



SOCIETE INTERNATIONALE POUR L'ENSEIGNEMENT COMMERCIAL

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR BUSINESS EDUCATION

Sample Format

Case Studies in Business/Technical Education

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HUMAN RESOURCE COLLABORATION

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This case study describes the development and implementation of a collaboration project between the Central California Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and Fresno City College (FCC) to create a formal mentoring program. The project was first implemented in 2000 and has shown tremendous success in helping students prepare for business careers.

Project Plan

Students who enroll in FCC's human resource management (HRM) course are required to have a human resources professional mentor for the duration of the semester. Part of the human resources mentor assignment includes attending an association (SHRM) luncheon with their mentor, job shadow their mentor for 2 hours, and formally interview their mentor. At the end of the semester, students must submit a written report on the interview and mentoring experience. All human resource mentors are members of the local SHRM chapter.

Objectives

With the ultimate goal of producing qualified students who are workforce ready, the following objectives were established:

- Provide HRM students a networking experience throughout the duration of the semester.
- Provide every student in the course the opportunity to engage with local HRM professionals.
- Encourage students to seek an advanced degree and/or a career in HRM.
- Provide student exposure to a professional business meeting and luncheon once a semester.
- Provide a venue where HRM students can apply professional dress/business etiquette in a formal business situation.
- Increase visibility of FCC students and its HRM program throughout the year.
- Strengthen relationships between FCC's Business Division and local employers through mentor involvement and advisory board membership.
- Increase annual HRM program enrollment and HRM certificates awarded.
- Obtain ongoing feedback/opportunities for program improvement regarding FCC's HRM program and curriculum from local HRM professionals throughout the academic year.

Implementation

The following activities identify major steps necessary to duplicate and implement a formal HRM mentor program such as the one presented:

Create a linkage with a professional association. The first and most important step is to establish a relationship with a local professional association. In this case, the majority of Fresno City College's HRM advisory board members are also SHRM members. Therefore, an HRM link was already established. Moreover, the HRM instructor has been actively involved in SHRM for many years. Since SHRM affiliate chapters are required to participate in a community outreach project, most

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chapters have an allocated budget for this purpose. Suggest that the project serve as an education outreach activity and request the project be funded by chapter. Once the linkage has been established, secure an invitation for your students to attend a luncheon meeting during the semester. Make sure the speaker and topic for that day is relevant for the class.

Secure professional suit donations. Because the majority of our HRM students are economically disadvantaged, many cannot afford to purchase appropriate professional attire to wear to a business luncheon. In 1998, the HRM instructor and the then-SHRM president created a program entitled “Suiting Up For Success.” The purpose of the program was to solicit “slightly used” professional suits from local business professionals. The project was a phenomenal success; and as a result, the Business Division maintains donated space that serves as a “store” for disadvantaged business students to receive free suits. Formal programs like this, however, are not necessary. Securing donated suits often-times is not a problem since many business professionals have unused wardrobe pieces that they would gladly see put to good use.

Secure mentors from the professional association membership. All HR professionals serving as mentors are also SHRM members. A representative from SHRM coordinates the HR professionals who are interested in serving. Professionals sign-up to become a mentor through the local association website, newsletter, or at the monthly association meeting. HRM mentors are solidified by the second week of school.

Match students with mentors. During the third week of school, HRM mentors are randomly matched with students. Students are given the mentor’s name, e-mail address, and telephone number. They are required to contact the mentor within a week and send a follow-up e-mail to the mentor (and copy the instructor). The student is also required to make arrangements to meet the mentor at an upcoming SHRM luncheon.

Inform students of their responsibilities in the program. At the start of the semester and as part of the syllabus, students are provided written instructions regarding program expectations. Their first assignment is to contact their assigned mentor via e-mail providing information about themselves and their professional goals, as well as, letting the mentor know how she/he can help.

Provide professional etiquette training. The entire HRM class is presented with a workbook on professional behavior.

Appropriate business attire, appropriate language/conversation topics, and dining etiquette are emphasized. Various situations that the students will encounter when meeting their mentor and/or attending the luncheon are addressed and simulated. Students are also taught how to introduce themselves and shake hands. Although this topic seems a bit trivial, it was suggested by our advisory board and has proven to be a valuable experience.

Select professional attire. Students are provided a date and time (typically early afternoon) to meet at the donated clothing site to get fitted with professional attire. Students assist each other in identifying and selecting “just the right” attire for the luncheon. The process is a bit crazy and chaotic because multiple students are trying on multiple suits with a limited number of dressing rooms. In our case with an abundance of donated clothing, most students leave with at least two professional business suits. The instructor will notice a definite “synergy” among classmates after the suit fitting experience.

Make arrangements for transportation. FCC’s District has a strict student transportation policy that applies to all students who are driving themselves to an off-campus, school sanctioned activity. Students are required to complete a form and provide proof of insurance. Because many students take the bus or do not own a car, transportation would appear to be a problem. Fortunately, the SHRM meeting location is near a bus stop. Moreover, many students with transportation happily volunteer to carpool with students in need. If the luncheon meeting time conflicts with other classes and/or work obligations (as is the case with many of FCC’s students), the instructor provides a memo to the respective teacher/employer asking that the student be excused from their obligation to attend the luncheon.

Attend the luncheon. Students meet the instructor and the SHRM mentor coordinator at the meeting site the day of the luncheon. After they are checked in, they meet their mentor and are seated together during the meeting. During the meeting, the students are introduced to the SHRM chapter. At the end of the meeting, a class photo is taken. The SHRM chapter has consistently used this photo and included a nice article in their monthly newsletter.

Send thank you notes and follow-up. In the class session immediately following the SHRM luncheon, students share their experiences. This is a fun and informative time for students to relate how they applied their newly found networking/business etiquette skills to a real-life situation. All HRM stu-

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dents sign a thank you card which is mailed to the SHRM chapter. Students are also required to write individual thank you notes to their luncheon hosts/mentors.

Provide mentor reminders and periodic status reports.

Throughout the remainder of the semester, students are reminded of their job shadow obligation and the required written report on their interview and mentor experience. One exam question also asks students to provide a status report on their mentor project.

Collect mentor interview/evaluations. During the second-to-the-last week of class, all mentor interviews are due. There is no exception on this deadline. Students must also provide a written evaluation of their mentor experience. Prior to the final exam, the instructor also contacts each HRM mentor and thanks them for their participation and solicits feedback on the mentor experience.

Challenges

There are four primary challenges associated with this project. They include: scheduling, student commitment; availability of attire for “hard-to-fit” students; and the job shadow/mentor commitment.

The SHRM chapter meets on Tuesdays at noon, while FCC’s HRM class meets on MWF mornings. Every semester, this poses a challenge for many students and the instructor. Students who are in class during the meeting time make prior arrangements with their instructor (with the assistance of the HRM instructor). Although this isn’t a problem for most students, there are always several each semester who cannot be excused from work.

Student commitment is a challenge. Funding for the luncheon (\$15 a guest) and the total number of needed mentors must be determined and secured at the start of the semester. Numbers are based on first week enrollment. As with many classes, students drop the class within the first few weeks. Student attrition affects the professional association budget and has the potential to create a negative impression toward the program from professionals who signed up to become mentors.

An additional challenge is that of finding suits for plus-size students. Every semester, several students have difficulty finding attire appropriate to wear to a professional luncheon. In several instances, students have worn a nice pair of jeans and a dress shirt or sweater because of the inability to secure clothing that fits.

Although every mentor has good intentions, some may be unable to complete their obligation to meet with students due to workload and/or availability. A mandatory 2-hour job shadow requirement sounds reasonable, but employee privacy concerns make it an unrealistic requirement for many employers. In several cases, members of FCC’s HRM advisory board stepped in to assist students.

Surprises

The HRM collaboration has been life changing for many students. As with many community college students, a typical HRM class at FCC includes single parents (male and female), economically disadvantaged, and academically challenged from a wide range of ethnicities and cultures. The local SHRM chapter is not as ethnically diverse as most students enrolled in the HR program. It has been rewarding and refreshing to see how mentors and students learn from each other. SHRM members enthusiastically welcome the students and consistently impress upon them the importance and value of continuing their education. The students increase their confidence level and vision for their future.

One student who participated in the project was a felon and single mom trying to get her life together. She was partnered with an attorney mentor. Immediately after the luncheon, she approached the HR instructor in tears saying that she never knew lawyers could be so kind and respectful. “He treated me like a person.”

It is exciting to see how wearing a professional suit transforms a student’s attitude. For many, this is a first-time experience. Class synergy is exceptional at the end of the semester.

The only negative surprise (but should be expected) is from those students who wait until the last minute to make contact with their mentors. Unfortunately, with short notice, several mentors were unable to assist the students.

Evaluation

The project has definitely met its stated objectives. It has been a win-win situation for both the college and for the professional association.

Although several students receive job leads, the greatest success has been in the area of increased student confidence. Students continue to report how proud they are to integrate HRM terminology into their discussions with HR professionals. An additional area that has exceeded expectations is that of program enrollment. It should be noted that the HRM class is a transfer

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elective course and is not required for business majors. However, since this collaboration was introduced, enrollment has increased 133%. Many students take the class on the recommendation of former students. Without fail, class synergy is exceptional at the end of the semester, and lifelong friendships are created.

Shortfalls

The primary project shortfall is the inability for some working students to attend the luncheon and/or have time to develop a mentor relationship. The mandatory 2-hour job shadow is occasionally a real problem for working students. Although students are reminded of appropriate and inappropriate behavior toward mentors, there is always one student that wants to take advantage of a situation. For example, this past semester, one student couldn't attend the luncheon and expected the mentor to take her to lunch at a different time.

Areas for Improvement

In our program it was felt that a better job can be done communicating with each mentor. Ideally, the instructor should personally meet with each mentor at least twice throughout the semester. At a minimum, the instructor should communicate with the mentor at least once a month via e-mail. Have students provide bi-weekly status reports throughout the semester because many will wait until the last minute to complete their reports.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations

It takes time and attention to properly implement a project such as this. It is imperative that those wishing to duplicate the project collaborate with a local professional organization rather than randomly solicit individual working professionals on your own. Visit the national organization website to locate the chapter closest to your campus.

Encourage the chapter to hold a clothing drive and only accept professional business suits. Most students have a hard time distinguishing what is appropriate business attire, so require business suits. If the call for clothing is not specific to business suits, you may receive other "nice" clothes which may be inappropriate. Donate inappropriate clothing to a local charitable organization.

If the collaborating chapter is unable to underwrite the luncheon, (FCC's cost is \$15 per student), identify grant monies from your district foundation. If you are seeking grant monies, you must typically plan 4-5 months in advance to allow time for the application and funding process. The local SHRM chapter agreed to underwrite 20 students a semester, although the chapter has been gracious enough to fund up to 25 students when

necessary. This last semester, a total of 35 students were planning to attend. This meant 15 students needed to be funded. An announcement was made at a SHRM meeting, and SHRM members signed up to underwrite the extra lunches. Having a strong relationship with a local chapter is critical to the success of this project.

Words of Advice

The majority of the work for this program involves pre-planning activities. Prior arrangements include matching mentors to students, providing etiquette training, and ensuring each student has professional attire.

The project takes several class meetings away from the limited class sessions—one for the etiquette training, one for the luncheon meeting, and one for the post-meeting feedback session. It's a challenge covering all the required material when 3 class meetings are used for this purpose. Plan accordingly.

Locating storage for donated suits and a place where students can be fitted for these suits can pose a challenge. If there is no space on campus, contact a local real estate agent who can assist you in securing donated storage space. The manager of our local mall donated vacant retail space.

Don't assume that teaching students the importance of basic manners always results in a learned habit. Make students write thank you notes to HRACC, suit donors, and their mentors. To ensure compliance, have them provide a photocopy of each note.

Be prepared to spend time communicating with mentors. Many have never worked with a typical community college student and sometimes have too high or too low of expectations. Constant communication ensures timely resolution of problems.

Make time to teach and role play proper etiquette in professional situations. Students need to know what to expect at the luncheon when they meet their mentor. Students must learn how to introduce themselves and extend a professional handshake. Dining etiquette must also be reviewed.

The benefits derived from this mentoring collaboration project have been well worth the extra effort. Both student and mentor learn valuable lessons from their experience with each other. It is what education is all about!



An Electronics Program for Changing Times

*Russell Bonine, Instructor
Southwestern College*

Southwestern College in Chula Vista, California, had long enjoyed a highly respected electronics program. During the 1970s, the 1980s, and in the early 1990s, classes were full, and employers came to our campus to recruit our graduates. Sometimes the employers were interested in the top 50% of the graduating class. Other times, they wanted the top 75%; and on at least one occasion, the entire graduating class was offered employment.

With the advent of the computer boom and the dot com period, enrollment and interest in electronics declined. In the late 1980s and the early to mid 1990s, manufacturing jobs were sent off shore, and the military industrial complex that had provided so many jobs for our graduates had merged and moved from the San Diego area. Computer careers were the growth industry, and the perception among our prospective students was that electronics was much more difficult to learn and employment opportunities were either very limited or entirely nonexistent.

Our electronics program added programs in basic computer systems (Electronics 10A and 10B), office machines (Electronics 14), and cabling (Electronics 15), the CompTIA A+ certification (Electronics 260), the CompTIA Network+ certification (Electronics 265) and an Advanced Networking course (Electronics 266) which bloomed into a Microsoft Windows 2000 Server certification course (Microsoft exam 70-215). Students who otherwise might have entered the standard electronics courses were taking computer courses under the electronics department umbrella. As was to be expected, basic electronics courses were cancelled due to low enrollment, as were the more advanced courses. Students who were in the program were forced to attend another local college to complete the courses required to graduate. It was a very unpleasant situation for the students, staff, and faculty who still recalled the "golden years."

There were 2 full-time instructors with the department. One spent his contract time teaching a new program called Cisco Certification which was enjoying a large number of students, and the other spent half of his contract time teaching mathematics. The computer courses continued to fill while the electronics courses were slowly dying out. There were serious discussions about closing the program entirely.

Proposal

Reviving this program would need top management support.

This was received when our new dean of instruction arrived. Being a former business professor who faced similar problems in the past, it was recommended that the Electronics Department offer a different packaging and delivery method. This new format would allow students to know exactly which classes they were going to take, when they would take them, and when they could graduate receiving a certificate or an associate degree.

The plan was called "Fast Track" and consisted of one instructor taking a cohort of students through 4 courses in one semester, followed by 3 courses the next semester, 3 courses in the summer, and concluding with 2 or 3 courses in the final semester. The plan called for students to attend courses on Thursday evening and Saturday morning. A total period of 9 hours per week was spent in class. Course offerings included:

Semester 1:

- Electronics 100 – Intro to Electronics
- Electronics 111 – Direct Current I
- Electronics 113 – Direct Current II
- Electronics 131 – Digital I

Semester 2:

- Electronics 116 – Alternating Current I
- Electronics 118 – Alternating Current II
- Electronics 122 – Solid State I

Summer Session:

- Electronics 138 – Digital II
- Electronics 226 – Solid State II
- Electronics 228 – Operational Amplifiers and Linear Circuits

Semester 3:

- Electronics 152 – Microprocessors and Micro-controllers
- Electronics 162 – Electronic Assembly
- Electronics 295 – Independent Study

Students Helping Students

The students would form study groups and meet at the Chula Vista City Library on Wednesday to discuss the homework and the problems that were due the next day. Many serious discussions and even some disagreements had to be settled in class by the instructor the next day. The students would then meet at the Southwestern College Library on Friday to discuss the problems and homework that had been assigned at the previous course meeting. Take-home examinations were given that required students to work extra hard to research and develop answers from either the textbooks or the volumes of handouts that the instructor prepared for each class. The handouts were generally single-topic worksheets that provided sample problems to solve and verify that learning and mastery of the subject had occurred.

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Electronics

Method

After selecting an instructor for this program, book selections were determined. Two textbooks were chosen to support most of thirteen courses which would reduce the student's expenses. Any student who signed up for the course was assisted through the program. The students were encouraged to help each other be successful.

"Anything can be achieved if one has the support and assistance from their administration... Leadership that provides encouragement and believes that every student can be successful if given the proper environment to learn, makes all the difference in the world."

Challenges

Students deficient in math or college study skills were a concern. Some students did drop out when the program became overly difficult. However, several of these students have returned and reentered the "Fast Track" program after receiving more math training or taking other courses to improve their college study skills.

Concern was voiced by some faculty members that the program was a "fool's errand" and was a waste of time and effort. Concern was also voiced by other faculty members that this format did not support traditional college methodology and could bring discredit to the college.

Results

The biggest surprise was how many people completed the program. We had projected that each semester would see a 10% to 15% decline in enrollment from the preceding semester and that about 40% percent would complete the program. We were thrilled to see more than a 75% completion rate.

Evaluation

The electronics program test platform was blessed with great leadership and support for the program from the very beginning. Our dean championed the program from its inception by providing funding for tutors and instructional lab assistants and backing every suggestion and request by faculty to achieve student success. The optimism and positive outlook for the program was contagious.

We met our expectations and in some respects we exceeded them. We had more students complete the program than we had expected. We have seen more students return to complete other programs within the department or with other departments at Southwestern. The "Fast Track" program continues to be

offered to this day. There are currently about 20 students enrolled.

This program has led to the addition of other programs over the past few years. We are offering an intensive Electronics Program which allows students to complete 33 units during one year (6 courses in the fall, 6 in the spring, and 4 in the summer). Enrollment started at 15 and is currently holding at thirteen 7 months later. Three units of either work experience or an internship are required during the one-year program. Students work in the field for each of the 3 sessions.

A similar program started this spring working with computers and networking. Another intensive program will start this fall where we will be offering training for Microsoft Certified Desktop Support Technician training, Microsoft Certified System Administrator (MCSA) in Windows 2000 operating systems, and Microsoft Certified System Engineer (MCSE) in Windows Server 2003 operating systems. We are expecting the students who complete either the intensive computer program or the intensive electronics program will continue toward a second degree/certificate.

Shortfalls

Program completion rates can still be improved. We are working with other departments on campus to see if we can place the students into a "college success" program to prepare them for the fast track or intensive programs. Not all students need this additional support, but the "at risk" students could certainly benefit from such assistance.

Summary and Recommendations

In reviewing our efforts there were several lessons learned.

Anything can be achieved if one has the support and assistance from their administration. A great dean can bring a program back to life by believing in it and supporting the ideas of the instructors who are teaching. Leadership that provides encouragement and believes that every student can be successful if given the proper environment to learn, makes all the difference in the world. We have 2-4 times the students in our programs than we did only three years ago.

Students will rise to your expectations if you give them the assistance and the support that they deserve and require.

Cut your losses and move on. You will spend a great deal of time trying different strategies to make the program successful. Some ideas won't work no matter how hard you try. You need to let them die and move on.

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The Rewards of Effective Mentoring

Brian L. Chow, Instructor
Golden West College

The following case is based on a mentorship experience carried out at Golden West College during spring 2005. As a first-time mentor, the experience gave me the opportunity to appreciate the rewards, benefits, and positive outcomes for both the student and the mentor. This case will explore my reflections on this very worthwhile endeavor.

Objectives

Business faculty members at Golden West College are encouraged to serve as mentors to one or more students throughout the term. This is especially important for “at risk” students who may need additional guidance to navigate the rigor and opportunities derived from a college education. The program aimed to provide assistance and support to economically disadvantaged, limited English, and disabled learners.

Effective mentors can:

- Help students understand the dynamics of college;
- Give limited English students additional opportunities to hone their speaking and writing skills;
- Provide all students a better awareness of the “big picture” as it relates to course assignments or experiences that seem of little value at the time; and most importantly,
- Help students develop the self-motivation to learn, seek opportunities, and demonstrate leadership skills.

Method

At the beginning of class term, announcements are made in each business class regarding the availability of faculty mentors. At that time students are made aware of the mentoring process and how it can support them in their studies. While a vast majority of students are open to participating, some are apprehensive and may need additional motivation to take the first step (i.e. extra credit).

Once students are identified, they are assigned to mentors who can meet their special needs. My mentoring assignment included 6 students in their early twenties. Four students were Mexican-American; two others were international students from Egypt. Depending on the students’ needs and availability, I met them during my office hours or before class meetings. During this time I

provided tutoring assistance, advice on available student services, recommendations of courses they might consider, or plain moral support and encouragement.

Challenges

There can be many challenges related to the mentoring process. Accurately assessing the strengths of each student and determining the areas for improvement can be a challenge but is critically important. Many times students are unwilling share their strengths and weakness until a rapport is built and trust is established.

Forming a relationship with the assigned mentor can be another challenge. Students and mentors alike must understand that the process takes commitment from both parties. A one-sided relationship is doomed to failure.

Keeping students motivated can also be challenging. In order for students to continue with the relationship, they have to recognize its benefits. By providing developmental discussions, taking a sincere interest, sympathizing, and encouraging, students will realize that these sessions are a valuable tool to their success.

Finally, there is always a shortage of qualified mentors. Establishing more programs that encourage, train, and support mentors may be the key. Mentors should be recognized for their outstanding accomplishments and contributions to their schools, communities and students.

Measuring Success

Although it is difficult to measure success in every case, I am pleased to say that I had many success stories. Success doesn’t come easy. However, when an “at risk” student makes a statement like, “I was going to drop out until someone showed they cared about my future;” or “Gosh, I didn’t know what I wanted to do as a career until I my mentor helped me focus my life;” it all seems worth it.

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Lessons Learned

This mentoring experience made me realize how important
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Effective Mentoring

and productive an effective mentorship can be. I was proud to take part in watching students grow to their fullest potential. It proved to me that the students have a tremendous capacity to meet any challenge given guidance and support. Student attitudes about education turned more positive. More of their energy became focused on learning. Their conversations focused on future college plans rather than the “next party.” I was an enabler for disadvantaged students and helped them achieve something they couldn’t do on their own. I was able to inspire them to reach outside of their “comfort zone,” to do something unique, to develop and reach a goal, and to make a difference. These were my achievements through this mentoring process.

Summary and Recommendations

A successful mentor is one who has the ability to motivate students through his/her wisdom and knowledge. There isn’t any greater feeling than knowing you were instrumental in making a difference in a student’s career. It is the commitment that has many rewards, from personal growth to career success. The goal is to build a culture where others are inspired by our efforts.

Mentors can also use support. A “mentoring team” can provide mentors a platform to support each other by offering solutions, collaborating efforts, and sharing lessons learned.

Although the role is multifaceted, a mentor who can listen to student concerns and, most importantly, serve as a role model will reap the benefits of being an enabler, change agent, catalyst, facilitator, and motivator in their students’ lives.

Electronics

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Fast track and intensive programs are not for everyone, but they do meet an important need. For those considering a fast track format, be prepared to think outside of the box and explore every possible idea in order to be successful. Our success was due to the support received from the administration, the support staff, and the school dean. It is an endeavor that provided our students the ability to grow, meet their goals, and fulfill their dreams.



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INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR BUSINESS EDUCATION

A society for everyone concerned with Business Education