

A Detailed Look at the Development and Execution of a Junior Year Case Competition

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ABSTRACT

The use of case studies is an effective tool for not only teaching business concepts, but developing a wide range of professional skills as well. Case studies offer students the opportunity to enhance their presentation, writing, teaming, critical thinking, and time management skills. When used as part of a case competition, the case study also offers the opportunity for networking with business executives. This paper provides a detailed look at one school's development and execution of a mandatory junior year case competition that plays a key role in developing such skills. Such a competition is part of an integrated four-year backpack-to-briefcase program.

Keywords: case study, professional development, case competition

INTRODUCTION

Business schools, in general, do an adequate job of preparing its students for the technical demands associated with a variety of professions. However, most schools do not focus as much on the professional development needs of its students. As such, there is a need to include professional development activities as part of the business school program (Bisoux 2002), (Moore 2007), (Dvorak 2007), (Rubin 2009), (Korn 2011), (Wiseman 2013), (Murray 2014), (Hardy 2014), and (Mind Tools 2015).

Professional development activities are designed to help students successfully navigate from being a student to being a business professional, from carrying a backpack to carrying a briefcase. Such activities could include choosing the right major, exposure to a variety of business careers, professional writing and presenting, creating a resume, effective interviewing, professional etiquette, networking, and teamwork.

This paper provides a brief summary of an integrated, four-year professional development program at a BusinessWeek top-ranked undergraduate business school. The paper will then focus on the third-year of the program, a mandatory case competition, including details on the development and execution of such a competition.

THE VILLANOVA SCHOOL OF BUSINESS BACKPACK TO BRIEFCASE PROGRAM

In response to the need to enhance the soft skills of its undergraduate students, and armed with the knowledge gained from the experiences of other schools such as South Carolina State (Jamison 2010) and Oakland University (Majeske 2009) which have attempted to integrate professional development into the business school curriculum, the Villanova School of Business (VSB) developed an integrated professional development program known as Backpack to Briefcase (B2B) (Borden, 2015).

B2B is an innovative program, integrating professional development into the core business curriculum throughout a student's four year academic program. B2B augments students' participation in traditional academic courses, providing holistic preparation for success and leadership as business professionals. Integrating career and professional development concepts into the VSB curriculum fosters a thoughtful approach to preparing for life after graduation. B2B is administered by the Clay Center at VSB, in collaboration with VSB faculty. The Clay Center staff plays a key support role within the business school, serving as advisers to students on a variety of issues such as course selection, internship opportunities, and other administrative matters.

Each year of the B2B program, students are presented with opportunities to learn and develop professionally. Table 1 provides a summary of what each year of the program entails.

Table 1: Outline of B2B Program

<p>Freshman Year: Assessing the Environment <i>(required; embedded in Business Dynamics course (fall semester) plus 1-credit, stand-alone course (spring semester))</i></p>	<p>Professional Development Component Each semester, students participate in and reflect on professional development activities related to exploration of majors, college planning, career exploration and professional skill building. Critical written communication techniques are developed. Additionally, each student crafts a professional resume and participates in a networking etiquette workshop, “The Art of Mixing and Mingling.”</p>
<p>Sophomore Year: Defining and Implementing Your Strategy <i>(required 1-credit, stand-alone course)</i></p>	<p>Professional Development Seminar In the fall or spring semester, VSB sophomores participate in a one-credit seminar focusing on interviewing skills, the internship/job search process, ethics, networking, business etiquette, etc. Throughout the semester, opportunities to interact with alumni/employers are presented.</p>
<p>Junior Year: Gaining a Competitive Edge <i>(required 1-credit, stand-alone course)</i></p>	<p>Case Competition In the fall or spring semester, VSB juniors participate in an internal case competition. Written and verbal communication skills, business research methods, analytical skills, team dynamics, and leadership are integrated throughout the competition.</p>
<p>Senior Year: Capitalizing on Your Investment <i>(voluntary)</i></p>	<p>VU Seniors Program VSB partners with the university-wide VU Seniors Program - a series of social, professional, and spiritual activities designed to unify the senior class while preparing them for life after graduation.</p>

This paper will take an in-depth look at the junior year case competition, including the planning and execution of the competition.

WHY A CASE COMPETITION?

Bruner (1999) provides an overview of the many benefits of using the cases at both the graduate and undergraduate level, along with useful tips for educators contemplating the case method approach.

Prior research studies support the positive learning outcomes associated with case study competitions (Menna, 2010), (Corner, 2006). Maier-Lytle (2010) notes that case study competitions ‘. . . provide competitors with opportunities to gain specialized knowledge, improve communication skills, develop a sense of teamwork, and heighten their chances in the job market’.

Galloway (2013) argues that case study competitions constitute an ideal pedagogical strategy for achieving the objective of equipping graduates with the knowledge and skills that are increasingly needed and valued by business in an effective and efficient manner, with resulting benefits for both students and employers.

Kunselman (2004) notes that the case study method helps students develop problem-solving, critical reasoning and analytical skills, all of which help prepare students to make better decisions and become better students and ultimately better employees. The authors also note that case competitions in particular provide an opportunity for students to work in self-directed teams, a situation they will likely encounter after graduation.

The use of case studies can also be beneficial from an accreditation perspective. Credle (2009) suggests that the combination of case analysis training, followed by a case competition, develops important student competencies and skills and that the data gathered from such activity outcomes can be used to assess the quality of the educational delivery system of the school.

Stone (1981) offers additional benefits associated with a case competition. The use of judges from industry assists in the reinforcement of the interchange between universities and industry, as well as potential financial support of the project. Such judges are often impressed with the seriousness, effort, and ability of the students. Including faculty in the competition may foster an interchange of ideas and techniques regarding pedagogy and research.

Given the many benefits of cases, and case competitions in particular, it was decided that the capstone phase of the Backpack to Briefcase program would be a junior year case competition.

VSB3000: A MANDATORY JUNIOR YEAR CASE COMPETITION

VSB 3000, the third phase of the VSB B2B program, requires all students to participate in a team-based case competition in either the fall or spring semester of their junior year. Students are assigned into teams and challenged to analyze and solve a case. There are three rounds of competition. Winners will advance from each round and ultimately to the final where a winning team will be selected. In addition, students prepare and submit individual executive summaries that describes their solutions.

Preparation for Case Competition

To prepare for the competition, students register for a one-credit course that prepares them for the competition. The focus of the class meetings are as follows:

Case Analysis: Over a few sessions, an approach to case analysis is discussed and practiced. Case analysis is an important skill for upper level classes and leads to better analysis and decision making. Instructors focus on tools and techniques that can be used in case analysis and problem solving. An actual case is analyzed in class as a hands on application.

PowerPoint: This session is designed to improve students' ability to craft a business friendly, professional quality PowerPoint deck.

Presentation Skills: In this session, the important elements of delivering a professional presentation are reviewed. In addition to general presentation skills, a particular emphasis is put on presenting as part of a team.

Professional Business Writing: The goal of this session is to hone students' writing skills, particularly as it relates to producing effective business documents. An executive summary is required from the students at the end of the course and this session prepares them to do this.

In-Class Presentation: This session is designed to allow students to do a low stakes "dry run" in class before the actual competition. Students are assigned to teams and challenged to develop a presentation based on the case that was previously discussed in class.

Also, given that networking is one of the goals of the program, students are required to submit a resume. Those resumes are put into a digital book which is distributed to the competition judges.

The Competition

The Bartley briefCASE Challenge kicks off on a Wednesday and continues through the end of the day on Saturday; students need to be available during this time to work with their teams. While there will be inevitable class conflicts between Wednesday and Friday, students are asked to keep their schedules open otherwise to be available for working with their teams. Instructions and rules for the competition are handed out at the kickoff in addition to being posted online. It is during the kickoff that students learn who their teammates are and what case they will be working on.

Prior to the kickoff, students are sorted by major and then randomly assigned to teams. Each team is targeted to have 4-5 students. Each team should end up with some diversity in the majors of the students.

On the day of the competition, there are three rounds.

Preliminary round: Teams are divided between 12 different judging rooms with 4 teams presenting in each room. The 12 top performing teams from this round advance on to the...

Semifinal round: Teams are divided between 4 different with 3 teams in each room. The top four performing teams advance on to the...

Final round: The four teams left standing present to a judging panel who picks a winner and a runner up.

The winning team receives \$500 for each team member. The team that finishes in second place receive \$250 for each team member. The team members of the other two finalist teams receive \$100 a piece.

Each presentation can be no longer than 15 minutes followed by 10 minutes of Q&A. Each team member is required to have a speaking role in the presentation. Teams receive feedback from the judging panels at each round in the competition.

The judges consist of members of the various business school advisory boards, faculty, and friends of VSB. This offers the judges an excellent opportunity to reconnect or remain connected with VSB and to get to know the students. After each round, a social event is held to encourage networking between the students and the judges.

Please see Appendix A for a detailed schedule of the course and the competition.

Executive Summary

The last part of this course is for each student to write an executive summary of his or her team's solution to the challenge. This document should represent individual student's work and is not intended to be a collaborative team project. Students submit their assignments through Blackboard on or before the posted deadline.

A prompt and rubric are included with the materials handed out at the competition kickoff and posted on Blackboard. See Appendix B for a copy of the rubric.

Peer Evaluation

Since the focus of this experience is the team competition, it is expected that all team members will contribute roughly equal effort and that all members will receive the same grade for their team's performance. At the end of the competition, each team will evaluate the contributions of each member of the group, using a customized version of TeamHelper.

TeamHelper consists of seven instruments and guides that can be used individually or collectively at each stage of the team process. It includes:

The Instructor's Overview and Team Effectiveness Presentation provide information on how to create and structure a dynamic team development experience for students.

The Team Charter Guide offers advice on how to create a working agreement for the team that spells out expectations, norms and roles for team members.

The Team Personal Styles Inventory (T-PSI) gives students insight into their own personal styles of behavior and how they can be most effective with that style in their teams.

The Team Feedback Survey (TFS) enables individuals to understand how their own self-perception compares with the perceptions of their teammates on two critical categories of team-related behavior.

The Feedback Review Session (FRS) provides a framework to do a self-managed peer review of team process and individual contribution and effectiveness.

The Individual Contribution Scale (ICS) provides instructors with an assessment of the contributions of all team members.

Articles & Reference Materials offer information related to the development of team effectiveness.

Professors obtain access to the TeamHelper set of products by first registering and then setting up its usage. Students then register through the TeamHelper web site, and are charged \$4.95 for a two-year license. Students will be able to access their TeamHelper accounts for an unlimited number of courses within that 2-year time period (from the [TeamHelper](#) web site).

The key component of TeamHelper that is used for the case competition is the Team Feedback Survey, which enables each student to complete a self-assessment and receive feedback from other team members on a set of behaviors. In addition to the survey, students identify top strengths and development areas for each team member in an open-ended response section. To be considered complete, feedback must be complete for all team members

including themselves and it must be professional, balanced, and constructive. See Appendix C for a sample report (courtesy of TeamHelper).

The results of this feedback are evaluated and if appropriate, individual grades are adjusted. Students who don't engage and participate may end up with a failing grade for this course even if their team performs well if they did not adequately contribute to the team effort.

Grading

The course grade is based on the following components and allocations:

In Class Presentation	10 %
Resume Submission, Participation, and Attendance	5 %
Team Case Analysis & Presentation (shared team grade)	65 %
TeamHelper (potential deductions – see above)	TBD
Executive Summary (individual grade)	<u>20 %</u>
TOTAL	100 %

CONCLUSIONS

There is a need for business schools to meet both the academic and professional needs of its students. While the majority of schools do an acceptable job developing the academic skills of its students, the same cannot be said for developing their professional skills.

This paper looked at one such program, the Backpack to Briefcase (B2B) program at Villanova University's School of Business, and in particular its junior year case competition. The paper includes an overview of the B2B program, as well as the details of the junior year case competition. It is hoped that faculty and administrators will find the information useful in developing professional development programs at their schools.

One benefit of the case competition worth noting is that it allows us to evaluate all of our students reasonably consistently. Given that all students have to be part of a team presentation and turn in an individual executive summary, we can evaluate all of them on their presentation and writing skills using the same prompt and rubrics at roughly the same point in their college career. Such evaluations can be useful for accreditation purposes.

Appendix A: Schedule for VSB3000, Fall 2017

<i>Date</i>	<i>Topic/Activity</i>	<i>What's Due</i>	
<i>Class Sessions</i>			
Aug 28	Course Overview, Case Analysis		
Sept 4	NO CLASS – LABOR DAY		
Sep 11	Building A Business Case	Assigned Reading	
Sep 18	Case Discussion	Read and Prepare Case	
Sep 25	Preparing a PowerPoint – Nick Maglio		
Oct 2	Delivering a Presentation – Tom DeMarco		
Oct 9	NO CLASS – FALL BREAK		
Oct 16	Presentations/Feedback	Team Presentations	
Oct 23	Presentations/Feedback	Team Presentations	
Oct 30	Business Writing – Cathy Toner		
Nov 1 – 4	<i>Bartley briefCASE Challenge</i>	See below	
Nov 6	Debrief		
<i>Other Important Dates</i>			
Oct 4	Resume	Resume made “visible” in Handshake by 11:59 PM	
Oct 20	WX Deadline for this class	Please note that it is before the normal WX date!	
Nov 8	TeamHelper	Feedback due for teammates by 11:59 PM	
Nov 10	Executive Summary Help Session	Writing coaches available between 2:30 to 4:30 PM in Bartley 1063	
Nov 15	Executive Summary	Documents due - Blackboard dropbox by 11:59 PM	
<i>The Bartley briefCASE Challenge</i>			
<i>Date</i>	<i>Time</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Event</i>
Nov 1	5:30 – 6:00 PM	Driscoll 132	The Bartley briefCASE Challenge Kickoff
Nov 1 – 4			Team Analysis and Presentation Preparation
Nov 4	9:30 AM – noon noon – 1:00 PM 1:30 – 3:30 PM 3:30 – 4:30 PM 5:00 – 7:40 PM 7:40 – 8:00 PM	Bartley Classrooms Curley Exchange Bartley Classrooms Nydick Fam Com Bartley 1010 Nydick Fam Com	Preliminary Competition Round Luncheon for judges and all competitors Semifinal Competition Round Reception for judges and semifinalists Final Competition Round Award Ceremony & Reception

BARTLEY BRIEFCASE CHALLENGE
VILLANOVA SCHOOL OF BUSINESS
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY RUBRIC

STUDENT NAME: _____

THESIS DEVELOPMENT/INTRO/CONTENT

- 0-1 point: Position is vague and illogical and lacks thesis and supporting details; little evidence of appropriate content. Document fails to adequately communicate a position or rationale.
- 2 points: Paper takes an apparent position supported by adequate detail and/or source material; some vagueness; material is appropriate but may lack a clear connection to purpose.
- 3 points: Paper takes a clear position supported by logical detail; all key points are addressed; material is clear, relevant, and accurate.

Points: _____

CLARITY & COHESION

- 0-1 point: Sentence structure and word choice make reading and understanding difficult.
- 2 points: Sentence structure and word choice sometimes interfere with clarity.
- 3 points: Sentences are structured and words are chosen effectively to communicate ideas clearly.

Points: _____

ORGANIZATION

- 0-1 point: Organization is unclear; paragraphs are incoherent or underdeveloped; transitions are missing; sequence of ideas is difficult to follow. Document lacks formatting options that would appropriately cue the reader.
- 2 points: Organization is generally clear; the sequence of ideas may be difficult to follow; some duplication of ideas or information may be present
- 3 points: Organization is logical; paragraphs are unified and coherent; transitions are effective; easy to follow sequence of ideas; little or no duplication of ideas or information. Bullet lists, headings, and other formatting options are employed to assist in reviewing the document.

Points: _____

SPELLING, GRAMMAR, SYNTAX, PUNCTUATION

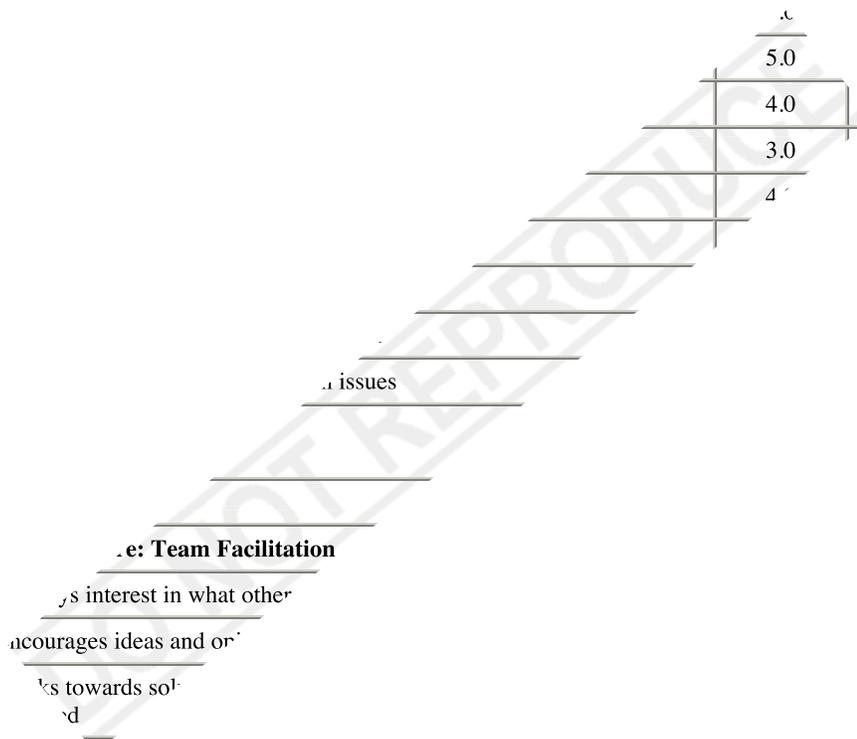
- 0-1 point: Writing contains numerous errors in spelling and/or grammar.
- 2 points: Writing contains few errors in spelling and grammar.
- 3 points: Paper follows normal conventions of spelling and grammar and has been carefully proofread; virtually no errors.

Points: _____

Total Points: _____ /12 possible points

Signature: _____

Appendix C: Sample TeamHelper Report



o express their views even when they are contrary	4.0	3.3
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