Hello Huskies!

As we look forward to enjoying the nature in its full bloom and welcome spring, our attention also turns to our graduates who will blossom in the way only a Huskie can. The journey of a Huskie in the College of Business is punctuated by a range of experiences that include new adventures like traveling abroad to understand different cultures, a trip to Second City to sharpen communication skills, a project that involves solving a real business problem or impact a community, participate in a national competition, and more. All of these activities can be broadly classified as active learning, a central aspect of our mission. While in-person learning has been postponed due to COVID19, our students are still participating in active learning via digital solutions.

To further strengthen our capability to deliver on the active learning mission, we brought together several initiatives under the aegis of a new framework called “Impact Lab.” Launched as an integrated framework in the fall 2018, the Impact Lab prepares students for lifelong careers. And today, that means preparing them for occupations that yet to unfold.

In this issue of the alumni newsletter you get a glimpse of the activities that prepare our students for the jobs of tomorrow by creating distinctive student experiences.

I hope you enjoy reading this edition and have an opportunity to visit campus or participate in delivering exceptional student experiences when it’s safe to do so. If you wish to discuss future opportunities for engagement to have a transformational impact, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Balaji Rajagopalan, Ph.D.
Dean, College of Business
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The Power of Impact

An epicenter for professional success was recently created in Barsema Hall. Suite 303 — formerly the Experiential Learning Center (ELC) — was redesigned and renamed “The IMPACT Lab.” This new space has become a hub for leading student career success. Built on the foundation of several programs that were already in place (the ELC, the BELIEF Program, and Passport), the enhanced lab engages 2,100 undergraduate students in designing and executing a personalized plan to meet their individual career and life goals. Student success is measured by the percentage of undergrads participating in externally focused project and internships, as well as placement at graduation, three months and six months out.

In addition to existing programs, the lab continues to experiment with new ideas to grow and expand unique student experiences. A few initiatives that have been piloted include:

**Fridays in the Field** — students tour local businesses to experience actual operations, supply chain, personnel management, and much more. (These will continue once it’s safe to do so.)

**Business in Action for Freshman** — an interactive freshman course to introduce business concepts through a problem solving focused live consulting project. Since fall 2018, students have assisted two early-stage startups, a DeKalb family business and a mature mid-size business. The class also immerses new students into the culture of the college through introduction of professional development, Career Compass, BELIEF and Passport. Students also create their own personalized plan for their college experience.

**Driving Pedagogical Innovation** — An important dimension of the IMPACT Lab is to fundamentally change the learning model from a passive mode to an engaged/active mode. Delivering innovative active learning and personalized experiences is at the heart of the College of Business mission and the Impact Lab’s charge. In summer 2019, faculty member Mark Groza and Federico Bassetti were named Dean’s Instructional Innovation Summer Fellows. This program supported significant transformation of two courses. Groza transformed the MKTG 350 in-person class to an 8-week, hybrid, flipped-course design. Bassetti adopted Agile processes, and in doing so, developed a learning community that can adapt to the pace and rapidly evolving nature of software development practice through OMIS 475. Our initial assessment of the IMPACT Lab framework is that it is yielding results and having an impact. But we are in the early phase of a long journey. The key to our success will be broad engagement from our community of alums, businesses and non-profits. Are you ready to have an IMPACT and transform lives?

Do you have opportunities for engagement, or would you like to help create experiential impact? Email Amy Buhrow.

HEAT TalksExpose Students to Unique Ethical Dilemmas

*Contributed by Neil Doughty, director of BELIEF*

Huskie Ethics Awareness Talks (HEAT) are organized and presented by the Leaders in Ethics and Academic Discipline (LEAD) student organization several times each semester. The HEAT Talks promote ethical awareness and use of the BELIEF Ethical Decision-Making Framework. The first HEAT event was held on October 1, 2019 where LEAD students led peers in a review and discussion of a topical ethics case. The exercise gave students the opportunity to apply the BELIEF decision making framework and reinforced its value. The second HEAT event was held on November 12, 2019. College of Business double alumni and BELIEF Corporate Advisory Board member Joey Avraham of Google delivered a presentation entitled “Ethics in Emerging Technologies.” The interactive discussion centered largely on the use of consumers’ personal data by corporations like Google. Students were challenged to consider how accessible their personal data should be to companies.

Would you like to share your ethical experiences with our students? Contact Neil Doughty.
How can the Experiential Learning Center Help You?

Contributed by Jason Gorham, director of Business Consulting

The Experiential Learning Center deploys teams of smart, motivated NIU students to tackle diverse business challenges and deliver measurable value to partners. Student consulting teams served seven organizations in fall 2019. The teams helped Family Shelter Services overhaul a website, and walked three healthcare startups (Clostrabio, Humaginarium, Therome Innovation Partners) through the development of their investor pitches, business plans, and marketing strategies. The student consultants also applied their expertise to part two of a capacity planning project for Caterpillar, made recommendations on how the YMCA of Rock River Valley could better measure and profess the impact of their programs, and helped Intelligent Medical Objects with coding and data analysis.

Student enthusiasm is strong: “The Experiential Learning Center (ELC) provided me with the best in-school opportunity to get real, hand-on experience. Everything I had to do in the classroom 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,” said Zach Fiegel, National Basketball Association.

Teams assisted these partners in spring 2020: Echo Global Logistics, Grainger, Maxwell Telecare, The Shelby Group, Therome Innovation Partners, TransNational Payments, WeWarriors and Vous Vitamins.

Do you have a business challenge you’d like an ELC Team to tackle? Email Jason Gorham.

BELIEF Week: Celebrating Ethical Values and Moral Courage from the Classroom to the Business World

Contributed by Neil Doughty, director of BELIEF

Fall BELIEF Week was celebrated October 7 - 11, 2019. Thirteen business professionals interacted with NIU Business students in twenty-two different class sessions. New this year, a speaker series was presented. The first event, entitled “Ethics Across Industries,” included a panel of senior executives from the engineering, financial services and security industries. Joseph Sener (JPS Consulting), Frank Scarpiniti and Dominick Archer (both of Patina Solutions) discussed trending ethics topics in their respective industries and discussed how a solid grounding in ethics aided their careers. The second address from Jeff Yordon, Chairman and CEO of Sargent Pharmaceuticals, spoke to “Relationships and Ethics: Keys to Success.” The final event was the keynote address by Jedediah McClure, a serial entrepreneur and current NIU College of Business management instructor. In front of a packed house, Jed related the story of his near-death experience at the hands of a former business partner and summarized with lessons learned.

To view the keynote address, click here.

Look for BELIEF activities in the future.

If you’d like to be future speaker or get more involved in ethical education, contact Neil Doughty.
Traveling Continents with Passport

The Business Passport Program gives students opportunities to gain experiences outside the classroom while broadening their business perspective, enhancing their marketability and helping them to define their personal brand. Students set goals through seven key business continents: Career, Communications, Ethics, Experiential Learning, Global, Leadership, and Service. Students must participate in at least one approved Business Passport event or activity from each of the seven continents before graduation.

Alumni often share their knowledge and expertise with students through the Passport Program by presenting workshops, hosting company tours, or hiring interns. Want to share your knowledge and expertise through the Passport Program? Visit and contact Jacie Collum.

Connecting Students to Opportunities, Everyday

Barsema Hall Meet and Greet Tables give students the opportunity to meet firm representatives and learn about companies and opportunities in a casual environment. They give firms the chance to establish and maintain a presence with our students and remain top of mind, especially important in advance of formal recruiting opportunities. In fall 2019, 48 firms visited Barsema Hall to interact with students across degree programs and majors.

Interested in sharing your firm’s opportunities with NIU Business students?

Email Amy Buhrow.

Igniting Students’ Professional Resumes

Launched in fall 2018, IGNITE! connects students to local companies, start-ups and non-profit organizations for paid, professional positions during the academic year. IGNITE! students work up to 20 hours a week for a minimum of $10 per hour with an IGNITE! company. Shawn O’Neill, management student, is one example of the partnership in motion:

“I’m loving it at the Egyptian Theatre! With this huge project going on [renovation], I have been able to apply both what I have learned from my major in Management and my minor in Nonprofit Studies. I have interacted with donors, created strategic plans to improve their membership programs. I have written several different donor letters and emails that have been sent to thousands of people. I have also used excel in sorting data and making sheets to hold donor and donation information. This is an awesome experience and very happy I applied and got the opportunity from IGNITE!”


The influence of our IMPACT Lab is obvious. We have been effective in creating experiences — personalized, active, and immersive — that have been transformative to student learning and career success. With stronger and broader corporate connections, alumni mentorship, and student involvement, we have been supremely successful in securing internships, externships and job opportunities for students. Do you want to make a difference?

Contact Amy Buhrow.

You can now follow the IMPACT Lab on Instagram at niu_business_impact_lab.

Stay Connected

Wherever you are...whomever you are with....wherever you’ve traveled, we’d like to stay in touch. Update your profile here.