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Inspiring Learning Through the Marriott Student Review

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Marriott Student Review is a student journal created and published as a project for the Writing for Business Communications course at Brigham Young University (BYU). The views expressed in Marriott Student Review are not necessarily endorsed by BYU or The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

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There is a palpable creative energy in the room as the editorial board organizes a Marriott Student Review issue and Measuring Success Right podcast. Board members are engaged and excited to work together, with everyone becoming a part of the team. These practical experiences combine formal learning with experiential learning to create original works. The board members engage in a transformative learning experience.
“Inspiring learning” has become the mantra for professors and administrators at Brigham Young University. In a speech to faculty and staff at the beginning of the 2016 academic year, President Kevin J. Worthen made a plea for faculty to start incorporating deeper and more experiential learning into their programs, pointing out that students cannot learn all they need to know by simply memorizing facts and discussing principles. He stressed: “Experience connects theory with application and deepens our understanding of the principles and truths we learn” (Worthen, 2016). This initiative seeks to transform the BYU educational experience by providing students with life-changing learning opportunities beyond the walls of a classroom.

Across campus, Inspiring Learning has become a brand for the university. Educators are encouraged to analyze what direction the scholastic experience in their classroom is headed for the student. At the university level, mature learners can exercise greater judgment and wisdom in broader learning situations rather than face the limits of firm external controls. Educational experiences should rest more on social contact and communication, which may mean a complete restructuring of courses and curricula. Worthen’s challenge to start programs beyond the classroom experience has brought about changes in the way traditional courses have been taught, encouraged more professor-led research, and increased student involvement in gathering data, writing scholarly articles, and presenting at conferences.

To promote Inspiring Learning in business communication, the Marriott School of Business started a peer-reviewed journal run by business students for young professionals entitled Marriott Student Review (MSR). The purpose of this publication, as defined by the student editorial board, is to connect the leaders of tomorrow with the issues of today. MSR is published through BePress, an academic publisher, and hosted through the Harold B. Lee Library website as part of ScholarsArchive, which includes a variety of professional and student academic journals published by BYU.

The MSR publication process begins with students submitting their articles through the online submission tab on the ScholarsArchive website. An editorial board of student reviewers evaluates the papers and sends remarks back to the authors. Submissions then undergo two peer reviews to ensure that a high standard of quality is met in each piece. When necessary corrections and clarifications have been made within the paper, it enters the queue for publication. MSR publishes issues three times a year at the end of each semester (e.g., April, August, December), so the wait time for accepted articles to be published is usually three to four months.

Soon after the publication’s inception, the MSR editorial board realized that students want not only a well-written business journal, but also a well-designed publication. To accomplish this, proactive business students recruited graphic design students to join the editorial board. This inter-departmental collaboration enabled students to understand that business does not happen in a vacuum. Instead, people from a variety of disciplines need to work together to realize success. MSR has happily

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welcomed the design team, a web team, a marketing team, and a podcast team onto the editorial board. For each issue, this dynamic and diverse team with wide-ranging skill sets determines the inclusion and order of articles, as well as the theme for the issue. For each article, designers often incorporate the vision of the author, interviewing them to understand their ideas on visuals and font type. These designs are similarly peer reviewed before publication.

As the journal has grown in popularity, the opportunities for students to increase their communication skills have grown, too. MSR now has a team of students advertising the journal through Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter, and Pinterest. Advertising and marketing students improve our SEO and boost posts, which has increased our readership remarkably. Currently, the editorial board is recruiting design, marketing, website, editing, videography, and photography students to help establish our brand personality.

Exploring Other Communication Channels

In addition to reading business publications, young professionals turn to other sources for their everyday business insights and information. The MSR board researched which business communication channels students are most interested in following. The marketing team conducted an informal survey to determine where students prefer to consume business news and information. The study results indicated that most students turn to websites and podcasts, rather than published material. Because of these survey results, our marketing students decided to explore other business communication platforms for the MSR brand. To start, our student-led web design team developed a professional, visually interesting website to establish and increase online readership.

Additionally, MSR students launched a podcast series entitled *Measuring Success Right*, a continuation of the MSR brand name. The podcast allows students the opportunity to conduct live interviews with well-established business professionals and well-known communicators, such as Hal Gregersen, Liz Wiseman, Brigitte Madrian, and Whitney Johnson. Our podcast is a weekly show, which offers students a platform to contact, invite, follow-up, and thank guests on a regular basis.

As a team, we also determined the importance of maintaining a consistent brand. By incorporating the ideas of our designers, editors, podcasters, and writers, we created a logo and style guide for Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, *Measuring Success Right*, and our website. This MSR brand consistency encourages consumer awareness across all communication platforms. Every semester, students re-evaluate how the MSR brand
Implementing Experiential Learning Cycle

The accompanying course for Marriott Student Review is entitled “Writing for the Business Press” and includes undergraduate and graduate students. Each of the four parts of the experiential learning cycle has been incorporated into the Marriott Student Review process.

CONCRETE EXPERIENCE.
Every semester, the main objective of the MSR class is to complete and publish an issue of Marriott Student Review and to post a weekly Measuring Success Right podcast. The marketing team bears responsibility for creative advertising on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn to promote more listeners and readers. Writing articles, producing podcasts, and marketing the publication all offer new and concrete learning experiences that students accomplish during the course.

REFLECTIVE OBSERVATION.
Students select their teams based on their interests, rather than assignment. Communication is generally very open within each team as they work to accomplish the team goals they set for the semester. Even though we have a classroom time and place, most of the work and learning takes place outside the classroom at the discretion of each individual and team. At this point in the experiential learning cycle, students often have many questions about how they are to accomplish these tasks. Typically, students need more than one semester to hone their respective writing, editing, marketing, and design skills, which is encouraged since this is a repeatable course.

ABSTRACT CONCEPTUALIZATION.
Reflection on the goals made at the beginning of the semester plays a major role in the learning process (Kolb, 1984; Lowe & Kerr, 1998; Mezirow, 1998; Morris, 2019). Each student submits a reflective paper within the first month of the course expressing their aims and ambitions. These will frequently change over time, since students often hope to accomplish more than they possibly can in a single semester time frame.

ACTIVE EXPERIMENTATION.
At the end of the semester, each student writes a final reflective paper on their individual and team efforts to accomplish their goals, what they learned, and how they could do better. The students also reflect on ways MSR can run more efficiently and increase readership and podcast following. Students take these new-found talents and bring them to new experiences after the course and into their business careers.

The Power of Concrete Experience: From the Students’ Perspective

The five characteristics of concrete experiences determined by Morris’ (2019) study have also been included in the MSR curriculum. Student comments from the MSR
NEW ENCOUNTERS WITH LEARNING.
“MSR extends my talents and gives me a chance to be artistic in what is otherwise an objective curriculum.”

INQUIRY TO REAL WORLD PROBLEMS.
“This term I wish I had more time to dedicate to MSR. I was able to record two podcasts and do some editing as well as contribute some ideas for the future of MSR, but I wasn’t able to do as much as I had hoped. I am grateful for my team who put in hard work and edited and uploaded the recordings.”

CRITICAL REFLECTION.
“Being a part of MSR has helped me discover what I am passionate about and where I want to go with my future career.”

Through this journey of Inspiring Learning in business communication, students learn not only to write, edit, and publish articles, but also to collaborate with a variety of peers in other disciplines.

Transformative Learning

A student’s experience with the MSR class consequently often results in a transformative learning experience. After joining the team, students face the unfamiliarity of hosting a podcast or writing in a peer-reviewed journal. This opportunity causes the student to critically reflect on their abilities to accomplish this new task. Often, the student realizes that he or she cannot accomplish this alone but must rely on the help and cooperation of others. At the end of the process, students can act on their newly acquired perspectives and abilities to help them become successful in the course and future similar experiences.

In one instance, an MSR student recently became the manager of the marketing team have been used below to illustrate the use of these characteristics in the course. During the semester, students are encouraged to express their thoughts and feelings about the MSR experience through reflective assignments. In their reflections, students have expressed their satisfaction with these experiential traits.

ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS.
“I was able to learn a lot as I worked on the website. I built a new site, measuringsuccessright.com, and updated it with the new podcasts that came out each week. It was a great experience and I’m happy that I was able to be a part of it!”

REAL TIME USE OF KNOWLEDGE.
“As a podcast host for the Marriott Student Review, I have continued to meet incredible businessmen and women who inspire me every day. From taking risks, to finding the endeavors I can be brave for, this experience has felt like a crash course in human optimism, resilience, and compassion.”

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team. She had never been a team leader and did not have experience with social media marketing. She wrote:

“I feel that there is a lot of room for growth and development, and I look forward to contributing to the progress of the journal. This term, I am planning to work on the newly rebranded ‘marketing’ team, as the Marketing Team Coordinator. My role will be to organize the team, plan meetings, delegate assignments, follow-up on projects, and coordinate with other teams and the MSR leadership to keep our marketing on track. Within these team goals, individually, I hope to develop leadership skills, improve my communication skills, develop skills for planning and organizing team meetings, and learn how to keep a project fun and engaging for those involved while also helping them stay on task and reach their individual goals. I also hope to continue developing my understanding of the power of social media and how it can be a positive tool for spreading uplifting and meaningful content.”

At the end of the semester, she had transformed in her abilities as a leader and social media marketer. Her comments reflect this change:

“We had a lot of new members of the team, and it was a good learning experience working with them, helping them find roles on the team, and showing them the many great facets of being a part of MSR. Sometimes, it was tricky to get everyone together to coordinate our marketing plans, due to very different schedules and internships, but everyone on the team was willing to be flexible and help out when they could. Overall, I feel that I learned a lot as a leader of the marketing team, especially about organization, communication, delegation, and knowing when and how to take the lead. It was a great opportunity and I am grateful for the team I was able to work with and the difference I feel we made as we promoted the powerful and uplifting content of MSR.”

On the class rating web page, students may include anonymous comments. In these comments, students have observed that they like the real-world aspect of the experience and the permanence of contributing to a work that will not fade away at the end of the semester (Bradberry & De Maio, 2019). As one of our past Managing Editors, Ryan Stenquist, remarked: “Overall it has been a joy to work with so many people on the team…. The work we have done this semester will last for years.”

Conclusion

At the university level, professors should encourage more interdisciplinary and cross-curriculum activities for students, enabling them to engage in a genuine experience that is not siloed into a single course or program (Gundala, Singh, & Cochran, 2018). Student satisfaction is also increased as they actively participate in courses which practically prepare them for their future careers (Borredon, Defayet, Baker, & Dolv, 2011). A senior business student remarked: “My first semester at the Marriott Student Review has been the highlight of my experience in the Marriott School of Business…. I consider working for MSR a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity that I am deeply grateful to have.”

References


