world.</td>
<td>Legal (contract negotiations); strategy (organizational impact); economics</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social media</td>
<td>Create a social media application (e.g., blog, wiki); or social media strategy</td>
<td>Marketing (viral potential)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data mining</td>
<td>Perform data mining and analysis on a subset of big data</td>
<td>Statistics; data analytics; operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual Property</td>
<td>Create a software patent</td>
<td>Law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business and societal technology influence</td>
<td>Analyze business impact of large-scale information technology firm (e.g., Google, Facebook, Apple)</td>
<td>Strategy; organizational behavior</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Student delivery will be primarily in-class presentations. Other formats that encourage student engagement might be panel discussions, interviews, role play; debates, and jeopardy or shark-tank style events. Challenges include ensuring that the networked projects: 1) stand on their own in multiple departments; 2) are doable; 3) are perceived as providing value to students. A set of metrics and rubrics will be developed for: 1) self-assessment by the team; 2) feedback from a peer team; 3) feedback on presentation skills (with assessment items for the communications courses adapted); and 4) graded content for critical analysis.

**Evaluation**
During the fall and spring terms of the 2015-16 academic year, at least two sections of P/MBA 8125 will be used to test the effectiveness of the networked projects. A questionnaire will be developed to obtain student evaluation of: 1) the value of the project; 2) how successful the project was in meeting its “networked” objectives; and 3) suggested improvements. Instructors will be asked to evaluate: 1) quality (grading and comparisons to traditional projects); and 2) subject area content. External members will be asked to assess the real world components. All networked projects will be made available to any faculty member who wishes to adapt them.

**Budget:** One course release for Summer 2015 is requested to develop the networked projects and assessments.

**Media/classroom:** A standard MBA classroom, with taping capabilities, is required.

**References:**