Undergraduate Action Learning

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Experiential Learning at CWRU

- Action Learning Course
- Faculty-Guided Learning Experience
- Exposure to Real-World Challenges
- Student Entrepreneurship
- Internship
- Practicum or Co-op
- Independent Study
- Research with Faculty
- Focused Classroom Assignments
- Study Abroad
- Community Service
- Student Leadership Roles
- Study Abroad
Action Learning Background

- Action Learning (MGMT 398) is an elective for business majors that meets the university’s requirements for a SAGES* senior capstone:
  - Critical thinking
  - Clear goals with an appropriate plan of action
  - Regular faculty oversight
  - Periodic progress reporting
  - Regular writing
  - Public presentation
- Teams of students conduct consulting projects
- Adapted from an MBA Action Learning course in 2005

*Seminar Approach to General Education and Scholarship
Delivery

- One semester; 6 credit hours; offered fall and spring
- Projects for a wide variety of organizations
- Student teams pre-assigned, cross-functional
- Projects vary; teams follow the same process
- Experienced consultants coach the teams
- Client input factored into final grade
Evaluation Dimensions

- **Team**
  - Final presentation
  - Written report
  - Engagement
  - Professionalism
  - Team effort
  - Problem solving

- **Individual**
  - Client relationship*
  - Team contributions*
  - Oral presentation*
  - Documentation
  - Course participation

*Data collected for Assurance of Learning*
Value to Students

- Big-picture thinking
- Structured approach
- Cross-functional teaming
- Quick study
- Relationship building
- Work planning, status reporting
- Managing expectations
- Executive communications
- Confidence
- Credentials
- Contacts

“The main thing I took away from Action Learning...is that challenges can be turned into opportunities.”

“Every activity that we did in the class and applied to our projects set up the foundation for us to learn to think critically and always evaluate the big picture.”
Value to Sponsoring Organizations

- Dedicated project
- Extra resources
- Learning experience
- New perspectives
- Lasting value
- Satisfaction
- No consulting fee

“We've found the interaction with Case students through the Action Learning Program to be engaging, stimulating, professional and extremely valuable to our business. The projects have been critical to helping us establish the correct framework to think about the future of our business”
Course Design and Facilitation

- Classroom lecture, discussion and activities
- Coaching
  - Breakouts
  - Individual team meetings
  - Ad hoc meetings/coaching
- Guest speakers
- Ten classroom hours the first week; periodic meetings thereafter
- Checkpoints and milestones
- Templates and materials
Student Learning

- Team project experience, including interactions with client
- Individual activities and reflection
- Class discussions (learn from each other’s projects, too)
- Feedback and coaching throughout the semester
  - Common themes
  - Project-specific issues
Individual Journal

- Five journal entries prompted by questions
- Entries help students:
  - Achieve success in and derive value from the class
  - Communicate directly with the team’s coach
  - Prepare for the next class session and next project milestone
- Example individual learning objectives:
  - “Adapt to situations and think critically on the spot”
  - “Trust team members”
  - “Listen to the ideas of others”
  - “Plan and run professional business meetings”
Project Example: Organizational Assessment, Manufacturing Co.

- **Project overview:** assess the organization’s structure, culture, and communications
- **Project sponsor:** president
- **Research included:** employee surveys and interviews, review of organizational structure
- **Challenge:** uncovered an ongoing harassment issue involving a top executive; final presentation had two components:
  - Presentation of findings and recommendations to president and top executives
  - Meeting with the president to share additional findings
Project Example: Business Plan, New Venture

- **Project overview:** develop business plan for pending investment in a new venture
- **Project sponsor:** entrepreneur with opportunity to acquire rights to market a new technology in NEO
- **Research included:** assessment of target market and competition
- **Challenge:** the technology had not been adequately tested; competing technologies had already been proven effective, and had captured market share; project result:
  - Investment put on hold pending further evaluation of the technology
Best Practices

- Select projects carefully
- Limit student team size (3 – 4 students is ideal)
- Manage client expectations
- Manage student expectations
- Introduce key concepts early, and reinforce
- Establish classroom esprit de corps
- Share team insights with entire class
- Be observant and responsive with coaching
- Respond to individual journal entries
- Treat classroom time as a precious resource