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Experiential Learning Center

The Experiential Learning Center (ELC) connects teams of talented NIU students with organizations—such as yours—to tackle real-world business issues over the course of a semester. At the end of the semester, through a formal presentation accompanied by written documentation, the student team transfers recommendations with measurable value to your organization.

ELC teams are hand-picked and guided by faculty coaches. We choose students to participate on ELC teams based on their interests, talents, and motivation. Our selection process provides you with the appropriate talent for your unique project.

Sponsoring organizations pay a project fee to the ELC and expect a return on their investment. This encourages students to step out of the classroom mode and into the role of a true consultant.

Successful ELC projects result from committed students, dedicated faculty coaches, and accessible sponsors. Our goal is to ensure the experience is positive for everyone involved.

This catalog highlights topics completed by previous ELC teams. When you engage ELC students to work on your project, they will focus on your unique specifications and criteria.
Benefits for Sponsors

Get Fresh Ideas from Creative Minds
The NIU College of Business Experiential Learning Center (ELC) connects you, the accomplished executive, with talented NIU students. By tapping into the minds of these future business leaders, you gain fresh insights and solutions to real-world business issues.

During the course of a semester, student teams utilize the ELC project management methodology and the knowledge and skills they gained in the classroom to provide you with recommendations based on research and data.

Recruit the Best and the Brightest
Since the ELC application process is competitive, only the best-suited students are selected to be project team members. This gives sponsoring organizations an opportunity to interact with and recruit from a pool of capable individuals.

Make a Significant Difference
You can make an enormous impact on students’ education by serving as a project sponsor. As someone whose experiences are invaluable, you serve as a role model and mentor to your ELC team.
Alumni Testimonials

With the experience an ELC project provides, students on prior ELC teams have enjoyed a jump-start on their careers. Therefore, we can say with confidence, “ELC experiences lead to student career success.”

“The ELC provided me with the best in-school opportunity to get real, hands-on experience. Everything I had to do in normal classes was great, but the ELC took things to another level. ELC teams are forced to think critically, manage difficult situations, and solve real problems for the organizations they work with.”

— Zach Fiegel, Associate National Basketball Association

“The ELC gives students the ability to develop and practice soft skills that employers look for. Students are able to graduate as polished professionals due to the experience they receive working alongside corporate executives.”

— Bob Bemister, National Account Manager Nenni & Associates

“In the role I have today, listening and uncovering customer needs is a large part of my job, and my ELC experience played a role in developing those skills. The ELC was also extremely crucial in gaining more confidence in myself and realizing my potential as a young professional.”

— Lexi Wozny, Wireless Consultant Verizon Wireless

“If I had to name any one skill in particular that the ELC helped me develop, the first (and obvious) choice is teamwork. It’s vital in the ELC and even more so in the business world. Knowing when you need to seek partnerships and finding the right people to partner with came in handy in the ELC and is something I do on a daily basis now.”

— Matthew Scott, Group Leader Target
Marketing

Your real-world marketing issues can benefit from an ELC project. Teams provide analyses and recommendations regarding social media, buyer behavior, competitive intelligence, product mix, and more.
Turning Point, Inc. is a crisis intervention 501 (c) 3 non-profit agency with a mission to confront violence against women and children in McHenry County, Illinois. Its work provides life-changing and life-saving services—as well as secure shelter to those who suffer from violence perpetrated by those they should be most able to trust.

The ELC team developed a social media initiative to cultivate and engage donors and volunteers and a strategic initiative for a planned giving campaign.

Social Media and Strategic Initiatives

"To confront violence against women & children in McHenry County"
Market Research

Insurance Auto Auctions, Inc. is one of the leading North American salvage auto auctions with the largest facility footprint, strong buyer base, and high auction returns. Its exclusive focus on the automotive total-loss industry and over 150 corporate-owned facilities across the United States and Canada provides sellers and buyers with the best solutions to process and acquire total loss, recovered theft, fleet lease, dealer trade-in, and collision damaged rental vehicles.

With an eye for identifying future business and marketing opportunities, students on the IAA ELC team analyzed buyer data combined with external market research to develop a better understanding of its buyers.
Positioning True Value for Continued Success with a New Generation

True Value stores are positioned to deliver a compelling shopping experience, the most relevant product assortment, and unparalleled customer service. Although True Value has a rich history of success, it knows that the future consumers and new True Value owners will look for different products and investment requirements than those being met today.

The True Value ELC team analyzed the buying needs, preferences, capabilities, and trends of the Gen X & Y consumer and potential store owners/investors.
Global Interactive Marketing Strategy

Calamos Investments is committed to excellence in investment management and client service. Calamos serves the needs of institutional and individual investors around the world by providing innovative investment solutions that capitalize on the evolving opportunities of the global economy.

The Calamos Investments ELC team delivered a strategy with a focus on social media to communicate with different client segments, build relationships and followings, and enhance market share.
Increasing Awareness and Attracting Membership

The Illinois Section of the American Water Works Association (ISAWWA) is dedicated to the promotion of public health and welfare in the provision of drinking water in sufficient quality and quantity. ISAWWA is proactive in advancing the technology, science, management, education, conservation, and government policies relative to the stewardship of water.

ELC students tackled two questions posed by ISAWWA leadership. How do we create increased awareness of the drinking water industry and its diverse and challenging career opportunities? How should we best serve individuals who have embarked on a water career?
Market Analysis of Online Business Education

The College of Business at Northern Illinois University evaluates growth opportunities that include online course and degree offerings for both the graduate and undergraduate programs in business.

This ELC team conducted a market analysis study to assess the demand, market size, and limitations of online higher education in business. They also provided a competitive analysis that included emerging trends and benchmarking with peer institutions.
Global Digital Marketing

Abbott is a global, diversified company devoted to the discovery, development, manufacture, and marketing of healthcare products. Abbott Nutrition International offers some of the world’s most trusted brands in pediatric, therapeutic, and performance nutrition.

The Abbott Nutrition International ELC team was asked to identify the overarching tools, techniques, and best practices used in global digital marketing.
Communication Strategy Development

NIU’s Division of Marketing and Communications develops, coordinates, and delivers the university’s strategic communications and marketing initiatives.

This ELC team developed an effective communications program (including social media) for existing NIU students. They proposed strategic recommendations to effectively communicate with students and ways to increase engagement via social media.
Comprehensive Social Media Strategy

The Junior League of Kane & DuPage Counties, Inc. (JLKD) is a hands-on volunteer organization comprised of approximately 200 women from throughout DuPage, Kane, Kendall, and Will Counties in Illinois who share a commitment to helping at-risk children in its communities.

The ELC team defined and created a comprehensive social media strategy, evaluated the JLKD website (jlkd.org), and made recommendations for an ongoing digital presence to enhance its efforts.
Marketing Analysis of Sponsorships

Jewel-Osco operates 180 stores across the Midwest, including Illinois, Indiana, and Iowa. It utilizes a wide variety of marketing techniques in its stores. The number of ways to attract potential customers continues to increase and evolve with technology.

The ELC team made recommendations on how to attract younger generations as potential new customers.
Market Intelligence

Do it Best Corp. proudly serves 4,000 member-owned locations in the United States and more than 50 countries. It is the only US-based full-line, full-service, member-owned distributor of lumber, hardware, and building materials products in the home improvement industry.

These ELC students gathered key data on specific segments within Do it Best’s industry. The team detected trends and presented the findings to corporate executives.
Mobile Strategy for Learning Management System

McDonald’s is one of the world’s most well-known and valuable brands. With 36,000 local restaurants in more than 100 countries, McDonald’s serves over 69 million people each day.

The US Training, Learning, and Development department at McDonald’s provides standardized training through an online Learning Management System.

The McDonald’s ELC team assisted the McDonald’s USA Training, Learning, and Development department to define a mobile strategy for restaurant training. The strategy focused on two areas: accessibility and content.

Marketing in a Digital World

This ELC team investigated and provided recommendations for marketing to customers and employees through digital devices.
Public Relations/Promotions Strategy

Living Well Cancer Resource Center, located in Geneva, Illinois, is a place in the Fox Valley where people living with cancer, and their families and friends, can go for the information and encouragement to live well while coping with cancer.

The ELC team successfully delivered a public relations/promotion strategy that included an online component which was scalable and repeatable.
Family Service Agency

Family Service Agency (FSA) is perhaps the oldest social service agency in DeKalb County whose core purpose is to strengthen individuals and communities through healing, mentoring, and social engagement. FSA is a multi-program organization that serves individuals and families throughout their life span.

Students on the Family Service Agency ELC project helped in the development of a business growth strategy. This team put forth recommendations based on their observations and research pertaining to the nonprofit sector.
Information Technology

Your information technology project will challenge ELC students to apply classroom lessons to real-world system applications. Recommendations will be customized to your needs.
Examining the Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) to Work Phenomena and Information Technology Implications

McDonald’s is one of the world’s most well-known and valuable brands. With 36,000 local restaurants in more than 100 countries, McDonald’s serves over 69 million people each day.

Representing students entering the workforce, the ELC team provided a valuable perspective on traditional IT concerns such as security, data protection, and privacy of personally identifiable information (Pii) on smart phones and laptop computers.
Knaack LLC is owned by Werner Co. and is the leading provider of tool and material secure storage systems in jobsite, truck, and van applications for professional contractors. Knaack was founded over 50 years ago and has manufacturing operations in Crystal Lake, Illinois.

Students on the Knaack LLC team built an interface with the JD Edwards Production Plan (current ERP System) and created a dashboard that articulated work center capacity throughout Knaack’s fabrication department.

This ELC team built a reporting system for Knaack’s safety and loss control metrics and benchmarked best safety practices from the industry.
Valuation of Existing Information Technology Applications

Do it Best Corp.’s information technology department builds, buys, integrates, operates, and supports hundreds of software applications that automate business processes across the company. There was a very good process in place for evaluating new software requests and for allocating resources to the prioritized projects. However, there was no process in place to monitor and evaluate the return on investment (ROI) of existing projects.

The students on the Do It Best Corp. team built a process to determine the value of select applications and the approximate cost to operate them. The end product was a spreadsheet with a listing of the applications, the value and allocated cost of each application, and an ROI.
Leveraging Technology to Improve Information on Patient Devices

Abbott is a global, diversified healthcare company devoted to the discovery and development of nutritional and medical products for children and adults.

The Abbott Nutrition International ELC team researched and recommended improvements within Abbott’s processes and technologies when capturing the identity of feeding pumps in the field and in the distribution/returns process.
Finance

Your company may want to consider a topic with a financial emphasis. Finance and accounting majors will lead the way, but students from all majors will grow from the experience. You will gain new insight from their research and recommendations.
The mission of Ronald McDonald House Charities (RMHC) is to create, find, and support programs that directly improve the health and well-being of children.

RMHC had a financial modeling tool that the local RMHC chapters were required to complete when planning to either expand a Ronald McDonald House or build a new one. The tool was overly detailed and complicated.

The ELC team designed a new financial modeling tool that accomplished the same goal but was much easier to understand and complete. A user manual was included with the deliverables.
Investor Relations

Yum! Brands, Inc., based in Louisville, Ky., has more than 36,000 restaurants in over 110 countries and territories and more than 1 million associates. Four Yum! restaurant brands—KFC, Pizza Hut, Taco Bell, and Long John Silver’s—are global leaders in the industry.

The ELC team successfully researched and provided recommendations on how to improve disclosures to investors and more effectively communicate Yum’s global growth story.
Navistar International Corporation is a holding company whose subsidiaries and affiliates produce International® brand commercial and military trucks, MaxxForce® brand diesel engines, IC Bus™ brand school and commercial buses, Navistar RV brands of recreational vehicles, private-label diesel engines, and truck and diesel engine service parts.

ELC students working on the Navistar project analyzed several commodity groups for potential sourcing into Navistar’s production. The recommendations were aligned with Navistar’s core processes, implementation costs, savings, and technology requirements.

Make or Buy Analysis and Recommendations
Supplier Management Analysis

The McDonald’s U.S. Controller Group is a world class organization of innovative, committed financial experts who are essential business partners in McDonald’s success.

Students on the ELC team analyzed ways to control McDonald’s commodity risk for non-food items such as fuel, steel, nickel, restaurant equipment and furnishings, services, construction, etc. The team developed recommendations in the following areas: supply availability, commodity correlation, financial instruments, and contracts.
Hall Associates Flying Effects designs, builds, installs, and operates mechanical systems used to lift and support performance artists during live theater events, sporting events, movies, commercials, and industrial shows. Upon experiencing exponential growth, the company requested assistance from an ELC team.

The students responded by putting forth recommendations in the following areas: financial management, inventory logistics management, data control, price quoting procedures, and strategic marketing.
Employee Advancement

ELC teams have a unique perspective of the wants and needs of the future workforce. Tapping into this resource can provide your organization with timely, unexpected value.
McDonald’s recently celebrated the 50th anniversary of Hamburger University (HU), where various educational programs and degrees, including a degree in Hamburgerology, are offered to its crew and staff.

McDonald’s asked an ELC team to define a platform that would allow it to standardize learning technologies and establish global recommendations and best practices across its seven Hamburger Universities around the world.
GEICO, a subsidiary of Berkshire Hathaway, enjoys high ratings in the industry for financial strength and claims-paying ability.

GEICO asked an ELC team of students to research and develop a policy manual and video on the “Do’s and Don’ts of Your First Job” in order to launch a successful career.

The ELC team conducted primary and secondary market research to understand new employees’ best practices and the skill development needed to make the most of their entry into the business world.
IT Talent Management

McDonald’s, a world class organization, wants to attract the best people to lead its information technology departments and will eventually have the ability to lead the company at officer or CIO level.

McDonald’s utilized an ELC team to help it with recommendations on how to identify, attract, incent, and retain this IT talent.
Operations

While ELC students are preparing for the business world, your organization gets a fresh look at ways to increase efficiency in the supply chain, facility utilization, inventory management, and more.
The Tebala Shrine Center in Rockford is home for the over 1,000 Nobles of Tebala Shrine. Tebala Shrine, which is one of the 195 affiliate member Shrine centers of the International Shrine Fraternity, has been in the greater Rockford area since 1894.

Tebala Shrine holds several fundraising activities each year to support the local Shrine center. The fundraising activities have not been sufficient in recent years to adequately maintain the facility. The Tebala Shriners ELC team focused on several recommendations to maintain a viable home for the Nobles of Tebala Shrine.
Reducing Supply Chain Latency

OfficeMax is a leading supplier of office products including office supplies, paper, technology products and services, and furniture.

OfficeMax recruited an ELC team to study its current supply chain process and look for ways to remove latency.

The ELC team made three recommendations to remove latency and provided implementation and test plans.
Knaack LLC is the leading provider of tool and material secure storage systems in jobsite, truck, and van applications for professional contractors. The company was founded over 50 years ago, and operates its headquarters and manufacturing operations from Crystal Lake, Illinois. Knaack LLC is proud of its state-of-the-art metal working and finishing operations and the leading position its KNAACK® and WEATHER GUARD® brands have earned for durable, secure tool storage products.

Knaack LLC asked an ELC project team to assess the effectiveness of its product packaging.

Students working on this Knaack project reviewed best practices from the industry and benchmarked Knaack packaging against other companies and products to make recommendations relating to process, cost, marketing, shipping, and damage.
The Knaack ELC team developed a strategy to carve out a service center/spare parts business unit from its other operations. The ELC team received best practices from the industry to develop a model for a service center and spare parts fulfillment center with recommendations on parts lists, inventory strategy, warehouse, and pick line layouts, operational costs, marketing, and pricing.
Currently serving 54 countries with more than 5,000 stores and 3,000 associates, True Value is well recognized as a trusted brand. Its retailers are supported by the training, technology, and retail support of an organization that strives to be the best in the industry.

Students on the True Value team analyzed the sales performance of 150 Destination True Value stores (new store format) and recommended sales and margin opportunities to help stores improve their profitability.
Facility Planning

McKesson is the largest pharmaceutical distributor in North America, delivering more than a third of all medicines used daily by pharmacies, hospitals, nursing homes, and doctors’ offices. McKesson broke ground on a Chicagoland Distribution Center (DC) in Aurora, Illinois, in September 2007 with a plan to move from the Carol Stream DC to the new DC in September 2009.

Students on the McKesson ELC team analyzed and compared transition plans for moving McKesson’s Carol Stream DC to the new Chicagoland DC and recommended a plan of action that would allow McKesson to maintain the highest customer service levels without interruption and manage inventory, labor, transportation, and cost issues.
Cross-Functional

Projects that require a creative collaboration process attract students from a variety of disciplines. Students gain business experience from your organization while they learn to examine issues from different perspectives.
Product Life Cycle Management

Caterpillar is the world’s leading manufacturer of construction and mining equipment, diesel and natural gas engines, industrial gas turbines, and diesel-electric locomotives. The company is also a founding corporate sponsor of the Building Ethical Leaders in an Ethics Framework (BELIEF) Program in the College of Business.

The Caterpillar team explored the ways to leverage information as it relates to the product life cycle in order to increase parts and service growth. This project considered product health, maintenance, and life cycle/repair solutions of large wheel loaders.
New Product Development

Frantz Manufacturing Company and its Sterling Steel Ball division is a manufacturer and marketer of conveyor system components and steel ball products used in a variety of commercial business applications.

Frantz had completed some preliminary work in developing a consumer-oriented Sterling Steel Ball product line.

An ELC team was responsible for evaluating the concept, bringing it to the market, and testing its viability.
Business Plan Development for Campus Technology Store

The Division of Information Technology provides technologies in support of learning, teaching, administration, and research at all of NIU’s campuses. It manages administrative and academic computing, computer operations, information management and security, telecommunications, and the NIU network.

Students working on this project developed a business plan for a campus technology store. The business plan included the types of products to stock, hours of operation, student and staff labor levels, and a description of all the business practices that need to be in place prior to opening.
Economic Development & Technology Promotion Plan

The goal of the Northern Illinois Economic Development Organizations and Northern Illinois University Outreach is to improve living standards and create economic opportunities for the region.

The ELC team developed a strategic plan that identified and documented the unique resources and advantages of the areas served by the Northern Illinois Technology Triangle (NITT) and NIUnet.

The deliverables included printed and electronic marketing material and a detailed plan to build awareness of the region and the technologies and infrastructure it offers. Specific technology and financial service companies that should be targeted for recruitment to the region were also identified.

Northern Illinois Economic Department Organizations
Research and Growth Plan

Savant Capital Management is a nationally recognized wealth management company founded 25 years ago in Rockford, Illinois, and has continued to expand into other regional markets in the Midwest.

This ELC team identified target Midwest markets with specific demographics. In addition, it helped identify other office expansion locations, possible acquisition candidates, competitor analysis, and provided some additional analysis of the economics of their local markets.
Caterpillar is the world’s leading manufacturer of construction and mining equipment, diesel and natural gas engines, industrial gas turbines, and diesel-electric locomotives. The company is also a founding corporate sponsor of the Building Ethical Leaders in an Ethics Framework (BELIEF) Program in the College of Business.

War gaming is a recognized, effective, and widely used competitive process/tool to support decision-making.

The Caterpillar ELC team benchmarked best practices for war gaming, identified Caterpillar’s internal war gaming knowledge and needs, and delivered a well-documented war gaming process ready for deployment to support strategic planning.
Identification of Critical Cultural Considerations When Expanding Globally

Caterpillar is the world’s leading manufacturer of construction and mining equipment, diesel and natural gas engines, industrial gas turbines, and diesel-electric locomotives. The company is also a founding corporate sponsor of the Building Ethical Leaders in an Ethics Framework (BELIEF) Program in the College of Business.

The Earthmoving Division asked for support in identifying the critical people and cultural considerations when integrating into new regions of the world, such as Thailand.

The deliverables included the creation of a standard process/checklist for regional considerations before determining/finalizing a facility location.
Optimizing New Product Introductions Using Web-based Tools/Activities

Richardson RFPD, Inc., an Arrow Electronics Company, is a specialized electronic component distributor.

The Richardson RFPD ELC team reviewed competitor activities, performed benchmarking, and recommended website improvements, online activities, and social media programs that would most effectively support market share growth.
Discover Opportunities for Your Company

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