

Moving beyond books...



# A Community Strategy

## Business Management and Experiential Learning in the Bradford Community

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...and into our community



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### Introduction

The University of Pittsburgh at Bradford is a unique campus within the Pitt system. Our students benefit from a tight-knit learning community that is dedicated to success, yet our institution is the seventh largest employer in McKean County and we are tightly woven into the Bradford business culture. It makes sense that we share our resources and programs to help strengthen this community while providing students with real-world experience. Pitt-Bradford's business students are able to learn via local firms in a ways that offer experiential learning from a business perspective. We incorporate hands-on approaches, expanding their viewpoints and developing skills through active learning. There's dual value in Pitt-Bradford's commitment to building ties and strengthening Northcentral Pennsylvania's business ecosystem. I'll provide opportunities for community-engaged scholarship, challenges, and how sharing resources benefits not just students, but Bradford and the surrounding region in numerous ways.

### Types of Businesses

Some of the community organizations students have gone into include organizations that are large and small, public and private, not-for-profit and for-profit :

- Retail
- Grocery
- Manufacturing
- Dollar Store
- Nonprofit
- Restaurant
- Diner/ Coffee shop / Bakery
- Salon

### Student feedback

*"This project allowed me to apply textbook knowledge to a real-world business...to really see business in action."*

*"This was a great experience to talk to a manager and see how managers really make decisions and the challenges they are facing currently."*

*"I enjoyed the freedom we were given to work independently and look to how things work in a real company."*

Greatest Challenges	How Addressed
Professional communication skills	Lesson on communication stressing the importance of professionalism w/ businesses. Discussion of "dos and don'ts" is highly beneficial
Timeliness	Multiple "Status Updates" by students to check progress. Informal discussions in class to see what went well and what needs more attention
Tones used by students	Give suggestions. Instead of "your customer service is horrible", change tone to "while your product quality is great, the customer service aspect can use some improvement. Here are some ideas on how we can make this even better..."
Patience of students with company	Teach that 'your lack of preparation doesn't constitute their emergency'. Remind students to ask for info from firm much earlier than they need it. Create timelines early on and get agreement. Be respectful of the duties of managers
Developing trust	Students need to show company they are genuinely interested in their success and truly want to help them. Meeting deadlines, exceeding expectations, and delivering what they promise are key. Respect what the company wants to keep confidential. Let company know you are there to guide them. Also, students' grade is not based upon plan implementation so there is no pressure put on companies if they decide to implement or not

### Why?

#### Bradford

- Building upon the "positive energy" in the community regarding local business growth and success
- Community Pride and engaging students in what is "out there" beyond the confines of the university
- Giving students the confidence and power to realize that they can make a difference in the community, and building connections so they can keep making a difference even after graduation
- Many businesses in the area are looking for business guidance; they want these professionals to truly care about the community beyond just \$. The services provided by students are at no charge, but would be costly otherwise.
- There are many different industries thriving in the Bradford area! Why just read about businesses and do case-studies from a book when there are so many firms here that can be studied and/or helped?

#### Active Learning

- Strategy is a dynamic discipline in that it's not just textbook memorization, but it's more the effective synthesis and application of concepts/models to achieve a goal.
- Students professionally interact with businesses. They will combine their knowledge, skills, abilities, and experiences gained from prior employment/business courses while taking into account the business functional areas (accounting, marketing, etc.).
- The goal of a strategic analysis is to make a positive impact upon the business(es) under study by assessing outcomes of strategic models and then providing constructive recommendations for the firms to achieve sustainable competitive advantage.
- I'm hoping that even after course conclusion, the students still have a vested interest in these companies by potentially building lasting relationships with business owners, managers, and colleagues from their groups.

### The Courses

#### The Capstone: Strategic Management Course (MGMT1451)

This course integrates fundamental concepts from each of the business management core courses to create overall organizational plans and strategies. A focus on real-world business applications is an integral part of the course, which is why experiential learning works so well. Students arrive at well-thought and researched ideas of what the strategy is / should be for the organizations partnered with. By doing this, students will be able to make the link between what they learn in class regarding strategic concepts and what real companies are currently doing. They will effectively evaluate how companies can potentially improve or sustain their current strategy for future competitive advantage. This can be of great benefit to local companies, and helps cultivate the relationship between the business and the university as a whole.

#### Principles of Management (MGMT0110)

This introductory course focuses on the basic management functions in business. I also emphasize developing leadership, teamwork, and communication skills. One of the key assignments is an individual Business Analysis, where a student visits a local business and not just describes what they are doing currently, but compares and contrasts to others in the industry and provides recommendations for issues that they are facing. In doing this during an early-level class, I create student familiarity with local businesses and hope to engage them in the local business community. This is key, so that by the time they arrive at the Capstone course, they already have ties to the community and have interacted with local businesses.