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Service-Learning by Doing

How a Student-run Consulting Company finds Relevance and Purpose in a Business Strategy Capstone Course

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A challenge for undergraduate learning in strategy is that the students lack professional work experiences. Without a rich background of experience, many strategic management topics are difficult to grasp. Our solution has been to develop a strategic management capstone course that combines service-learning and problem-based learning. The experiential design puts students in charge of a consulting company serving struggling local nonprofits and small businesses. By consulting, students have access to strategic decision makers and learn to understand the missions of their organizations. Students acquire a sense of urgency to solve strategic problems and develop a commitment to improving their community. In this article, the authors describe their motivations for the course design and how service-learning enhances the design's efficacy. In addition, the authors explain the use of a matrix structure for the student consulting company, how the company operates, and the strategic process consultation approach its consultants use. This study also describes the student leadership structure and just-in-time lecture technique that enables the instructor to provide on-demand instruction. The authors conclude by explaining the assessment system of quality checks, presentations, and reflection papers that allows instructors to maintain student learning in a very flexible and student-driven learning system.

Keywords: *service-learning; problem-based learning; strategy; management; consulting; student-run business; assessment*

Schools of business are interested in helping students learn the various business disciplines while helping students develop into responsible and active members of the community. A promising way to address the

need for educating our business majors is to use service-learning to build what may be the most meaningful educational experience students can have (Papamarcos, 2005). Service-learning takes many forms and is offered in many different courses across a wide range of business subjects (Andrews, 2007). Activities involving service-learning can provide students with rich experiences working with unique aspects of organizations that would be difficult to access without a service-learning focus. Service-learning

- encourages students to give back to communities in a meaningful way (Papamarcos, 2005) while learning theory applications (Vega, 2007);
- improves applying management concepts to social problems (Godfrey, Illes, & Berry, 2005);
- helps the student develop an ethical compass and increases student civic involvement (Salimbene, Buono, LaFrage, & Nurick, 2005); and
- provides direct personal exposure to theories and practice to appreciate the limits of theory in an unpredictable world (Kenworthy-U'Ren, 2005).

The purpose of this article is to describe how we teach business strategy using a service-learning approach. We endeavor to create unique experiences for students, enable them to gain access to the strategic decision makers in community organizations, and have students improve the strategic capabilities of those organizations. Under the umbrella of the College of Business's business strategy capstone course we have created a student-run consulting company that provides consulting to small businesses and nonprofit community service organizations.

A key element in the success of this approach has been turning over leadership of the classroom and the consulting company, Sycamore Business Advisors (SyBA), to our students. We encourage students to take ownership to give them a sense of mission about operating the company for their classmates and the college. By conducting the functional operations of the company, students enable their classmates to learn. By working as consultants, the students serve their community by providing needed consulting services to their local clients. We are able to give up control of the class operations

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by establishing a student leadership structure and shifting to just-in-time (JIT) lectures that are delivered when students need the knowledge.

We maintain learning standards by reviewing student team progress using a series of interim presentations (called QCs or quality checks) that serve as hurdles to be overcome for teams to be able to progress in their consulting projects. Our approach allows students to experience the unstructured problems that actual organizations face, to practice skills, and to use their general and specific knowledge (strategic management) to help community organizations. We coach, inspire, and advise.

In this article, we describe our SyBA instructional method so that others facing similar teaching challenges can adapt this method to fit their own instructional goals. First, we give a brief foundation for service-learning and the supporting pedagogical approaches and theories that guide our design. We then discuss a full semester of course activities used to execute the course. We conclude with a discussion of learning activities, assessment processes, and expected outcomes of our service-learning approach to strategy.

Connections to Problem-Based Learning and Experiential Learning Theory

Our experiential design linking service and problem-based learning is based on experiential learning theory (ELT; D. A. Kolb, 1984; A. Y. Kolb & Kolb, 2005). In ELT, learning is defined as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (D. A. Kolb, 1984, p. 41). ELT posits that learning takes place in cycles in which students grasp experiences through concrete actions and abstract conceptualizations, transforming their experiences with reflective observation and active experimentation (D. A. Kolb, 1984). In the course description section of this article, we discuss how we have used the SyBA organization generally, and a series of QCs specifically, to bring students through these multiple learning cycles related to strategic management and other business disciplines.

Problem-based learning (PBL) is an approach to learning that places the problem at the center of attention. Starting from encountering the problem, students go through a learning process that includes problem solving with professional/discipline-related skills while identifying learning needs, self-study, applying newly gained knowledge to the problem, summarizing, and

reflecting on what has been learned (Barrows, 1985). The learning process helps students achieve the learning objectives of PBL, including "construction of professionally useful knowledge, development of reasoning and problem solving strategies, development of self-directed learning strategies, increasing motivation for the learner and, finally, becoming effective collaborators" (Sherwood, 2004, p. 538).

Our course design merges common elements of service-learning with a PBL approach. We observe that PBL shares three of the five common elements of service-learning as noted by Steiner and Watson (2008): a hands-on encounter, ties to course curriculum, and reflection on the experience. Steiner and Watson (2008) also list two other common elements of service-learning: involvement with an organizational project and fostering of community participation. Our approach to service-learning uses community organizations as clients to provide a rich context for PBL activities (Kloppenborg & Baucus, 2004; Sherwood, 2004). The course method requires students to apply theory and techniques that they have learned to resolve problems and identify opportunities for real organizations, not simulations.

There are a number of benefits to using this course design. Combining service-learning and PBL helps students integrate their learning into outcomes that are valued by the community and skills valued by future employers (Papamarcos, 2005). In our area, employers have identified teamwork, problem solving, communication, and time management as important skills. The course design is consistent with other service-learning approaches in that student consulting efforts often lead to tangible benefits for the community, and students can gain a sense of community involvement through reflection on their service-learning experiences (Kenworthy-U'Ren & Peterson, 2005; Salimbene et al., 2005). Building community involvement is also part of our university's lifelong learning goals for students. By helping organizations in their communities, students gain a sense of mission that motivates students to give the effort needed to make SyBA function. Also, activities designed into the course provide rich opportunities to assess student learning, an important goal for instructors, the university, and its accrediting bodies.

Course Setting and Objectives

The university setting is a medium-sized (approximately 11,000 students) public university in the Midwest of the United States. The university

is located in a small industrial city of approximately 60,000 people surrounded by small agriculture communities. Students from first-generation college families comprise about 50% of the student body. The nearest large cities (300,000+ residents) are from 70 to 200 miles away. The university's location limits convenient access to large organizations, making our use of small businesses and community organizations a practical alternative.

The syllabus summarizes the academic purpose of the course as "a capstone course in both business and in general education . . . focusing on the theory and practice of strategic management, students integrate the foundation and functional areas of business and synthesize their business education with their [general education] experience" (Syllabus, 2007).

Thus, the instructors are responsible for teaching strategic management and encouraging the students to integrate, or combine into a whole, their prior learning in functional business courses (marketing, finance, accounting, management, operations, and information systems). The course addresses several university general education learning objectives, including critical thinking, communication skills, issues of values, and lifelong learning.

The course unfolds in three sequential phases: the organizing phase, execution phase, and the close/reflection phase. These phases overall lead the students through multiple learning cycles, asking them to engage in concrete experience, use abstract conceptualization, and to engage in reflection and active experimentation. We briefly discuss the purpose of each phase with more specific details included in the course design section below. The organizing phase introduces the purpose and structure of the SyBA consulting company to the students. During this phase, students are selected for leadership roles and assigned to consulting roles.

The purpose of the execution stage is twofold. The first purpose is to engage the students with their clients using a variation of process consultation, a method originally articulated by Edgar Schein (1999). In this approach, a helper works with a person or group through some sort of problem or challenge focusing primarily on "how" things are done rather than "what" is done. In process consulting, the client continues to own the problem and the consultant provides an effective process to reach a solution. This approach differs from technical consulting where the consultant takes the problem and resolves it for the client (Schein, 1999).

We call our consultation approach "strategic process consulting" (SPC), which combines strategic management concepts with Schein's process consulting approach. During the execution phase, students use SPC to offer clients a consulting process that helps clients identify and choose effective

strategic solutions that fit the clients' specific industry. SPC allows students to apply strategy concepts and avoids requiring that consultants be seasoned experts in a client's industry.

The second purpose of the execution phase is to give students experience using strategic management theories and tools to effectively plan for and operate the SyBA consulting business.

The close/reflection phase draws the service-learning to a close with a set of culminating experiences, including client presentations, observation feedback, reflection papers, professional development portfolios, and a final peer assessment. This stage closes the learning cycle by concluding the activities and facilitating deep reflection on a semester's activities and learning.

Course Description

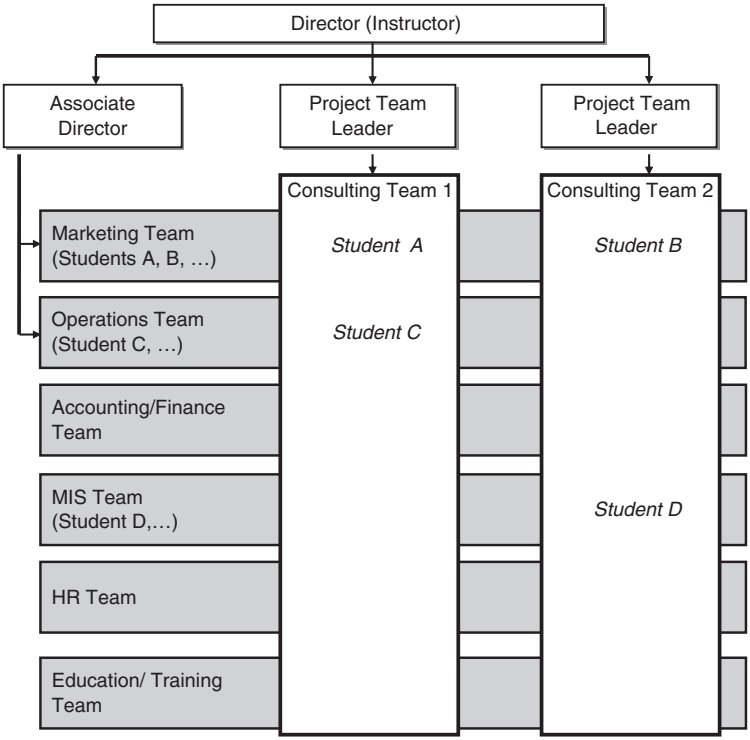
We will now describe the specific methodology we use to run the consulting class. The course uses very common elements of strategic analysis. Some strategic elements are mentioned in the phase descriptions below and a detailed listing of elements appears in Appendix A. The key learning device for the course is a student-led consulting company that uses a matrix structure consisting of production departments (consulting teams) and six functional departments (e.g., marketing; see Figure 1). SyBA tasks most students with being both consultants for a client and employees in a functional department.

The course is divided into three phases explained below. Explanations include student and instructor activities during each phase and some of the challenges faced by both students and instructors in operating SyBA's matrix structure. Table 1 contains a semester outline of major course activities.

We use two ongoing learning activities (OLAs) to facilitate student learning from their consulting team experiences, JIT lectures and QCs.

JIT lectures. As student teams encounter important issues that they do not fully understand, the instructors provide lectures and exercises to help deepen the students' knowledge of strategy and how to use strategy to help a client organization. These lectures are often triggered by team members and leaders expressing doubt as to how to proceed in the analysis or frustration with their inability to find adequate information. For example, a team might express that its nonprofit client is using a generic low-cost approach to serving its participants, but the team is not sure what the client could do to use a more segmented or niche approach. The instructor could use a JIT

Figure 1
Organization Matrix for a Typical SyBA Class Section



Note: In this matrix structure, consulting teams are vertical (white background); functional teams are on the horizontal (shaded background); associate directors from other sections manage the remaining four functional teams (accounting, MIS, HR, and education). Examples: Student A is on both Consulting Team 1 and the Marketing Team. Student B is on Consulting Team 2 and the Marketing Team. Student C is on Consulting Team 1 and the Operations Team. Student D is on Consulting Team 2 and the MIS Team.

lecture to explain to students the generic strategy options based on differentiation and cost–leadership, and then explore how and why organizations segment their potential clients and differentiate services. Using JIT lectures, instruction becomes a demand "pull" function allowing specific learning to take place when students can best be engaged because the students have recognized their need for that knowledge. Instructors have to be

Table 1
Outline of the SyBA Course Design (Semester of 16 Weeks)

1. Organizing phase (Weeks 1-3)
Instructor and students solicit and select clients
Instructor distributes course manual to students and collect fees for working capital
Instructor explains structure and purpose of SyBA and experiential learning to students
Students apply for leadership positions, instructor conducts interviews, and select leaders
Consulting and functional teams are selected by ADs and PTLS
Begin weekly leadership team meetings (instructors, ADs, and PTLs)
2. Executing the consulting engagement (begins in Weeks 3 or 4, ends in Week 15)
Each consulting team meets its client and begins directional analysis phase
Team reviews client mission and vision, analyzes stakeholders, business model, and competitive advantage
Instructor uses JIT lectures for content and quality checks for feedback to students
Consultants conduct internal and external analyses
Human resources functional team conducts developmental peer review
Consultants perform gap analysis
Consultants develop recommendations for gaps and create implementation plans
Education team and ADs administer content exam
3. Close/reflection phase (last 2 weeks of term)
Consultants prepare/perform the final presentation and written report for their client
Consultants prepare performance portfolio of written reflection reports
Consultants submit final peer reviews following presentations
Functional teams and leaders prepare turnover packets (instructions for next semester)

Note: SyBA = Sycamore Business Advisors; AD = associate director; PTL = project team leader; JIT = just in time.

well-prepared to both recognize the team's needs and be able to deliver a wide variety of topics with little time to prepare.

Quality check. QCs are a method for communicating effectively with clients while encouraging students to engage in ELT by reflecting on their experiences with their clients. During the semester, consulting teams are required to formally present their interim findings to the client after each stage of the consultation. These interim presentations are called QCs and occur throughout the semester. During the QC process, students go through the four stages of Kolb's (1984) experiential learning cycle. First, students reflect on their *concrete experience* with a portion of their client analysis (e.g., internal analysis). Next, the students prepare an interim presentation for the instructor by consciously reflecting on their experiences (*reflective observation*) and interpreting those experiences (*abstract conceptualization*) in light of the strategic management and other theories that are appropriate to their investigation. Students conclude the process (and their

presentation) through *active experimentation* by evaluating their findings and recommending improvements to their client.

QCs are developmental, allowing the instructors to assess understanding of pertinent strategic concepts and to facilitate deep reflection on interaction with the client. If the consultants are uncertain as to their findings, instructors encourage early presentations (dubbed "fuzzy" QCs by the students).

During the QC process, the instructor asks the team questions, critiques language, evaluates the validity of conclusions and depth of analysis, and encourages student reflection on their work. Informal QCs usually occur during class time and are often observed by consultants from both teams in a class section. In this way, both teams become aware of the issues surfaced by the other team and the advice and criticism of the instructor. Finally, once the team's QC is ready, the instructor permits them to present the interim findings to the client and the client provides the team feedback on their interim findings.

At the individual level, consultants list each accomplishment for their projects on a weekly progress report (PR) as well as what they plan to work on for the next week. Students also note on their PR form any procedures, strategy topics, or analyses that need to be addressed. The PR encourages students to reflect on their individual progress each week, gives the project team leader (PTL) a tool to manage the team's progress, and helps instructors select JIT topics.

The Organizing Phase

The purpose of the organizing phase is to lay the logistical groundwork for beginning the consulting operations. Important organizing activities include securing clients for the semester and selling operating manuals (used as the course textbook) to the students. Fees from manual sales are used as working capital for consulting operations. Instructors introduce the purpose and structure of the company to the students and select a leadership team. Student leaders take charge of the course (the consulting company) and assign each student to a position on both a client consulting team and on a functional team for SyBA internal operations.

Client Selection

We find that the best clients are organizations that are struggling to succeed and having some difficulties. Struggling clients want help so that they

are forthcoming with information that facilitates student learning and fosters student involvement in the clients' problems. Clients in crisis are too unstable for students to develop their findings and are avoided by SyBA. Clients agree to work within a semester timeline and give access to key managers as needed by the team.

SyBA solicits clients from a variety of sources, including economic development agencies, university or community officials (e.g., United Way), the previous semester's SyBA marketing functional team, and current and former SyBA students with ties to potential clients. Clients can find SyBA through a university Web site, but word of mouth and relationships are most effective in bringing in clients.

Clients typically require two or three contacts before they agree to participate. Past consultations and community involvement by the instructors and students (participation on boards and in activities) help increase the credibility of SyBA to potential clients. Students agree to guard client confidentiality as part of the SyBA ethics policy included in their operating manual.

More than one third of past clients have had the confidence to come back for a second consultation. Although that may seem like a low repeat ratio, it is a strong endorsement given that small organizations do not need frequent strategic reviews. First, engagements tend to be SPCs and follow-up engagements address major initiatives requiring feasibility studies or business plans (such as expansion of facilities or starting new lines of business/service).

Course Materials and Working Capital

Each student purchases a copy of the student-produced operations manual. The manual describes how to perform the client consulting engagement using the SyBA method of process consultation. The content of the operations manual is revised each semester by a student functional team with technical input from the instructor. Its price is currently $40, and it is 107 pages long. SyBA sells the texts to raise its working capital and does not charge any consulting fees to clients as part of our commitment to community service. Having an independent source of funds from manual sales helps SyBA create its identity as a real organization. SyBA funds are used to produce the manual, print final reports for clients, reimburse student travel to clients, and give "employee-of-the-week" performance awards ($5 gift cards/one per team). The university provides classrooms, an office, computers, a projector, and instructors.

Orienting Students to SyBA and Experiential Learning

In a typical semester, the college of business offers three sections of the class; one instructor teaches two sections and another instructor teaches one section. Each section has between 20 and 26 students; larger sections are difficult for the instructor to support effectively. Sections meet twice weekly for 1 hour and 15 minutes. Meeting twice, rather than once a week, increases the frequency of contact between team leaders, team members, and the instructor. Frequent contact creates opportunities for formative assessment and JIT lectures.

In the first two sessions, there is often great fear that the workload in the course is overwhelming, and it can be. The instructors explain that the students will be experiencing the challenges of having dual roles in a matrix-structured organization (a diagram of the SyBA section structure appears in Figure 1). For each student, managing the difficulties of filling dual roles requires satisfying leaders from both a consulting team and a functional team. Working in this matrix offers students a challenging preview to their future careers in organizations. To be successful, students will learn and use strategy as well as apply their learning from previous functional classes. In return, students are assured that they will have great opportunity to help local organizations, lead team efforts, and gain knowledge and experience valued by employers.

The Leader Selection Process

In the second week, all students apply for employment in SyBA using an interest form that briefly explains the leadership positions and the six functional teams that make up the SyBA organization. Students compose a cover letter detailing their interests and strengths for leadership positions, submit a resume, and give a rank-ordered listing of their interest in the six functional teams. For each section, the instructor and two student volunteers review the applications for leadership positions and briefly interview each viable candidate. The instructor first chooses an associate director (AD) to run daily learning activities in the classroom and supervise several functional teams. Next, the instructor selects a PTL to lead each of the two consulting teams in the section.

The instructors use the interview process to identify leaders who will be participative, developmental of others, and decisive in moving their team's efforts forward. Instructors avoid students who lead by trying to be a "superstar" because the superstars often fear delegating and loss of personal control, both of which are necessary for their team members to

learn. Also, the consulting projects are so extensive and complex that the leader cannot do it all. Instructors actively coach the leaders at all levels on building collaborative teams and inspiring their consultants to develop a sense of mission in helping their client. Team leaders are encouraged to take active roles in their teams' projects because student-peers tend to see hands-off leaders as aloof. By being "in the trenches" with the consultants, leaders build participative teams.

Signaling the Beginning of Student-led Training

Part of the learning process for SyBA is for students to assume control of the classroom. Student ownership of learning does not wait for leadership selection or team formation. To send the message that it is time to take that ownership, instructors leave the classroom and conduct interviews in a separate room. This leaves the class without a designated leader for an experiential exercise in which students create interview questions for a generic client. Next, ad hoc groups of students practice interviewing one of their group members posing as a consulting client. The student client answers questions as if the student were a member of an organization with which the student is familiar (employer, service organization, family business, etc.).

Creating the Matrix Structure of Consulting Teams and Functional Teams

After the three student leaders are in place in a section, the remaining employees of SyBA are placed on both consulting teams and functional teams.

Consulting Team Formation and Operation

The instructors give the PTLs the right to staff their own teams so that the PTLs accept full accountability for their team's success. To form their teams, the two PTLs in a section take the student employment application packets and divide the students into two teams of approximately 10 consultants each, selecting students from a variety of functional majors. Consulting teams meet during class time to discuss findings, review their approach to the project, and form conclusions.

Project team leader. Each PTL is responsible for the execution of a client consulting engagement. PTLs manage the workload and mediate internal team disputes if they arise. The SyBA manual states that PTLs are to

assign "responsibility not tasks" and "earn respect not demand it." They are the frontline supervisors of the consulting engagement. PTLs establish a plan of action or schedule for the semester-long project with key milestones and are responsible for meeting that schedule. PTLs help the team maintain excellent communication with the client while minimizing client time spent on the project. PTLs are exempt from functional team participation because of their heavy workload. Instead, they participate at the leadership team level for making and implementing SyBA policy decisions.

Consultants. Each student serves on a single consulting team for the semester. Informal subteams often form within a consulting team to carry out an element of the consulting engagement. Subteams create leadership opportunities for consultants.

Functional Team Operations

Functional teams and their leaders exist to serve all of SyBA. This means that each team typically coordinates its meetings and actions across three sections and two instructors. Table 2 lists the functional teams and a selection of their responsibilities.

Associate directors. The AD is responsible for the daily operations of one section of the class. ADs plan how students will use their time in the classroom (training, exercises, consulting team coordination meetings, celebrations, etc.). Planning is done in consultation with the PTLs and the instructors. In addition, each AD is responsible for coordinating several of the six functional teams that operate SyBA as a company. In a semester with three sections of the course operating, each of the three ADs takes oversight responsibility for two of the six functional teams (see Figure 1). Each AD selects a functional team leader (FTL) for those two teams. ADs are exempt from formal membership in a consulting team but sit in on consulting team meetings as part of the AD's training oversight responsibility.

Functional team leaders. Once selected by the AD, the FTLs lead teams responsible for the development of the SyBA functional infrastructure. Each functional team develops strategies and carries out routine functional operations such as employee training, performance assessment, and creating new operating procedures. FTLs serve on consulting teams as do their team members.

Functional team members. All consultants must also join functional teams. FTLs select their team members using team members' ranked list of

Table 2
Functional Team Responsibilities

Function	Responsibilities
Marketing	Develop a comprehensive marketing strategy for SyBA Create materials to educate future students about the course Develop a database of potential clients and solicit consulting engagements Publicize SyBA activities in the university and community
Accounting/finance	Secure working capital from textbook sales, deposit funds in account Create a budget and track spending, report regularly to leadership team Seek additional grants and funding sources
Operations	Develop and maintain procedures for daily operations of the company Update the employee manual for all procedural changes Improve the quality of the manual, maintain the office space Coordinate all final team presentation invitations
MIS (info systems)	Maintain and improve the SyBA Web site and Blackboard site Administer the online midterm and final peer review process Assist other functional areas needing technology to improve SyBA
Human resources	Support team formation activities, social events, and celebrations Track employee attendance, administer employee weekly awards Run and analyze peer reviews and manage peer review reporting Plan final celebration event
Education/training	Develop training exercises for daily class sessions Create content exams and quizzes as well as related study materials Develop training videos

Note: SyBA = Sycamore Business Advisors.

functional preferences and other information from their SyBA employment application. Unlike the consulting teams, which are client specific, each functional team must have members from all sections of the class so that the team representatives can coordinate any procedural changes across every SyBA section. The number of members in a team is negotiated between the three ADs based on team workload (usually between 4 and 8 members). Functional teams begin operations immediately to perform routine duties such as tracking attendance (human resources) or collecting for manuals/paying bills (accounting).

Leadership team operations at the corporate level. SyBA functions as a pseudo-corporation with each section considered a division. If there are

three sections of the course, the corporate-level leadership team typically consists of two instructors (directors), three ADs (one from each section), and six PTLs (two from each section), or a total of 9 students out of 65 enrolled. The leadership team (including the instructors) holds a weekly coordinating meeting outside the class. Meetings last about 60 minutes. The meetings are an opportunity to assess whether the consulting and functional teams are operating properly, are on schedule, and are being led well. Policy changes, training on SyBA procedures, improving consulting techniques, and morale boosting are part of the meetings. As part of our process focus, leaders learn to distribute detailed agendas and form concise reports and questions so that meetings are effective uses of everyone's time.

Span of control. The span of control varies from 10 for PTLs (most appoint an assistant PTL to help them manage) up to 25 for the ADs in the classroom. The ADs also oversee two FTLs. The FTLs are not part of the corporate level leadership team, but they help reduce the span of control for each AD by running their functional teams.

The Execution Phase

By the third and fourth weeks of class (7 or 8 sessions), the consulting teams have met with their clients and are beginning their analyses. Most clients request an SPC, which consists of directional analysis, internal analysis, external analysis, gap analysis, and recommendations. We explain these analyses in detail below.

Directional Analysis

The purpose of the directional analysis is to understand the client organization's competitive direction in terms of its strategic goals, relationships, and ability to create value. The method we use is adapted from the first stages of many strategic planning models that begin by examining the organization's strategic direction or purpose (e.g., Carpenter & Sanders, 2007; Thompson, Gamble, & Strickland, 2004). The consulting team begins by describing how the client does business, the client's mission, and vision for the future. Next, the team identifies the client's stakeholders and the value exchanged between them (Thompson et al., 2004). The analysis concludes by assessing whether the client's value creating activities and resources produce competitive advantages (Barney, 1991; Porter, 1985). Instructors

work with the teams to adapt their analysis tools to fit how nonprofit or social service clients create value.

OLAs in the directional analysis stage. OLAs commonly include JIT lectures on identifying the value stakeholders receive from the client organization. The QC in this phase is often developmental because it is the team's first time through the QC review process. Instructors urge subdividing the team with some students finishing the directional analysis while others start internal and external analyses.

Internal and External Analyses Stages

Internal analysis. Consultants review the client's internal operations to understand how the client operates and to identify areas of strengths (S) or weaknesses (W) in those functional operations. To help consultants recall their previous functional courses, instructors often ask questions such as "What should a marketing strategy look like? What are the goals of the accounting operation in any organization? Does the client have those elements in place? Are they effective?" Identifying the client's strengths and weaknesses forms the first half of the consulting team's SWOT analysis (i.e., strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; Thompson et al., 2004).

External analysis. Consultants review the client's general and specific environments (Hitt, Ireland, & Hoskisson, 2005) and identify any opportunities (O) and threats (T) facing the organization completing the second half of the SWOT analysis. The SWOT analysis then forms a basis for the subsequent gap analysis described below.

The general environmental analysis (Thompson et al., 2004) uses research and client observations for political/legal factors, economic conditions, sociocultural demographic shifts, and technology trends. The client's specific environment, or industry, is analyzed using the five forces described by Porter (1980) in terms of buyer power, supplier power, substitutes, competitive rivalry, and barriers to entry. Consultants document competitors' generic competitive strategies (Porter, 1985) and identify distinctive competencies (Collis & Montgomery, 1998). Consultants learn to adapt business strategy models for use on nonprofit clients. Industry competition in the social service context can be difficult to identify. Instead, external analysis for nonprofits often focuses on substitute services that may compete with the services provided by the client or other agencies that compete for the same participants or donors.

OLAs during the internal and external analyses stage. For the internal analysis stage, JITs often describe how the mission, vision, and goals can work together with internal capabilities to support the organization's strategy. Another JIT topic is benchmarking to evaluate the effectiveness of the client's internal functional areas such as marketing. The students struggle when required to exercise judgment and to support it with data, making the instructor's experience helpful in identifying data sources and interpreting findings. Although any topic is open for JIT lectures, students usually request help with Porter's (1980) five-forces model, identifying competitive advantages (especially for nonprofits), and understanding how capabilities and resources create sustainable competitive advantages (Barney, 1991).

Gap Analysis

Once internal capabilities and external environment are understood, the consultants identify capability gaps, resource gaps, and performance gaps. Any gap is simply the difference between a current level and an ideal level for the client to operate effectively, reach its own goals, or to compete with other organizations. If a gap affects an important part of the client's strategy, consultants identify the gap for the client and address it with specific recommendations. The SWOT analysis is used by the consultants to identify some gaps and to help prioritize their importance. For example, consultants will prioritize gaps formed by attractive external opportunities (e.g., demand for a new product), that align with internal weaknesses (e.g., slow product development capability), making it likely that the client will miss the opportunity unless action is taken. To assess the size of gaps, the teams often perform benchmarking, a comparison of the client's capability with a similar organization admired for its capability.

Recommendations

In the recommendation stage, consultants create their best recommendations to close the gaps identified in the gap analysis. Using nonprofits and small businesses as clients means that recommendations that require added staffing or a large amount of management time are not helpful. Expensive recommendations will never be implemented because of tight budgets. SyBA consultants are challenged to propose pragmatic strategies to obtain the resources needed to fund new initiatives. The gaps and recommendations form the basis for the final client presentation.

OLAs in the gap analysis and recommendations stages. JIT lectures address gap identification as students often struggle with whether a performance gap is strategically significant. Other topics for JITs include benchmarking and identifying best practices. To develop their recommendations, teams cycle back through the external and internal analyses. The QCs in this stage are extensive because the QCs involve the final actions recommended to the client.

The Close/Reflection Phase

The purpose of this phase is to draw service-learning to a close with a set of culminating experiences, including client presentations, observation feedback, structured reflection reports, peer assessments, a content exam, and end-of-semester turnover packets.

Final Report Generation and Presentation

After the analysis is concluded, a subteam of consultants prepares a final written report that discusses the analyses performed by the team and contains helpful ancillary material such as databases of key contacts, comparative information on competitors, industry trend data, and benchmarking data. Another subteam prepares a professional presentation (30 to 45 minutes plus a question-and-answer session) that must be concise, error free, and delivered with complete fluency. The final presentation explains the performance gaps identified by the team, recommendations for improvement, and advice for implementation. Preparation involves a series of QCs with the instructor in an iterative process until the final presentation is perfected. The process is stressful for students because no notes are permitted, so they must know what they are presenting and explain it in concise detail. The presentation is attended by the client, several board members from the client, a dean from the College, and invited faculty members.

Student Performance Portfolio

To conclude the course, each student creates a performance portfolio consisting of three short reflection reports (an average total of 12 to 15 pages, double spaced). Several examples of comments from student performance portfolios appear in Appendix B.

Reflection report. Students reflect on which portions of the course were the most meaningful to them. Students discuss how their commitment to serving local organizations has affected their attitudes and goals for future community involvement. A number of students have changed their employment goals, wanting now to become managers of social service agencies (nonprofits). Students also reflect on how their learning from prior business and nonbusiness classes contributed to successfully running the SyBA organization. Finally, students reflect on what they have learned about working in teams as they use their critical thinking, communication, and time management skills to accomplish a large coordinated task.

Application report. In this article, students apply the strategic process consultation method to their own professional and life goals. By performing an SPC analysis, students demonstrate their knowledge of strategy and their understanding of SyBA's consulting methodology. Here students will identify values and their needs for lifelong learning to live a successful personal and professional life. Students' goals tend to be broader and more "other centered" after the SyBA experience. Many students recognize their community as an important stakeholder.

Contribution report. Students reflect on the specific value they directly created and/or delivered to their consulting and functional teams. Students interpret their specific contributions made to their consulting and functional teams' efforts. The weekly PRs are especially useful for students to use in reviewing their accomplishments during the semester.

Peer Reviews and Exams

Peer reviews. There are two peer reviews during the semester. Both reviews use a behaviorally anchored rating instrument developed for the course (Syllabus, 2007). All leaders and consultants rate their consulting team members at midterm. The human resources team administers the Web-based evaluation. There is no grade impact for the midterm review; it is focused on identifying and encouraging good work behaviors and advising students on improving any poor work behaviors. Performance dimensions include levels of participation in the team's activities, responsiveness, responsibility, and quantity and quality of performance. Reviews include students' comments given to justify the ratings given. Instructors review

the comments for consistency with the peer ratings and compare each consultant's ratings with their respective team's average. After the final presentation, all students perform a final peer review, and those results are used by the instructors as part of the final course grade; rewarding those who perform above their team's average and lowering grades of those materially below average.

Content exam. The content exam, administered around the 13th week of the course, measures the students' knowledge of strategic management. To prepare, students review a set of strategy content notes and do review exercises developed by the education functional team. Instructors use the exam to assess whether students have learned a broad range of strategy concepts. The exercises and content notes allow the instructors to address topics that may not be covered through the experiential consulting, such as globalization and international market entry.

Turnover packets. During the semester, the ADs, the PTLs, and the six functional teams reflect on their duties, methods, and effectiveness of their respective teams or SyBA positions. Each position/group (e.g., ADs, PTLs, and functional teams) produces a turnover document explaining team responsibilities and best practices as a service to future SyBA students.

Assessment

To evaluate student learning, we use a variety of summative and formative assessments, including QCs, leadership meetings, midterm peer evaluations, reflection reports, contribution reports, final peer evaluations, and final consulting presentations.

We primarily use the QC practice presentations to gauge the progress of the consulting projects and leadership meetings and interactions with functional teams to assess internal SyBA operations. The JIT teaching approach, student-led learning design, and revisions to the student manual each semester combine to give us great flexibility for responding to assessment results. For example, a student functional team helped us quickly develop a content exam and study materials in response to observations from QCs and leadership meetings that students needed broader exposure to strategy content.

Midterm peer evaluations are used to assess student effort level and to improve their work behaviors. Reflection reports are used to assess the

impact of service-learning on our students using the frequency and depth of student comments. We also use these reports to assess how well students apply the SPC model.

We use contribution reports (the students' self-reported contribution to the class) and final peer evaluations (the teammates' views of each student's contribution) to partially determine individual student grades. The portion of grading credit each student receives is weighted by their contribution report (the student's self-reported contribution to the class efforts) and their peer ratings from the final peer evaluations.

We use the final consulting presentations to clients to assess student communication skills. Developing effective communication skills is a learning goal for the college of business and the university's general education program. The presentations are observed by outsiders and include feedback from clients, faculty, and deans.

Conclusion

Our purpose in this article was to describe our approach to teaching strategic management using a service-learning design. Our aim was to give the reader both a clear description of how we run the course and why we use certain activities and methods. Service-learning enables our students to gain access to strategic decision makers in organizations and inspires students to give extra effort to help those same organizations. By creating a real organization to do the consulting, we were able to make strong connections to students' experiences in other courses, a key feature of a capstone course. The course design lets us mimic conditions that students will experience when professionally employed. The use of functional teams gives students a chance to integrate their previous discipline specific coursework.

We, as instructors, have had to shift from being the formal leaders of the class and become coaches who provide expert advice (content) and keep students motivated. To encourage learning, we adopted a JIT teaching method that provides students with knowledge at the point they need to apply it. By changing our approach to teaching, our students have practiced strategic management, gained confidence in addressing unstructured problems in organizations, and grown in their commitment to a future of participation in their communities.

Appendix A
Selected Strategic Management Topics and Related Assessment Activities by Phase of Course

Organizing Phase

Strategy Topics: Business strategy/strategic management, service-learning elements, for profit and nonprofit management, community engagement, organizational structure

Assessment: No assessment activity. Introduce progress reports, quality checks, and the just-in-time lecture process

Execution Phase

Directional analysis

Strategy Topics: mission, vision and goals, stakeholder analysis, strategic management process, generic strategies (cost vs. differentiation), functional, business, corporate strategies

Assessment: Progress reports identify JIT lecture topics as needed; Quality checks—apply competitive strategy theories and communicate findings to clients

Internal analysis

Strategy Topics: organizational culture, competencies, capabilities, competitive advantage, resource-based view

Assessment: Progress reports identify JIT lecture topics; Quality check—apply resource and competitive theories to functional area problems and communicate findings to client

External analysis

Strategy Topics: industrial organization, general environment, industry analysis, competitor analysis, five forces analysis, competitive advantage

Assessment: Progress reports identify JIT lecture topics; Quality check—evaluate environmental conditions using theories and communicate findings to client

Gap Identification and Recommendations

Strategy Topics: benchmarking, strategy formulation and implementation, outsourcing, market growth strategies, diversification—alliances and acquisitions

Assessment: Progress reports identify JIT lecture topics; Quality check—use theories and creativity to develop solutions, support with data, and communicate findings to client

(continued)

Appendix A (continued)

Close and Reflection Phase

Strategy Topics: strategy implementation, review topics as needed
- *Assessment:* Performance assessment and reflection using the following:
  - Final Presentation—service-learning contribution to client and community, communication skills;
  - Final Report to Client—theory application, research skills, and recommendations
  - Student Performance Portfolio:
    - Application of SPC method to student—strategic process skill;
    - Reflection on service-learning—community involvement, ethical views;
    - Contribution to SyBA—creativity, strategy knowledge
- Peer Evaluation—assess team skills, effort level, communication skills
- Content Exam—strategy content knowledge
- Turnover Packets—functional knowledge, application of theory to practice

Appendix B
Evidence of Learning Outcomes From Reflections in Student Performance Portfolios

In reviewing student reflection reports and assessing the effectiveness of our service-learning design we noted that students are often deeply moved by their consulting efforts. The experiences students are having in the class have resulted in moving testimony as to their broadened value system, an important outcome linked to service-learning experiences. Students also express that they have integrated their previous coursework at the university into the consulting experiences in this course. Students have a new appreciation for both the role of organizations in helping the community and a deeper understanding and respect for the small businesses that make up an important part of the fabric of our communities.

Representative Quotes From Students' Portfolios

How our students' lives can be changed by the course and service-learning:

> This class was something different than I have ever ventured to do.
>
> As of an hour ago from this moment, I turned down the job . . . I realize now that it is not all about being able to say that I have a job to count on right after graduation, it is about doing something that I want to do for the rest of my life. . . . Whether it be supporting a cause I feel strongly about or booking shows for my favorite musician, no matter what meaning my work may have, it will [be] powerful and important to me.

(continued)

Appendix B (continued)

How the course experiences helped build confidence and commitment to serving the client:

> At the beginning of the semester I was kind of skeptical on whether or not this project would do well. . . . Once things started coming together I got [a] feeling of enjoyment out [of] this. . . . I was doing something with a lot of meaning and people [were] depending on me. . . . I became attached to the furniture store . . . it was hard doing some of the work but it was all worth it in the end knowing that we made a difference in the furniture store.

How the course helped them integrate liberal/general education knowledge and strategy:

> Now . . . I realize that all these so-called "stupid" courses had a reason . . . they teach the fundamentals of a well-rounded human being. These courses taught me the ropes . . . and helped me to complete this large project . . . how to deal with people and also how to respect their views [Because of these courses] I could communicate with stakeholders of the museum. . . . I could respect Eva's [the museum's founder, an Auschwitz survivor] views and reasoning on topics because of what these courses had taught me.

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