

Keeping It Real

By Laurie McLaughlin



The top-secret clients and their new car concept may not be disclosed, but the class project was one that provided students with the invaluable experience of working in the trenches for a client on a very real, high-end, high-profile product.

“The project was intimidating and overwhelming at times,” says marketing student Matthew Jung ’12. “But Professor Sunil Thomas was a great teacher, and it was reassuring to know that we had access to his experience and help whenever we needed it.”

The semester-long assignment in Thomas’ undergraduate Marketing Research Methods course included market research and the design of a marketing campaign for the motor vehicle – still undisclosed to the public – that would appeal to Generation Y consumers. Thomas had partnered with marketing company FreedomZone on a previous class project for Starbucks. FreedomZone approached Thomas again with the auto manufacturer’s product.

“They came to us because they wanted to attract Generation Y, and the best way was to have Generation Y students talk to their peers to gather information,” says Thomas, an associate professor of marketing. Divided into six competing teams, the class received the same project

brief. Thomas was available as a resource, but beyond that, the students were on their own to apply their entrepreneurial spirit and attack the problem from different angles and come up with meaningful solutions – and present their strategies to FreedomZone. Two teams split the \$4,500 first prize, and, says Thomas, “the company was very excited about the presentations and will implement many of the ideas the students had.”

“The entire experience for the students was real-world related,” adds Thomas, and he is not surprised that Jung and other students found the project challenging. “Importantly, they were able to apply all the concepts they learned in class and then see how a company uses those techniques.”

Making it Real in Today’s Business Climate

Bringing the business world into the classroom and sending the classroom (*continued on page 19*)

Focusing on Generation Y consumers, Matthew Jung ’12, kneeling above, and Angelica Banales ’12, were each on the winning student teams that presented marketing plans for a major auto manufacturer for a yet-to-be-announced new vehicle. “The company was very excited about the presentations and will implement many of the ideas the students had,” says Associate Professor of Marketing Sunil Thomas, above.

‘We make a special effort to bring our practical experience into the classroom. I start each class by describing situations I’ve dealt with and reinforce the theoretical principles with real-life examples,’ says Bruce Lipian, lecturer in finance.

(continued from page 17) back out into the business world encapsulates Mihaylo College’s focus on creating an educational experience that fully prepares students for their careers.

This mission relies on faculty – both full- and part-time – who are entrenched in the field. “For example, we constantly renew our pool of adjunct faculty in order to bring first-rate practitioners into the classroom,” says Mihaylo College Dean Anil Puri.

“Before students enter the job market, they need to understand the environment that they will be moving into. Professors provide students these real-world projects and use the tools of academia to analyze and understand the current state of affairs. To me, a relevant business education is one that provides an unflinching look at the world that is in the making right now.

“Our professors work within that world daily, and they bring that wisdom and experience to their students.”

Wayne Pinnell is the managing partner of Haskell & White LLP, one of the largest locally owned CPA firms in Southern California, and he’s a part-time Mihaylo College accounting professor. “As a practicing financial statement auditor, I bring real-life examples to each class meeting,” says Pinnell. “Often, I have had a direct experience related to the course material in my ‘day job’ within the same day that I present it to my students. By making it real, I’m helping set students’ expectations for what they are getting into.

“In the accounting profession, we are experiencing an ongoing sea change because of the financial crises of the past years and the divergent interests of various bodies charged with the promulgation of new standards,” he adds. “One direct result is that the textbook becomes outdated more quickly each year.”

As a lecturer in the information and decision sciences, Prem Gupta points out that faculty who are working daily within their industries provide extraordinary insight and, often, an entrée into the field. He’s president of Global Infovision Inc., which sells, implements, customizes and supports Microsoft Business Dynamics software for mid-sized companies. “I have almost 30 years of experience in aerospace, pharmaceutical, and food

companies in the fields of business planning, operations planning, forecasting, operations research, inventory planning logistics, and systems analysis and design,” says Gupta. “These are the same topics I teach in my courses.”

Gupta’s business is across the street from the university, and he is pleased to provide ready guidance to students evaluating their career paths, whether it’s to enter business or pursue advanced degrees. “Over the years,” he adds, “we have also offered training and employment within our company.”

Digging In: Hands-on Preparation for the Job Market

By day, Bruce Lipian is a StoneCreek Capital managing director, and he’s been in private equity and corporate finance for 20 years. On Thursday nights, he co-teaches the graduate-level Mergers and Acquisitions course with Darleen Armour, a principal at Cronkite & Kissell, a valuation firm.

“We make a special effort to bring our practical experience into the classroom. I start each class by describing situations I’ve dealt with and reinforce the theoretical principles with real-life examples,” says Lipian. Part of the class requires students pitch a “client” who’s in the market to buy or sell a company. Each presentation requires the valuation analysis along with recommendation on deal structure and financing alternatives. “Professor Armour and I play the roles of the clients, and just like in real life, we’re edgy and unsophisticated when it comes to corporate finance matters,” says Lipian.

“Not only are the students required to do the mechanics right, but this assignment is designed to teach them how to communicate in an understandable and sensitive manner. They learn how to win an engagement by gaining the trust and confidence of the client.”

Up From the School Desk and Onto the Front Lines

The queues at a Wachovia Bank branch were very long – customers were waiting up to 15 minutes for service. The students in Assistant Professor of Management *(continued on page 21)*

At the 2011 Small Business Institute Project of the Year competition, the Mihaylo team took first-place honors. For the last six years, Management Professor Peng Chan, below, has been the faculty advisor for Mihaylo’s victorious teams.



‘Saying you’re qualified to do something because you’ve actually done it is powerful,’ says Matthew Jung ’12. ‘Experiential courses can help you get a better feel for what’s really important. It’s a great way to build confidence.’

(continued from page 19) Adelina Gnanlet’s Service Organizations and Operations undergraduate course collected data within the branch for three to four weeks. They observed the ebb and flow of customers – busy times, slow intervals, interaction between people, etc. “The students then identified staffing requirements and waiting-line analysis and created computer models – information they carried over from an information and decision sciences course – that would reduce the number of customers in line during peak hours, and Wachovia adopted the model,” says Gnanlet. Her career has been in manufacturing process management; and her research is currently in healthcare management – improving efficiencies in hospitals.

“In this course, students pick a service firm and identify a problem area in conjunction with the management from that company. Students act as consultants and help the client find feasible recommendations. My students have done process improvement in a number of industries.” Clients have included Disneyland, Mexican Cantina, Bristol Farms, Fresh & Easy, Wachovia Bank, First Bank, Boiling Crab restaurant and Speedzone, among others.

Winning Awards

At the 2011 Small Business Institute Project of the Year competition, the Mihaylo College team took first-place honors – and Mihaylo’s team has ranked among the top 10 for 19 of the last 20 years. The contestants conduct in-depth studies of real businesses and present case studies improving upon the clients’ practices (See related story on page 5.). “We learned how to analyze a company based on its current and past financial performance and preparation/planning for a new product launch,” says team member Prabhu Palanisamy, who earned his MBA at Mihaylo in 2010 and now works at Southern California Edison. “Working with the criteria helped us to apply what we have learned throughout the course of our MBA studies, and the process of applying structured analysis helps us every day within our current work.”

The faculty advisor behind the top teams in the last six years is Peng Chan, profes-

sor of management. “I provide a framework that helps students focus on the steps in the process,” says Chan, who has served as a consultant for both private and public corporations in the United States and Pacific Rim nations. He also has advised and trained senior executives for more than 200 major international corporations. He previously served as an adviser to the Vietnamese government in establishing the country’s first stock exchange. He’s impressed with the success of his student teams, and adds, “Their analyses are as good as any outside consultant.”

Fundamentals for the Future

“To me, the most important aspect of making it real is that it leads to better results. Students are more motivated, they remember course content better, and it makes the class more fun,” says Francis Mummery. He’s a lecturer in economics and president of Mummery Economic Consulting Inc., which provides expert witness services in cases of personal injury, wrongful death, wrongful termination and medical malpractice in addition to valuations and guidance in financial, marketing and economic matters for businesses – all of which provides rich and relevant in-class material.

“I encourage my students to think of their education as an ongoing process,” says Mummery. “The time they spend at CSUF is just one step in the process, and it must continue after they graduate.”

Matthew Jung, the student who explored Generation Y for a car company appreciates the hard work required in the practical approach to learning about business. “Saying you’re qualified to do something because you’ve actually done it is powerful,” he says. “Experiential courses can help you get a better feel for what’s really important. It’s a great way to build confidence.”

True to Jung’s experience, confidence is earned. And, Mihaylo College continues to equip students with both the knowledge and experience required to begin or advance their careers with the self-assurance required of today’s business leaders. ■

