Integrating Subject Matter and Practical Experience: Leveraging technology to support subject matter learning, creating room for business world - relevant lectures and meaningful assignments

An Instructional Innovation Proposal
Submission for Summer 2009

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March 9, 2009

I have reviewed the proposal and I support the request for a course release/cost reimbursement for the project.

Department Head
March 5, 2009
Integrating Subject Matter and Practical Experience: Leveraging technology to support subject matter learning, creating room for business world relevant lectures and meaningful assignments

PROBLEM STATEMENT
BUSA3000 is a required course for all RCB students in their junior year and, for almost all students, this is their first exposure to international business. Many students have very limited understanding of international and cross-cultural dimensions of business prior to this course, and all are making a first transition from the core curriculum to specialized topics. At the same time, these students are required to acquire several new skill sets:

• BUSA3000 is a designated core Critical Thinking through Writing (CTW) course – many students have neither critical thinking nor business writing skills, as important as these are for success in business;
• Global information literacy – Students are required to identify international newspaper articles and explore other international business sources to support individual writing assignments and a group based country research report; and
• Podcasting and presentation skills – students work in groups to prepare a country research report and either present the results to the class using a Podcast or a multimedia presentation.

Pedro Carrillo coordinates BUSA3000 for the IIB. Some 700 to 800 students are enrolled in BUSA3000 in any given semester, taught by several faculty members (full time and part time). During one semester each year BUSA300 is also taught in Spanish. As a core course, all regular semester sections are required to administer a common final exam, making the use of a multiple-choice testing instrument mandatory in order to ensure some degree of consistency across sections.

In order to adequately prepare students for the testing required in a required core course with many sections, an instructor is forced to spend the majority of the lecture time covering the material in the textbook (subject matter) with only limited time remaining for any mini case analysis and discussion, use of video materials, guest lecturers, classroom exercises or any additional instruction to address critical thinking, business writing, group work or presentation skills. Challenges of teaching BUSA3000 include:

• a significant amount of subject matter has to be addressed,
• many novel concepts need to be introduced to a full class of students where most have never been abroad and some never left the state,
• a framework has to be provided for meaningful CTW activity, information literacy, and presentation skills (in person or as a podcast).

BUSA3000 covers a significant amount of subject material and several diverse approaches (CTW, podcasting, information literacy). This provides a context for what may appear to be rather an ambitious series of teaching innovations. Some of the proposed activities have been explored briefly and in a preliminary fashion in the past. The objective of this proposal is to implement a series of pedagogical innovations in a systematic, integrated approach.

I propose an approach to combine innovation in teaching that would address these challenges, while resulting in very specific improvements in student learning. The proposed approach includes:

• Experimentation with new teaching methods (wikis) and technology assisted classroom activity (classroom response systems and hand-held portable digital tablets)
• Creative use of media such as podcast-based subject matter lectures, combined with videos that convey the diversity in cultures, environments and situations encountered in international business
• Inter-disciplinary enhancements to improve the learning acquired through course assignments by specifically leveraging the Online Writing Environment, materials on critical thinking, examples of effective business writing, information literacy, the services of the Digital Aquarium and the IS&T Digital Media group
• Creating higher levels of:
  o Student learning by leveraging technology to deliver and reinforce the subject matter, thereby freeing up class time for application, review and discussion
  o Student accomplishment by raising the quality of work through examples, review, and coaching
  o Student involvement by offering the subject matter in media format and using class time for mini case discussions, peer review of project assignments, and use of classroom response technology, and
Student motivation by relating classroom efforts closely to career enhancement and practical skill development.

PROPOSAL OBJECTIVES
The proposed approach is intended to explore innovation in teaching with the objective of very specific improvements in student learning, including:

- **Course Delivery:**
  - Improve learning, review and reinforcement by enabling asynchronous review of podcast lectures
  - Increase student involvement and instructor’s ability to assess learning through technology-assisted classroom activity (classroom response systems)
  - Improve classroom experience and learning by use of interactive lecture-in-motion instruction versus “death by PowerPoint” pedagogy
  - Reduce single dimensional lectures by using podcasts to present and enable review of subject matter
  - Improve perceived relevance and authenticity by use of videos and virtual resources (globalEDGE) to convey the diversity in cultures, environments and situations encountered in international business

- **Course assignments and activity:**
  - Improve team experience and learning by instructor facilitated team based activity and peer review
  - Improve writing and critical thinking skills through additional instructional emphasis supporting CTW
  - Increase information literacy specifically in a global information context
  - Improve quality of presentations/podcasts through project planning and basic project management

In addition the innovation in teaching, we seek to evaluate the following elements for potential value to faculty:

- Integrated approach to combine the subject matter learning and business skills acquisition in a core survey course
- Effectiveness of technology, podcasts, interdisciplinary learning and facilitated group activity in a core course
- Approaches to and effectiveness of instructor facilitated team based activity and peer review
- Use of alternative classroom technologies
- Approaches and effectiveness of podcasting as a subject matter instructional delivery medium
- Targeted use of media in an international business survey course
- The level of course specific business writing, critical thinking and information literacy instruction required to produce a meaningful improvement in student work.

METHOD
The proposed approach would use a combination of the following methods to achieve the stated student and faculty objectives:

- With the implementation of SharePoint in the undergraduate RCB program, students will have access to the Web2.0 Wikis to be used in team research projects assigned in BUSA3000. Unlike many of the graduate students, these students will not have much familiarity with the use and specifically the contribution to team based activity as is increasingly common in the workplace. The use of existing training materials and newly created introductory material will greatly reduce the student learning curve in use of the tool. It is important that wikis become a useful facilitator of group interaction and not a distraction reducing productivity.
- The use of podcast based lectures to augment the delivery of the subject matter and enable asynchronous review of podcast lectures by the students will greatly reduce the need to spend classroom time covering (or repeating) the textbook and “death by PowerPoint” pedagogy. This is specifically important to balance classroom discussion and innovation versus the need to cover all the material in the textbook in order to ensure equity and consistency in a large core survey course with many sections and a common exam.
- Classroom response systems are used in several introductory Accounting courses and application in BUSA3000 will go a long way towards ensuring increased student involvement while giving the instructor immediate feedback on learning progress and areas needing emphasis.
- The use of a hand-held portable digital tablet to enhance interactive lecture-in-motion instruction focused on cases, application, review and discussion as opposed to a series of publisher furnished PowerPoint slides.
- Selective but ample use of videos that convey the diversity in cultures, environments and situations encountered in international business to provide a context for discussion and application of subject matter.
- CTW is an important effort intended to directly impact the quality of the product RCB and GSU delivers to the workforce. Most students had limited exposure to the theoretical and practical application of the concepts behind
CTW. Developing lectures or lecture elements (for use in person or as podcasts), on critical thinking and examples of effective business writing, complimented with online resources (such as the Online Writing Environment) will greatly enhance the usefulness and meaningfulness of CTW to the student.

- Integration of hands-on information literacy sessions by business reference librarian Casey Long, conducted in the workstation-equipped classroom in the library promised to greatly enhance the quality of the work students do on assignments. Past experience shows that these session are useful but the search tools such as Business Source Complete (EBSCO), World News Connection, Factiva are often intimidating even to reference librarians. The use of podcasting as user guides to review and step students through the use of these tools will further enhance the utility of the information literacy efforts.

- Integrating the resources of the Digital Aquarium and the IS&T Digital Media group into a limited but focused course element (delivered by lecture or podcasting) on project planning and project management early in the semester will greatly enhance the usefulness of the presentation portion of the group project as a learning experience as opposed to “seat of the pants, how do we get this done during the last week of class” approach.

EVALUATION
The relatively large number of proposed methodologies will complicate evaluating the degree of success in meeting the project objectives. On the other hand, the context of a survey course with many sections as benchmarks for comparison should facilitate the assessment of overall effectiveness.

I propose to evaluate the extent of success against student learning objectives in two distinct ways:

- Course Delivery:
  - Student Evaluation of Instructor Performance (SEIPs) against historical
  - Raw average student grades on common final exam administered by department
  - A survey of students on their classroom experience in my sections and usefulness of podcast lecture material will be used to evaluate students assessment of the learning experience

- Course assignments and activity:
  - Podcasts are currently submitted for a RCB podcasting contest and judged by a faculty committee. Relative performance of sections of BUSA3000 I will teach using this framework versus podcasts by teams in other sections will be an objective measure of podcast quality resulting from proposed activity
  - A survey of students on their experience on assignments (CTW paper, group based country analysis research report and podcasts/presentations) in my sections will be used to evaluate students assessment of the learning experience
  - A small sample of country research reports from my sections will be made available to instructors in other sections and the course coordinator to assess relative quality in terms of content, format, references (information literacy)
  - A small sample of CTW papers from my sections will be made available to Dr. George Pullman, Director of the Critical Thinking through Writing Initiative to assess relative quality compared to expected results university wide

Based on the student learning outcomes assessed as described above I will prepare and assessment of the relative success of the various elements for application by other faculty, specifically focusing on:

- Evaluating the overall use of an integrated approach to combine subject matter learning and business skills acquisition in a core survey course
- Evaluating the effectiveness of wikis, classroom technology, podcasts, focused videos, interdisciplinary learning and facilitated group activity in a core introductory business course
- Evaluating the level of course specific business writing, critical thinking and information literacy instruction required to produce a meaningful improvement in student work

BUDGET
I request the allocation of up to $2,000 as an expense reimbursement for the acquisition of technology to implement this proposal, including an IPod Touch with Italk, an Interwrite Digital Instructional Pad, and CRS software with instructional platform.

MEDIA/CLASSROOM
No special equipment or classroom needed to this project.