

Research Articles

Learning the Importance of Export Readiness Through Experiential Learning

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Experiential learning has become a popular form of teaching in higher education in recent years. This learning modality focuses on giving students stimulating and hands-on experiences that simulate a real-world environment. This paper examines an innovative experiential learning project undertaken by students at Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) during the Fall 2021 semester. The students worked closely with the owner of an entrepreneurial firm to evaluate the export readiness of one its products. By the end of the project, students were able to apply the concepts learned in the classroom to real-world situations. This paper discusses the outcome of the project as well as the benefits of experiential learning for both students and faculty.

Introduction

This paper examines the application of experiential learning techniques to an undergraduate Export/Import course during the 2021 Fall Semester at Southern New Hampshire University. Titled “How to Get Started Building an Import/Export Business,” the course was designed to offer students real-world insights into the complexities of building an import/export business, including economics and politics, planning and negotiation, foreign currency transactions, shipping and insurance, documentation, and the intricacies of exporting from and importing to the United States.

Literature Review

Experiential learning, as described by psychologist David Kolb (2017), is learning by experience. Influenced by the work of other theorists including John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget, Kolb developed an influential theory about experiential learning. Differing from cognitive and behavioral theories, experiential learning uses real life experience to construct knowledge and meaning within a student’s field of interest (Cherry, 2020; Illeris, 2007). This technique allows students to interact with the subject they are learning and builds their knowledge by having multiple experiences. Once new knowledge is gained, students can apply previous experiences to further understand the learning subject (Yardley et al., 2012). Along with adaptability and togetherness, experiential learning creates an opportunity to set professional practices and boost self-confidence and leadership skills (Dean et al., 2020).

In an Australian research project conducted in 2016 by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching, it was shown that students were also able to recognize

the importance of lifelong learning by being able to critically reflect on their experiences. By having direct learning, they were able to better understand their subject. Students were also able to build on their communication, teamwork, time management, and critical thinking skills (Slade et al., 2016). Killorin (2021) noted that US university instructors across every discipline employ experiential learning techniques and encourage or require students to participate in internships. Regarding business majors, corporate partnerships, business plan competitions, and new venture incubators are just a few experiential learning opportunities available at US universities. Employers wanted to see candidates with resumes that demonstrated their leadership, communication, project management, and teamwork skills — all of which benefit from participatory activities both in and out of the classroom.

Research previously indicated that there are benefits and challenges to experiential learning. Some of these benefits and challenges have been explored. Experiential learning presented many applications towards the learning process that can alter the knowledge, experience, and benefits gained from said experience. The application of experiential learning was dependent upon the student, mentor, and project itself. Depending on the goal of the project the student can learn first-hand about their major/field of interest (Anticol, 2019). As experiential learning was applied and used, opportunities to improve how it was implemented and the different fields that you can enter with this process increased.

Benefits of Experiential Learning – Envision by World Strides (2020) identified seven benefits attributable to experiential learning:

Creates real-world relevance: Students may tune out lectures if they think the material does not pertain to the

real world. Experiential learning takes data and concepts and applies them to hands-on tasks, yielding tangible results. As the student interacts with the information, it becomes real to them. Of course, each student's learning experience will be guided by their unique perspective, and thus each will interact with the information and the task in diverse ways—and may have different results. In this way, the experiential classroom emulates “real” society.

Provides opportunity for creativity: In our world, problems often have more than one solution. Experiential learning enables the student to engage the creative portions of their brain and seek their own unique solution to the problem or task. This creative problem-solving, and the variety of results produced, enriches the classroom.

Provides opportunity for reflection: Reflective observation is an integral component of experiential learning theory. By incorporating concrete experiences with abstract concepts and reflecting on the outcome, students engage more regions of their brains and make personal connections with the material. They analyze how their actions affected the outcome and how their outcome may have differed from those of other students. This analysis helps them better understand how the concepts they have learned can be applied to other circumstances.

Teaches the value of mistakes: Experiential learning involves trial by error. As students engage in hands-on tasks, they find that some approaches work better than others. They discard the methods that do not work, but the act of trying something and then abandoning it becomes a valuable part of the learning process. Students learn not to fear mistakes, but to benefit from, and remember, them.

Accelerates learning: The act of practicing a skill strengthens the neural connections in the brain, making us, in effect, “smarter.” Hands-on activities require practice, problem-solving, and decision-making. As student engagement increases through these processes, learning accelerates, and retention improves.

Guides students toward the future: Many experiential learning projects are career-oriented because they are grounded in real-world activities. Through these activities, students start to discover and develop their skills, aptitudes, and passions. This self-discovery sets them on a more defined path to what they want to pursue after graduation, including college and careers.

Prepares students for adult life: Most experiential learning activities are communal in nature, with students working in groups. Through these team projects, students learn to work more effectively together, developing a plan of action and capitalizing on the unique strengths of each team member. In turn, the students learn how to lead, how to think critically, and how to adapt to changing circumstances.

Additionally, faculty benefited from having outside resources to support the traditional learning that took place in their classrooms. Nor can we ignore the benefits that external individuals, institutions, or organizations gained when students engaged in projects specific to their needs or research focused on solving individual or organizational business problems. But with benefits also came challenges.

Challenges – In an extensive study on challenges in experiential learning by Noogbahi et al (2011) four categories of challenges were identified:

- *Less experienced instructors and technicians*
- *Not paying attention to parallel and additional experiences*
- *Insufficient class management by the instructors or technicians*

While this study focused on experiential learning in an agriculture and natural sciences program, these components could be attributed to many programs. Other researchers have noted similar issues in experiential learning. These challenges ranged from the student not being able to fully engage in the activity to the instructor having too much influence in the experiential learning environment. Aggarwal and Wu (2019) when they commented on experiential learning in the international business field pointed out that experiential learning is pointless if the student does not feel engaged and the experience does not stimulate learning. There can also be challenges when a student enters a class not knowing that experiential learning is a part of the learning experience. This can potentially result in poor motivation and confusion for the student.

The Project

Professor Charlotte Broaden, the course instructor, determined that students would benefit from starting at the very beginning of the process, “determining if a company was adequately prepared to export their products.” The professor conducted a search to find a company that the students could assess its export readiness. During the search to find a suitable candidate, students prepared themselves by finding tools to assess a company's readiness to export. While there were several tools available, it was important to find one that would provide the chosen company with feedback on areas of improvement if they were not ready to export as well as supporting student learning.

globalEDGE, funded in part by the U.S. Department of Education Title VI B grant, delivers a comprehensive research tool for academics, students, and businesspeople. It allows users to connect with over 47,000 people using the globalEDGE Network while tapping into a directory of over five thousand quality resources. globalEDGE provides tools and resources to efficiently research any international business question you may have. As part of their database of tools, globalEDGE has CORE™ is a self-assessment tool that will allow you to determine your company's readiness to expand its operations internationally and ascertain its ability to export a particular product. Upon completing the questionnaire, students identified the client company's strengths and weaknesses concerning exporting systematically and objectively. CORE™ generated answers (based on responses from the client) and then placed them on two independent dimensions of readiness; “Organizational Readiness” and “Product Readiness.” The survey results were presented in a comprehensive, easy to read format for student analysis and client use.

- *Insufficient educational spaces & equipment*

Dimension: CORE

Your score consists of a minimum and a maximum score. The minimum score is your score if all of the questions you didn't answer, or answered "don't know", are counted as 0 points. The maximum score is your score if all of the questions you didn't answer, or answered "don't know", are counted as 100 points. For all the other questions, your minimum and maximum scores will be the same, and will reflect the answer you have given for the question. If all questions within a dimension have been answered, only an absolute score will be given for that dimension.

Dimension	Score	Rating
Competitive Capabilities in Domestic Market	12	Low
Motivation for Going International	76	Moderate
Commitment of Owners and Top Management	19	Low
Product Readiness for Foreign Markets	41	Low
Skill, Knowledge and Resources	20	Low
Experience and Training	14	Low
CORE	26	Low

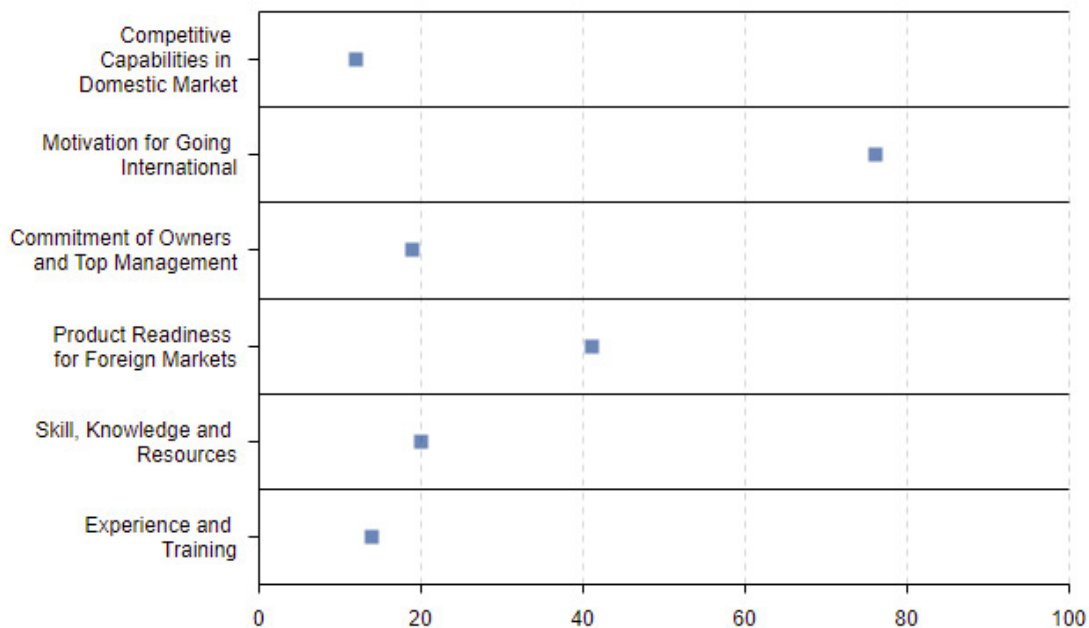


Exhibit 1. CORE Dimensions

Source: globalEDGE Results Report – Carter Health & Lifestyle 11/30/21

The Client

Ms. Kristen Carter, a senior business administration major at Marquette University and owner of Carter, Health & Lifestyle, LLC volunteered to work with the class on their project. The company is an e-commerce business that sells premium health and lifestyle accessories. It aims to provide high quality products that contribute to overall well-being and convenience. The first product in their catalog was a hand sanitizer wristband (Krisband). On the company's website, Carter noted that the product was currently available for US distribution, but global shipping was coming. Carter donated 11% of the firm's earnings to nonprofit organizations and COVID-19 relief resource centers. This young entrepreneur and her company made an ideal client for students to evaluate their knowledge in export readiness, while providing valuable resources to a company in the early stages of going international.

The Assessment Process

The CORE assessment analyzed six critical areas important for exporters to have proficiency in exporting to foreign markets. These areas covered: competitive capabilities in the domestic market; the motivation for going international; a commitment of owners and top management; product readiness for a foreign market; skills, knowledge, and resources; and experience and training. The assessment document delved into critical information to provide a thorough examination of these principal factors. After Carter completed the seventy-question assessment, students entered her information into the CORE database generating several documents which created an in-depth profile of the client's organization. The assessment also provided valuable information for students. [Exhibit 1](#) provides a scoring and rating profile based on a 100-point scale.

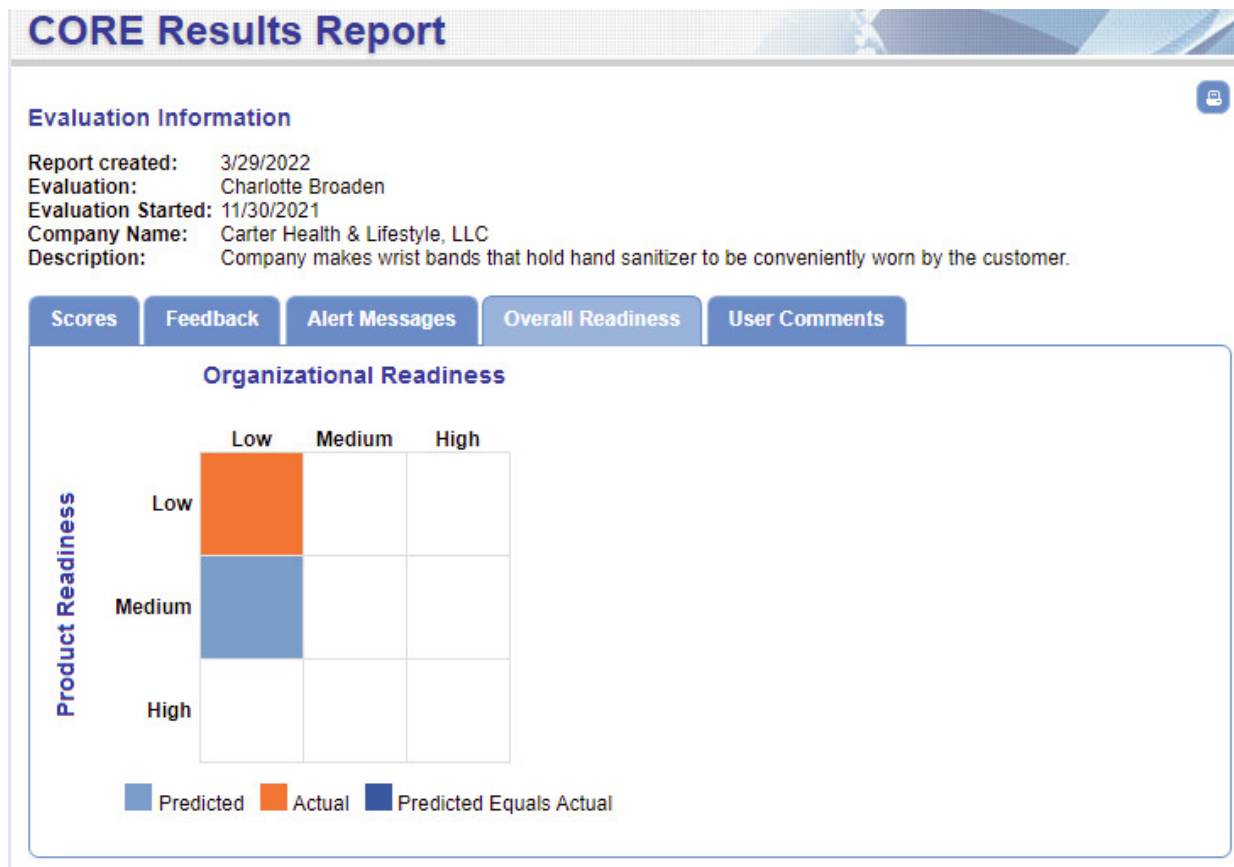


Exhibit 2. Organizational and Product Readiness

Source: globalEDGE Results Report – Carter Health & Lifestyle 11/30/21

Additionally, the assessment provided an overall readiness assessment which identified the actual readiness evaluation and the perceived readiness of the client. Results were compiled in [Exhibit 2](#) below.

Perceived Benefits for the Client – Carter Health & Lifestyle received a complete package of information to assess its level of readiness. In addition to the two reports listed above, two additional reports focused on specific information for improvement. CORE provided detailed feedback on all the major dimensions assessed (see [Exhibit 3](#)). This feedback pointed to key areas for improvement for the client in the general dimensions of the assessment.

In [Exhibit 4](#), the feedback examines specific strengths and weaknesses of the client.

This combined package of information provided to the client allowed them to prioritize the most critical areas to work on within their timeframe for building their export readiness strategy.

Perceived Benefits for the Students – Prior to collaborating with the client, students spent time reading and understanding the assessment and the questions used to analyze a company's readiness to export. By administering the questionnaire, and compiling the results, they gained first-hand knowledge of the client's position in the market. Because the client is still in the infant stage of their business, students are exposed to start-up activities. The knowledge gained provides more details than just reading a textbook or having a lecture. Students were exposed to researching

tools to do an actual export readiness and they performed one for an actual client seeking to go global. There are some combined benefits that both the client and students gained from this exercise. For students, this feedback closes the loop on identifying problems, assessing problems, and charting a course for problem resolution. The goal would be to follow up with the client to discuss which, if any, of the suggestions were implemented. In [Exhibit 3](#), the actual feedback was provided. This project will not allow for client follow-up, but the students' participation in the project did not end with building the report. Students decided that they could provide further assistance to the client by identifying dimensions based on [Exhibit 1](#) where they could provide additional information to assist the client in future decisions. Two dimensions that allowed the student to engage in related research were skill, knowledge, resources, education, and training. Based on data searched performed in class, students collected resources that the client could access via the internet of organizations in both Illinois and Wisconsin where the client lives and goes to school. It was important for students to identify resources close to the client for easy access.

Reflections

Kolb (1984) described process of experiential learning as a four-stage cycle involving for adaptive learning modes: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract con-

Exhibit 3. Feedback on the Client's Export Readiness Dimensions

Dimension: CORE

Score: 26 - Low

The overall assessment of your company's readiness to export is LOW. This means that there are several areas in which your company and/or product is weak. The general areas are described below. In addition, specific strengths and weaknesses of your organization and product can be found by reviewing the list of questions and answers.

Dimension: [Competitive Capabilities in Domestic Market](#)

Score: 12 - Low

Your assessment shows that your competitive capabilities in the domestic market are LOW. Therefore, there are a number of areas that will require considerable improvement in dealing with your domestic market before you are likely to be able to compete in foreign markets. You should examine the specific weaknesses and develop specific plans to improve those areas of weakness.

Dimension: [Motivation for Going International](#)

Score: 76 - Moderate

The motivations that you listed for going international are acceptable, but also exhibit some potential problems for your firm. The motivation for successful companies tends to include such factors as: desire for significant long-term presence in foreign markets, exploitation of the company's unique technologies, and improving company's return on investment. Unsuccessful companies seek short-term, incremental sales and/or are motivated by desires to dispose of excess inventory. They are reactive rather than proactive. You should examine and improve upon the specific weaknesses, as shown in the list of questions provided with this evaluation, and work to maintain the specific strengths, also listed in the questions and answers.

Dimension: [Commitment of Owners and Top Management](#)

Score: 19 - Low

Your top management and owners display little commitment to the international expansion of your company. This is the most important single factor in determining your likelihood of success in foreign markets. Successful companies in international markets are those that pour significant personnel and financial resources into the effort, and exhibit patience in obtaining a return on their international investment. On the other hand, unsuccessful firms, of which yours is in danger of becoming, are those who put little investment in the international efforts and/or expect immediate returns. To enhance your chances of success, your top management and owners must significantly reconsider their level of commitment to the international development effort.

Dimension: [Product Readiness for Foreign Markets](#)

Score: 41 - Low

Your product is ill-equipped for foreign market penetration. Factors influencing in this assessment include training and after-sales support needs and capabilities, willingness to modify product and packaging, ability to meet standards and regulations in the foreign market(s), and comparisons with leading competitive products in foreign markets. In several of these factors, your product has significant shortcomings. The specific weaknesses can be seen by reviewing the Product Readiness questions and answers. Your company will need to make a significant effort in this area if you hope to succeed in foreign markets.

Dimension: [Skill, Knowledge, and Resources](#)

Score: 20 - Low

Your company rated poorly in its Skills, Resources, and Knowledge as related to international marketing. Factors involved here include exporting and international transaction experience, knowledge of tariff, regulations, and other barriers to entry in foreign markets, and access to resources such as capital. Prior to entry into international markets, you will need to improve significantly in this area.

Dimension: [Experience and Training](#)**Score: 14 - Low**

Your company performed poorly in the Experience and Training criterion for international marketing. This is an important problem for your firm. Factors included in this criterion refer to management experience abroad, and company participation in trade fairs and other internationalization efforts. The lack of such experience and training will be a significant hindrance to your success in internationalization. You need to improve in this area.

ceptualization, and active experimentation. Following up on his discussion on reflective observation, Powell, and Wells (2002) summarized Kolb's reflective observation stage by saying, "it allows the learner to scrutinize ideas and reflect on the information from different points of view". It is in this section of the paper that reflective observations from both the faculty instructing the class and students were shared.

Reflections of the course professor

"One of the major challenges that I had with this course and every course that includes an experiential learning component is to find the most appropriate activity to fit the learning objective of the course. This is not always an easy task and one that takes time and care to ensure the students gain knowledge and experience from the activity. Using globalEDGE's CORE assessment provided me the opportunity to share not only this resource, but other resources available on their website that students could use now and in the future. The ability of the tool to not only provide diagnostic capabilities but also direct feedback on improvement for the client was not something that I could have accomplished in a traditional learning environment. I have also had time to reflect on how I would incorporate this into future classes, and I will work with our state export/import center to identify clients who can benefit from this type of service. This will allow my students to see companies at various stages of export readiness." Dr. Charlotte Broaden, Professor, International Business, Southern New Hampshire University

Reflections from Course Students –

"One of the major benefits that experiential learning has given me is the opportunity to learn faster and in an interactive way, as well as it helped me to prepare for my future in a highly creative way. Being introduced to different tools in this case globalEDGE CORE is valuable as I am an International Business major, and I can use it for any other research while being a college student or in a workplace environment too. I am incredibly grateful that this class gave us the opportunity to learn through experiential learning but also being able to share about it to state the importance of it." Isabella Andrade Silva, student, Southern New Hampshire University

"After doing extensive research into the positives and negatives of experiential learning I personally found that this type of learning is more suited for those who prefer a hands-on learning style." Kyle Beck, Student, Southern New Hampshire University

One final activity that students engaged in during the semester was the first ever Experiential Learning Curriculum Fair held at SNHU. This fair was sponsored by the University College Center for Project Based Learning (CPBL). Faculty from across the campus in different disciplines highlight their courses for the upcoming spring semester that contained an experiential learning component. This fair gave students the opportunity to speak with the instructor before registering to find out more about the course design. The fair was so successful, the center held a second fair in the spring highlighting experiential courses to be offered in Fall, 2022.

The Center supports six "educational anchors" or models. Each model includes the process of teaching and learning experientially, including shared pedagogical qualities that systematically guide learners through the meaning-making process. Through experience, critical reflection and active experimentation, learners construct new knowledge and perspectives that lead to deep thinking and transferable skills. Additionally, learners engaged in experiential opportunities are more likely to find relevance and persist in their studies through to graduation, and they are more likely to become life-long and self-directed learners. Experiential learning has become an integral part of the university's institutional culture.

[Exhibit 5](#) is a listing of the experiential anchors included in SNHU's Experiential Learning.

Putting into Practice What was Learned from the Research on Experiential Learning

Hess (2018) identifies numerous critical skills that students may acquire through experiential learning courses. These include how to manage fears and emotional defensiveness; how to overcome reflexive ways of thinking; how to listen, communicate, and connect with others; how to learn from failure; and how to work effectively in diverse teams. Many of these skills were learned in this project. This was a remarkably diverse team with students of Asian, Hispanic, and African heritage. There was also a study abroad student from Cologne Business School, who had to become acclimated to Southern New Hampshire University's academic environment, including the university's Brightspace system for academics. The team became dependent upon each other to learn each other's strengths and weaknesses as they navigated the learning challenges and tools required to accomplish the project.

Exhibit 4. Client Strengths and Weaknesses Assessment

Strength Messages

Expand into Key Markets

The fact that you are motivated to expand your business into key world markets is an incredibly positive “early warning” indicator of your success in foreign markets. Success in foreign markets starts with a vision of what you would like to become as a company, and that “vision” is a critical element of success.

Acquire Knowledge

Your willingness to enter foreign markets to acquire market knowledge is a very favorable element in your potential success. Recognizing the value of competitive intelligence is the mark of most extremely competitive global companies and because you have indicated your interest in acquiring market knowledge, you have a much higher likelihood of success.

Product Life Cycle

You understand the benefits of going into foreign markets to extend the life cycle of your products. If you have a leadership position in a market in your domestic market, it is highly likely that there is, or eventually will be, market for you to exploit throughout the world. If you recognize that your products will experience demand throughout the world and determine to commit yourself to seizing on those opportunities, you are likely to be properly motivated in your export development.

Weakness Messages

Business Experience

Enterprises with a proven domestic venture are better prepared to deal with the complexities of export markets. Your company has little experience in the home market. Unless you have a product particularly suited for a foreign market, you may falter in the export market. It is also possible that your brief time in business means that you have not built up the cash resources needed to enter foreign markets and sustain the support required in those markets.

Domestic Market Share

Your low market share in your domestic market indicates that you are still relatively new in the domestic market, or that your domestic market is extremely competitive and that you have been unable to develop a significant position. If your market position at home is still low, you are likely to have significant difficulty in penetrating foreign markets, where you must not only face intense competition but also must compete at long distances.

Total Sales

Being one of the smallest firms in the industry, you do not have the cash resources required to develop sales in foreign markets. It is also unlikely that you have the time to devote to develop foreign markets when there is still so much to be done to expand your business in the home market. With a lack of time and resources, your chances of success in foreign markets are diminished.

Throughout this course, students learned the value of their mistakes and reflected on their actions as the project moved forward. For example, the paper's original intention was to include a survey of SNHU students and their views on experiential learning. While the survey was developed and the students were confident on the structure, they ran into problems with meeting the criteria of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and what they needed to do to meet the requirements for using human subjects. While disap-

pointed, they rebounded, used the information from the proposed survey to identify what each had learned, and re-structured the focus of the paper. This allowed students to display their creativity by adjusting to unforeseen challenges.

With the use of globalEDGE, the group gained experience using real life tools that could benefit them in the future as all were International Business majors looking to develop a career in this field. By working within a group, the

Exhibit 5. Experiential Anchors or Models

Project Based Learning (PBL): Project based learning gives learners the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills by investigating and responding to an authentic, engaging, and complex question, problem, or challenge over an extended period. • External partner/client engagement • Virtual International Exchange • Learning Labs
Community-based Learning (CBL): Community engagement and service learning offer the opportunity for learners to apply and practice theory within the diverse community of service organizations and settings that surround SNHU. • Service learning (place based and projects) • Community-based research
Pre-Professional Experiences (PPE): Pre-professional experiences offer learners an introduction to a field of interest and a mechanism to develop critical professional skills and training, and to explore first-hand a field of interest. The timing of these opportunities is short in comparison to Professional Experiences (PE). • Conference attendance • Live case study and other disciplinary competitions • Site visits • Job shadowing
Professional Experiences (PE): Professional opportunities offer learners an immersive experience in a field of interest as a mechanism to develop and apply critical professional skills over an extend period. • Internships/Coops/Apprenticeships • Practicum • Work Study • Student teaching or other field-related certification experience
Domestic or International Travel (DIT): Domestic or international travel provides learners the opportunity to increase their global awareness and cultural competency. • Faculty-led travel • Study Abroad • Alternative Spring Break
Leadership Development (LD): Leadership opportunities enhance the learner's ability to lead on individual, organizational and community levels in co-curricular and extracurricular contexts. • Student government • Clubs & Associations, Executive Board Appointments • Learning Fellows • Athletics • Resident Assistant (RA)

Source: The Center for Project Based Learning (CPBL) at Southern New Hampshire University.

students built on their communication skills to form a cohesive work environment. It was enlightening for students to apply technical skills to the project and to comprehend and apply what they learned from the research conducted for authoring the paper.

Through the work with *Carter Health & Lifestyle LLC*, the students were presented with the opportunity to provide a service for the company while learning about the process that an organization must go through to expand their business globally. This experience allowed the students to develop a deeper understanding of imports and exports and give the experience of collaborating with a company instead of a simulation. For the company, this service benefited them by being able to see where their business lies within the expectations for businesses who want to move forward into exporting their product. With the feedback from the service, it allows the business to assess their weak points and strong points to grow their business. By having this experience with *Carter Health & Lifestyle LLC* students were able to become more independent during the learning process. With little guidance from the instructor, students were able to build trust with their peers and develop their own ideas without outside influences. This en-

hances the learning environment through the freedom to conduct a project based on the students' ideas and individual experiences that can contribute to a group setting.

Service learning seeks chiefly to promote civic and community engagement, and stimulate personal growth (Wang & Calvano, 2018). Professor Broaden reminded us of what we learned from the research by Killorin (2021) that the business world wants to know how we can transfer skills learned in the classroom to the workplace. Service-learning projects are important items to put on your resume as it shows the technical skills acquired and writing a journal article is an excellent example of our writing skills and both are key transferable skills for the business world.

Conclusion

This unique and innovative course provided students with real world insights into the process of importing and exporting. During the course students evaluated the export readiness of a product designed by entrepreneur Kristen Carter, owner of *Carter Health & Lifestyle* and provided the company with valuable information about potential overseas markets. Experiential learning will continue to be a

tool that shows multiple benefits on students and teachers, both inside and outside a classroom. As students, we were fortunate to be part of an institution that has developed opportunities for students to learn and grow in their educational programs through experiential programs and activities.

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