DeVry University

Authentic Learning and Community Engagement through an Undergraduate Senior Project Course

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About DeVry University

Original Chicago school

Long Beach campus today

- Founded 1931
- More than 80 US locations and online
- Career-oriented grad and undergrad degrees in technology, science, business, and the arts

Photos from DeVry University website. Used by permission.

Evolution of Senior Projects at DVU

DeVry University

1960s
- Project-based capstone activities

1970s
- Capstone courses
- "Senior Project" name adopted

1980s
- Team-based projects
- Real-world clients in business and IT
- Rigorous documentation and presentation requirements

1990s
- Liberal arts faculty included
- Use for assessment and curriculum improvement

2000s
- Team teaching
- Dual 8-week sessions

2010s
- Multidisciplinary student teams
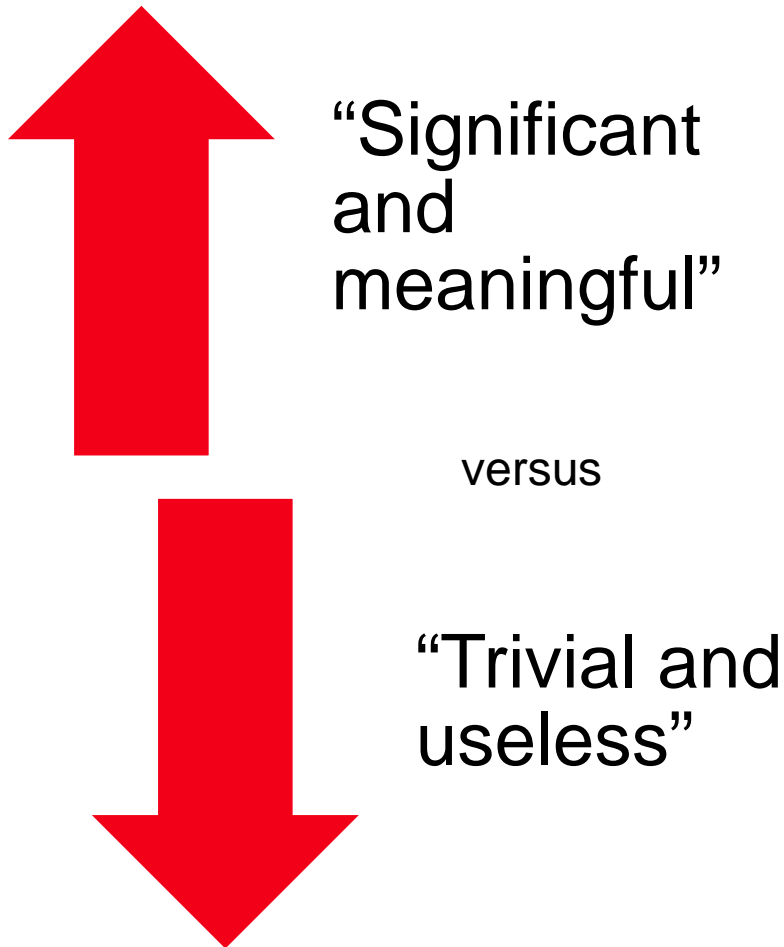
(Urman, 2007)

Today's Business Senior Project

- Two-course sequence
  - Sr. Project I: Project selection and planning
  - Sr. Project II: Project execution, presentation, and evaluation
- 3-5 person student teams
- Client and project usually proposed by students
  - Small business
  - Non-profit organization
  - Public agency
- Professors as coaches and evaluators
- Typical student course deliverables
  - Proposal
  - Requirements specification
  - Design specification
  - Final report
  - Final presentation

Photo: A DeVry Sr. Project Team: Thanh Hoang, Rich Kappmeier, Marisela Ornelas, Efrain Ruiz, Richard S. Kim.

Authentic Learning in Senior Project

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"Significant and meaningful"

versus

"Trivial and useless"

(Newman & Wehlage, 1993)

Real-world relevance	Fuzzy definitions
Complexity	Multiple perspectives and resources
Collaboration	Reflection
Integration	Built-in assessment
Products valuable in their own right	Diverse outcomes

(Reeves, Herrington, & Oliver, 2002)

Case 1: Marketing Big Bertha's Pizza

- Client: Traditional family-owned pizzeria founded 1996

- Project: Develop and implement marketing plan

- Accomplishments
  - Established presence on 11 social media/marketing sites
  - Initiated referral relationships with 15 nearby businesses
  - Created custom website
  - Trained owner

Students: Ian Ross, Evelyn Navarro, Robert Frisinger, Tyler Grayson (Jul/Sep 2013)

Case 2: Organizing a Charity Car Show

- Client: Charity supporting homeless and low income families in Long Beach, CA

- Project: Organize auto show as a fundraiser

- Accomplishments:
    - Developed detailed plan and budget
    - Secured venue, permits, sponsors, and entertainment
    - Promoted via flyers, t-shirts, and social media

Students: Gloria Armijo, Edmund Martinez, Rama Wijaya, Varun Malhotra (Nov 2012/Jan 2013)

Case 3: Veterans Club Relaunch

- Client: Campus Veterans Club

- Project: Revitalize student organization

- Accomplishments:
  - Updated mission and branding
  - Created logo, website, t-shirts, and video
  - Wrote organization plan
  - Held relaunch event

Students: John S. Leota, Darrell Amarasena, Hector Bravo, Carolyn Erfe (Nov 2012/Jan 2013)

Case 4: Accounting for Leadership Long Beach

- Client: Nonprofit community leadership development organization

- Project: Improve accounting procedures and financial controls

- Accomplishments:
  - Wrote policies and procedures
  - Set up document control and reconciliation process
  - Developed manual for interns
  - Enhanced use of QuickBooks
  - Trained staff

Students: Willie Cole, Fabian Georges, Steven Jorgensen, Jason Nick, Sheri Smoody (Nov 2011/Jan 2012)
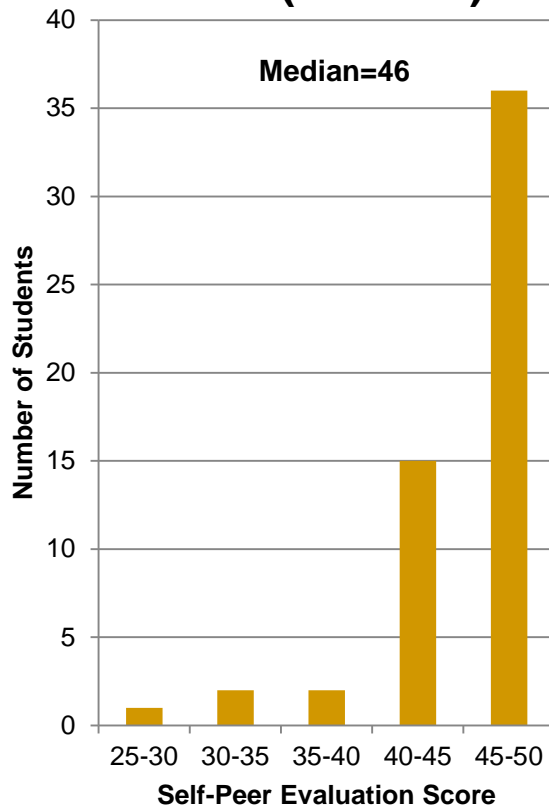
Case 5: DUI Analysis for Long Beach PD

- Client: Long Beach Police Department Accidents Investigation Detail

- Project: Analyze DUI arrest data

- Accomplishments:
    - Determined demographics of DUI offenders
    - Identified peak days/times and locations for arrests and drinking
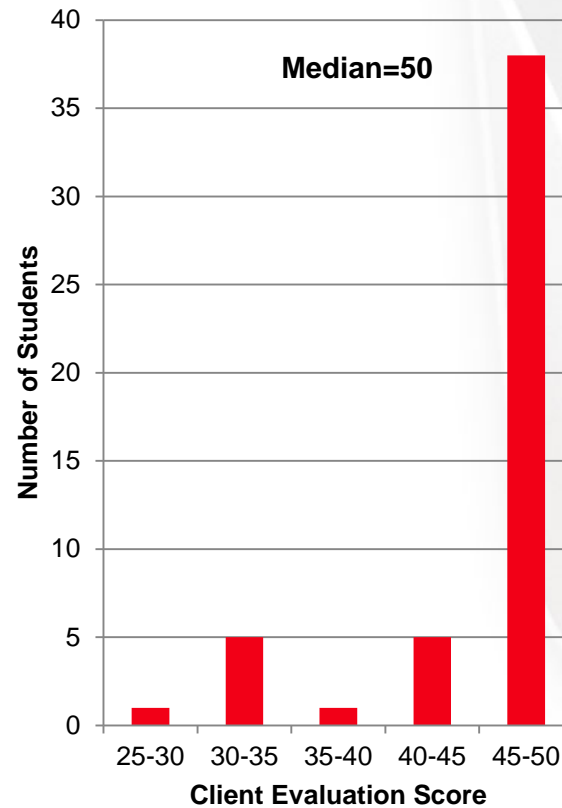   - Flagged specific drinking establishments for follow-up

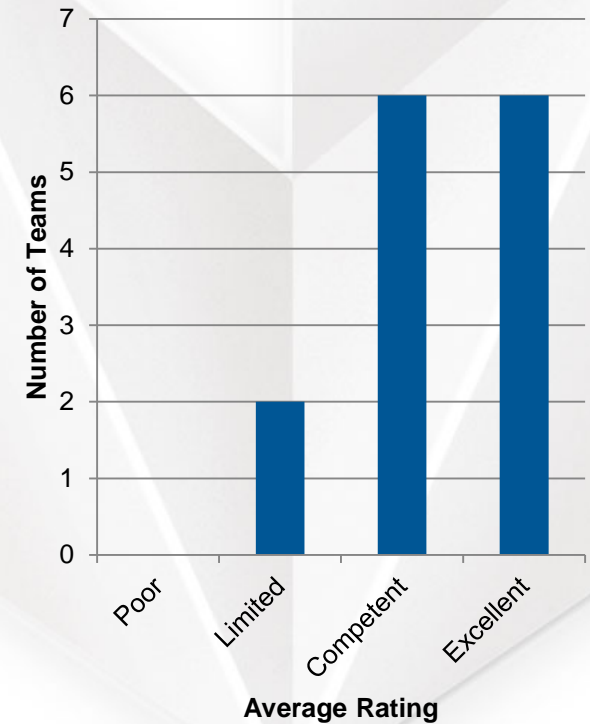Students: Eliseba Martinez, Jose Medina, Lesli Garcia (Jul/Sep 2009)

Outcomes Assessments

Self-Peer Evaluation Scores (Max=50)

Median=46

Number of Students

25-30	1
30-35	2
35-40	2
40-45	15
45-50	36

Self-Peer Evaluation Score

Client Evaluation Scores (Max=50)

Median=50

Number of Students

25-30	1
30-35	5
35-40	1
40-45	5
45-50	38

Client Evaluation Score

Average Final Presentation Rating by Faculty/Staff/Industry Evaluators

Number of Teams

Poor	0
Limited	2
Competent	6
Excellent	6

Average Rating

Based on last 14 projects supervised by author

Student Comments

- "This was a great class to explore the skills you have learned throughout your DeVry years."
- "This is a good class that tested mastery of what I learned throughout my college career."

- "I learned a huge amount from senior project. It was a great, if stressful, experience."
- "A great experience and tough time."

- "I learned a lot about real world business and personalities when conflict arises."
- "This is a real world class, no jokes, no games. . . . Also there was a lot of team interaction and team work, I feel that while performing all the assignments, we learned a lot from each other, it was a good dynamic to learn what team work and effort means and what we can expect about our personal projects out there."
- "It's the closest you'll get to a real world scenario for a school environment. This course helps you overcome issues with real scenarios and people you'll work with in the outside world."

Client Comments

- "In reality the effort was a 10, a perfect 10. They saved the club thousands of dollars."

- "The project itself, the PowerPoint slide show, data, stats, findings, and information [were] very useful and required a tremendous effort to obtain and put together."

- "[The student team leader] was my contact for the class and was awesome. He was respectful of my time and an effective project leader."

- "[The student team leader] was very responsive as changes occurred, providing updates and taking action to correct problems. The original time frame was 16 weeks. It was accomplished in 14 weeks and was under budget. [The student team leader] was a delight to work with and I hope to work with her again in the future."

- "I enjoyed working with the students and they provided tangible benefits to our nonprofit organization. And more importantly for us, the recommendations they made through this process will make us a stronger organization down the road."

Assessment and Curriculum Design

Sr. Project products assessed against program outcomes

Assessments entered on university website

Areas for improvement identified

Improvements mapped to course objectives

Courses redeveloped

Impacts on University Culture

- Provides consistent focal point for students
- Promotes shared understanding among faculty
- Connects students, faculty, and staff
- Connects university community with employers
- Serves as rite of passage ("fire walk")

Image: "Pyromancer" by Sandy Chase from Flickr Commons (CC BY 2.0)

Challenges and Adjustments

Change drivers → **Resulting challenges** → **Responses**

Change drivers
- Increasing number of concentrations
- More students with significant transfer credit
- Mix & match with other locations and online

Resulting challenges
- More varied student skill sets
- Greater diversity in prior course experiences
- Disruption of student cohorts
- More geographically dispersed students

Responses
- More explicit teambuilding
- Greater use of supplementary resources for skills gaps
- Rebalancing of individual vs. team attention and accountability
- More iterative process for major deliverables

Conclusion

A 30+ year tradition

An evolving challenge

A rite of passage

Business Senior Project at DeVry University is . . .

A driver of continuous improvement

A bridge to the real world

A community touchstone

Photo of Sr. Project Team A (A-Team Solutions), Jan 2013 session: Carolyn Erfe, Hector Bravo, Ryan Casey (VA Club President-Client), Russ Walker (professor), Darrell Amarasena, John Leota.

Contact Information / Q&A

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- DeVry University College of Business & Management:
  http://www.devry.edu/degree-programs/business-management.html

- This presentation:
  https://sites.google.com/site/russwalker58/SrProjectHETL15

- Questions?

References

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