Creating a New BizX2200 Curriculum for Students

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Honors Project Summary: Creating a New BizX2200 Curriculum for Students

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Abstract
The inspiration for this project arose from my personal experience as a College of Business student at Bowling Green State University. As part of a new program implemented within the college, each academic year students are required to participate in an applied business experience lab, known to students as BizX1100, BizX2200, BizX3300, or BizX4400. The program is the first of its kind in the nation, and allows teams of students to evaluate products and companies through hands-on research and propose innovations to improve an aspect of the product or company. Specifically, the BizX2200 course requires students to investigate a B2B (business to business) product. The idea for the lab is very applicable to subject matter of every business student, but the execution of the lab needed some innovation itself.

My vision was to create a more fluid course that only included subject matter that was relevant to the final presentation, helpful in understanding how to evaluate a company or product, and relatable to subject matter that is taught in other courses. I also wanted to see a different presentation of the learning through an oral presentation that was more fully developed, rather than a lengthy paper from which students found little value, followed by a thrown-together presentation that did not satisfy the desired learning outcomes for the course. I believe that my new structure for the course promotes critical thinking, evaluation, and problem solving. Personally, I would find the newly designed course to be more useful and relevant to my classes and career goals.

In order to make this course fulfill the desires of the initial curriculum and to receive vital feedback from experienced instructors, I enlisted the former BizX2200 course coordinator, Mearl Sutton, and an experienced veteran of teaching BizX courses, Kristen Brotzki, to assist in the formation of a better program. They both proved to be extremely helpful in providing feedback as to how students would react, how to get the most “return on investment” from each lab, and how to structure the program to be in line with the college’s standards.

After a semester of working closely with my two advisors and receiving feedback from another current BizX2200 instructor, I have created what I believe to be, a curriculum that exploits BizX2200 for all of its opportunities, and a curriculum that will be more relevant to students’ needs.

Workbook Format:
I have decided to keep student organized with a “workbook” format for all assignment, activities, journals, and outlines that will occur throughout the class. This should create a more cohesive design for students that will encourage them to make connections between the lab topic and the innovations they will create. I would have found the method more useful to refer to notes from lab sessions to create a more desirable and thorough analysis and innovation.

Addition of the Alumni Mentor:
Some companies don’t post every detail of their business to the public because competitors may gain access to their suppliers or their competitive advantage. I have worked with my mentors to begin implementing an alumni mentor for each company that is being studied. This will help with creating a feasible innovation, company research, and necessary feedback. This mentor will be available to answer questions that students may have. As an advantage to the mentor, the mentor’s company will gain access to BGSU students who may be interested in working in the company as an intern or as a post-grad opportunity. The mentor has a firsthand view to
evaluating work ethic and recruiting for job positions. The mentor or a company representative will also be invited to view the final presentation.

Not only will this improve the work of the students, it will also contribute to networking possibilities and access to companies interested in College of Business Administration Falcons. In business, it’s not only about what you know, it’s also who you know.

**Addition of a Teaching Assistant:**
Due to the increasing class capacity for this specific course and maintaining the quality of instruction and the individual time that this course requires, in addition to not increasing faculty costs, to add a teaching assistant. This teaching assistant could be helpful in checking the completion of pre-class assignments, answering questions during in-class assignments, and administrative activities. A candidate for this position would be a student who already completed the course with a satisfactory grade, a passion for helping other students, and a student who could provide insightful feedback to students. A small stipend could be offered as compensation.

**Course Structure:**
My suggestion for the BizX course is designed with the idea of the “inverted classroom.” This style of learning is designed to promote learning in the classroom; not lecturing (Hall, Macie). Students are given pre-class information that pertains to the upcoming lab. For example, if students will be discussing the elements of a product, the pre-class activity requires them to research the information with the assistance of provided PowerPoints, video clips, and hands-on application. This provides more time for discussion-based classes and for students to apply the learned material to their own products.

The beginning of the class will begin with the instructor welcoming the class and directing the class in what will be that lab’s topic of discussion. The instructor can also ask students about the pre-class activity if applicable, walk around and ensure completion of the pre-class activity, or start a class discussion about individual findings from the pre-class activities. Checking for completion of the activities could also serve as role call. The class will then proceed to turn to the relevant page of the workbook, and begin on the lab. The instructor, graduate assistant, and teaching assistant will all make themselves available to circulate between teams, answer questions, ask questions, and provide feedback. If a specific element of the lab seems to provide difficult to many teams, the instructor will interject in the lab and address the class to guide understanding. Depending on the individual lab, the last 10 minutes will be spent on a summary paper and introducing next week’s lab topic and any pre-class activity that will be required.

**Notes on College Learning Initiatives:**
The current dean of the College of Business is Raymond Braun, and he is trying to implement the ideal that professors spend 25% of the class teaching or lecturing material, and the other 75% of the time is to be spent on discussion and a group learning environment. This idea of an inverted or “flipped” classroom seems to promote this ideal, and will continue to push BGSU in the direction of innovative learning styles.

**Pre-Class Activities:**
To ensure that students are on the right track and have been completing the pre-class activities, the instructor could facilitate a quick discussion at the beginning of the lab, or ask basic-understanding questions on a short quiz. The instructor could also quickly walk around to each
table and ask the students to provide the required page of the workbook with completed material. This would also create the opportunity for students to ask questions about the material if necessary.

The pre-class activities are designed to be a “tip of the iceberg” and just for students to have a basic understanding of the material. The real learning will come from working collaboratively with the group to apply the material to the product, and exploring further into the lab topic.

Furthermore, I have experienced success in this form of classroom under the instruction of Dr. Paul Moore. As a Presidential Honors student, I found this style of learning to be more thorough, easier to apply to other subjects, and easier to retain, as information is obtained from experience rather than memorization. This classroom structure promotes an open forum for creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and innovation; all desired learning outcomes from the BizX2200 course. This experience has had an incredible impact on my evaluation of how courses are taught, and the opportunity that is presented in some courses. I firmly believe that if more students were exposed to this form of learning, more students would push for change in all university classes, and thus, hopefully contributing to a more engaged student community.

These activities are designed to provide an introduction to the next lab session’s topics, and an introduction to the vocabulary and concepts that will be needed for team work. The pre-class activities are designed to be in line with what the next lab will cover. It saves time for the short, once a week 50 minute class, and allows for more discussion time in class versus lecturing from the professor.

**In-Class Assignments:**
The in-class assignments are designed to cover all of the main topics of business. They are not meant to be fully encompassing of all details. They are questions that relate to elements of the presentation. Each lab includes leading questions that promote critical and innovative thinking. Students are given generic questions that are then used to provide assistance in answering more in-depth questions. The labs are designed to be completed in a collaborative environment with other teammates.

**Order of Lab Topics:**
The initial lab order was as follows: The new lab order is as follows:

- What is a Product? Welcome Lab
- Product Life Cycle & the 4 Ps Elements of a Product
- Thinking Beyond Price Product Life Cycle
- Team Building and Team Contract Product & Company History
- Industry Overview Supply Chain
- Product History Production Processes
- Customer Analysis Distribution Channels
- Supply Chain & Logistics Social Responsibility & Eco Sustainability
I applied the request of moving the innovation lab earlier in the semester so students would have ample time to ask questions and create a quantifiable innovation to their product. I also subtracted the “Thinking Beyond Price” activity because it doesn’t fully relate to what is being researched and does not provide much value to the final presentation or learning outcomes. I also replaced “Global Branding” with “Social Responsibility & Eco Sustainability”. This comes from the idea that many companies are very concentrated recently with improving their image through social responsibility and “going green”. This topic also creates a great springboard for students to create an innovation in this sector. I also took away the lab devoted to “Team Building and Team Contract”. As a sophomore in college and having previously worked in a group setting for BizX1100, students should know what is expected of them and is explicitly outlined in the syllabus. In addition to these reasons, students will be placed in groups during the “Welcome Lab”. This allows for maximum team time and collaboration.

**Team Formation**

Because this course is designed to cover nearly every aspect of the business world, my mentors and I thought it would be most useful for teams to be formed based upon their anticipated specialization. Instructors would do their best to place students into groups where there is a mixture of specializations. For example, a team may be comprised of a supply chain student, a finance student, a management student, an accounting student, and a marketing student. This creates an experience where the passion, and the work, should be shared and will be comprehended by different students in a different manner. This should create different views and therefore more options to creating a better innovation.

With the expertise of my mentors, they thought that teams of 5 would be the most efficient. With increased class capacities and the mix of students in the group, we arrived at the size of 5. This actually aligned with some research I completed about finding optimal group size. Sheila L. Margolis, the President of Workplace Culture, completed a study in 2011 trying to find the optimal group size. Consequently, the number she arrived at was 4.6. Please refer to the attached graph (Group Dynamics vs Group Size) below relating the group size to number of social interactions:
Summary Papers:
These papers are designed to help students conclude and keep track of the learning that occurred during each lab. Depending on the instructor, the instructor will ask students to record their most relevant experiences and findings from each lab in a short, two to five minute summary. This will allow students to keep track of their innovations and use their ideas as springboards for further problem solving. It also serves as a means for students to get a quick recap of what was learned in the prior week’s lab.

Actions for Implementation:
My mentors and I would like to start implementation of some of the elements of this renovated course immediately. I will be introducing this new design to the Fall BizX2200 course instructors. Since my instructors also teach other levels of the BizX courses, they have already been implementing and testing some of my suggestions. As with any program, feedback and continuous improvement will be key in the success of this class. Upon the completion of a semester of the new course design, future instructors will need to further analyze this course and its opportunities.

Conclusion:
My goal for this class is to make the topics more relevant to business students, and provide opportunities to use critical thinking and innovation. These skills are highly transferrable to all majors and business topics. Now that all of the labs reflect what is required to create a successful presentation, I believe students will consider this course to be more useful with better transitions between the labs. Eliminating the paper that was once required will allow students to fully articulate in a presentation setting where evidence will exist that each team member contributed to the presentation. Instructors will be able to ask questions and seek further understanding from the individuals in the team. My hope for this class is that students can now fully understand the value and opportunities that this class provides for real-world experience and practice.