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Leadership in the Classroom

10/31/2016



The Huntsman School instituted a new core curriculum, the set of courses required of all business majors, beginning this fall semester. Two new courses, MGT 1050, Foundations of Business, and MGT 3800, Leadership, serve as bookends to our core curriculum, and help provide the curricular component of our mission to develop leaders of distinction in commerce and public affairs.

The Foundations of Business

In September of 2014, Dean Douglas Anderson called me into his office. Inspired by efforts at Boston College, he wanted to create a course that would help students see the field of business in a holistic manner and create a set of expectations for incoming students aligned with our culture of excellence.

In the interest of creating a collaborative work I partnered with Dr. Shannon Peterson, Director of the Huntsman Scholar Program, and we put together a team of 15 students who would help create this new class. Since this was a unique course with no clear predecessor we spent the next 18 months collecting data from students, faculty, alumni and employers. Based on hundreds of interviews and surveys we found that Huntsman students needed engaged, challenging courses where they were pushed to consider different perspectives. The most interesting part of the research turned out to be the response we received from employers. Unanimously, and rather vociferously, every employer we talked to pointed to two themes: they wanted to hire people who were critical-thinking problem solvers and who could communicate clearly.

Given the task before us and the data we collected, we set out to create a course from a different perspective. Instead of using the usual business materials, we found ways of introducing students to the world of business through literature, art, history, philosophy and other liberal arts disciplines. We decided to introduce ethical dilemmas by having students read Aristotle and Locke, to grapple with questions of leadership and power by reading Dostoevsky and viewing Picasso, and think about organizations by reading Orwell and Tennyson. By forcing students out of their traditional comfort zones of learning we are hoping to create enough cognitive dissonance that students begin to question their assumptions and start thinking critically and creatively about business and the world around them.

Creating this course was one of the most rigorous and well-researched experiences I have had as a professor. I have high hopes that we will achieve our goals of creating a holistic introduction to business and of setting performance expectations for all Huntsman students. The best assessment of success right now may be from the students who took the pilot course during Spring 2016. As one student explained in their course evaluation, "(Because of this class) I feel now as though I have a purpose in being in college. Before, college was just a means to an end. But now I care about my education, I want to do the absolute best that I can." Our hope is that they will take that excitement with them as they go through the Huntsman School and focus on how they can make a positive difference in the world.

Leadership

My first assignment, almost as soon as I joined the Huntsman School last year, was to develop and launch a new leadership course that would be required for all business majors. I began course development by analyzing syllabi and reaching out to colleagues from top business schools including Georgetown, Harvard, Stanford, Boston University and the University of Virginia. Through these discussions, I



John Ferguson is the course lead for the Foundations course and associate director of the Huntsman Scholar Program.

found that similar courses were designed to increase individual leadership capability and favored the application of leadership concepts through experiential learning, including real world projects. Building off these insights, we created a course that utilizes cutting edge theory coupled with innovative individual exercises and team-based activities to help students assess and develop leadership skills.

The guiding principles of the new leadership class are; first, leadership is positive influence, is not associated with a formal title and can be performed by anyone. Second, leadership development is the result of increased-self awareness, knowledge of leadership practices and principles, purposeful practice and thoughtful reflection. Finally, leadership is challenging and requires individuals to step out of their comfort zone.

To help students step out of their comfort zone, provide a real world opportunity for leadership practice and instill the values of the Huntsman School, students are required to develop and execute a "leadership challenge project". This project requires students to identify a need in the community or at large, recruit team members, create a plan and lead a service effort to achieve an extraordinary result. Students are required to individually dedicate and lead a minimum of 16 hours of service during the 7-week class. Students have demonstrated both creativity and strong leadership in achieving remarkable results.

Projects included:

- Donating 120 winter hats to children in Mongolia.
- A fundraiser that resulted in purchasing and gifting two cars for refugees in Cache Valley.
- A USU football "superfan" experience for an individual with special needs.
- A bubble ball tournament that raised over \$1,000 for Project Smile.
- A reading glasses drive for individuals in the Philippines with deteriorating eyesight. 67 glasses were donated within 24 hours.

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— Bret Crane

One indicator of the impact of the new class can be found in the response of students. In the words of one accounting major: "Beginning this class, I was not sure what I expected. I came in as an Accounting major, my brain scattered with numbers and equations, not at all what this class was about to start teaching me. What have I learned so far? I'm more than just a number-crunching accountant. I can be a leader and make a difference, and I'm just now learning the tools to become a great one."



Bret Crane teaches Leadership and is an assistant professor with the Huntsman School.