The Power of Learning to Learn

“Fifty two percent of the Fortune 500 companies have gone bankrupt, been acquired or ceased to exist since 2000 due to digital disruption.” (EY Report, 2015)
As technologies transform firms and industries, our graduates are increasingly entering occupations that are quickly disappearing and taking on new work responsibilities that didn’t exist just a few years back. So, the question we ask ourselves is, “How do we best prepare our graduates for a future that is increasingly uncertain?” We may find the answer in Benjamin Franklin’s quote: “Tell me and I forget; teach me and I remember; involve me and I will learn.”

By focusing on a model of learning that is immersive with a high level of learner involvement, we would not only help students learn to apply their knowledge but also help them learn how to learn. And this will be key for our graduates to stay at the cutting edge. They will need to be lifelong learners of new concepts, experimenters of ideas and learn to learn from what works and what doesn’t.

In this vein, our strategic focus is on creating experiences that will help our students develop the skills to be lifelong learners. In the stories that follow you get a peek at some of these immersive learning to learn experiences in our college to prepare graduates who will shape the future of work.

Consulting for Award-winning Media Company

Over the last several decades, the business world has come to rely on consultants to analyze and give expert advice on a variety of vexing business issues. Our college gives students the ability to work as consultants for real
businesses in our **Experiential Learning Center** ("ELC"), now housed within The Impact Lab.

Over the last 13 years, the ELC has been a place where students can earn credit for the 16-week collaborative course and apply their skills to help solve cross-functional business issues.

Last fall, a student consulting team worked on a major project for Tribune Publishing where they gave recommendations on how the media company could increase profitability via digital marketing and print advertising.

While we can’t share the findings here due to privacy, the Tribune Publishing executives were pleased with the extensive research and recommendations given by our student group. “The team from NIU helped provide greater insight into three key areas of our business – digital pricing, print pricing and digital cost of sales. The team’s energy, effort and recommendations allows us to drive value across all of our businesses and will be helpful in driving revenue and profitability both short and long term,” said Terry Jimenez, EVP, CFO of Tribune Publishing.

“The diverse and well-rounded background, education levels and skill sets of the NIU team brought unique ways of approaching and tackling the project. Their discoveries and analysis of our advertising pricing will undoubtedly help us to better serve our clients, drive more predictable and profitable revenue, and further enhance our value proposition,” said Sr. Vice President, Finance Paul Pham.

After the presentation, the team was able to take a tour of the Tribune newsroom and other departments in the city.

The project left our students with real-world consulting experience and confidence to interact with senior executives. “Through this great program, and a job well done, we truly hope that the NIU team has also benefited in the form of skill, knowledge, goodwill, and real corporate challenges,” said Pham.

**Interested in sponsoring a project? [Click here.](#)**
Igniting Students' Careers

What was your job during college? Did you wait tables? Cashier? Perhaps you worked construction? While these are all fine jobs and probably paid for a late night pizza or two, our Senior Director of Strategy, Student Success & Accreditation, Amy Buhrow, wanted to provide students with opportunities that contribute to their professional growth. She initiated a partnership between the College of Business and the DeKalb County Economic Development Corporation (DCEDC). The goal was to connect with and employ College of Business students in DCEDC member companies, local startups and local nonprofit organizations. The new program is called IGNITE!

“NIU Business students are an untapped resource for DCEDC members. At the same time, these organizations are not an instinctual source of employment for our students. The IGNITE! Program will change this dynamic,” said Buhrow.

Accounting major Lexi Floming was seeking a job for her sophomore year and applied to the IGNITE! Program. “I thought IGNITE! would give me an opportunity to put my classroom learnings into practice, while getting paid,” states Floming. As an accounting intern at the DeKalb Park District, she is applying classroom concepts directly on her job. “IGNITE! could help students who are on the fence about their careers. It can allow them to figure out what they want to do in the future and give them an opportunity to try
something new before they commit to it full-time,” Floming states. She has also learned personal lessons while working in an office. “It is important to have a good balance between the job, school, and personal life. Don’t be afraid to ask questions – that’s how you learn, and finally, take your time and be specific, so people 10 years from now can understand your notes,” states Floming.

We can all learn to take better notes.

Learn more about The IGNITE! Program.

Gaining Research Experience

For students who are more inclined to work in the academic field, students gain practical experience in a program called Research Rookies. It’s an avenue for students to work alongside faculty mentors in their major -- or area of interest -- to conduct small-scale research projects. For sophomore Adam Rivas, conducting research helped him develop academic skills outside the classroom setting and gained valuable research methods that many college students are not fortunate to have.
His mentor, Dr. Ally Zimmerman, wanted to see whether gender played a role in determining audit committee members and chairs. Rivas collected data for a full year.

Dr. Zimmerman’s research examines characteristics that factor into the selection and assignment process of audit partners in the U.S., along with whether audit partner gender is associated with audit committee members and chairpersons. Data on gender for the research project was hand-collected by student Rivas and analyzed by him and Dr. Zimmerman.

The results clarified the important role that gender plays in the selection process of audit partners. Zimmerman found that audit firms lack female audit partners, due in part to the lack of female directors and managers. The research showed that female audit partners were more likely to be selected by board of directors and audit committees with female representation and by companies with female chief financial officers. Future research needs to consider the role of audit partner selection and assignment as well as gender in examining audit partner quality.

Rivas can now put this research on his resume and know that he is a true research professional.

Learn About Research Rookies

Global Experience - International Business Seminars
Students can experience international business practices and the excitement of traveling outside the U.S. through our International Business Seminars (IBS) program. Each visit includes a combination of lectures, panel discussions and plant tours of both small and large multi-national enterprises. The IBS program is co-sponsored by more than 25 universities, so students also have the opportunity to make lifelong friends from across the U.S.

Here is one student's experience:

**My IBS Experience by Tess Clampitt, Masters of Accountancy student:**

Studying abroad has always been something that interested me but I never thought that I’d actually have the opportunity to pursue. I have always been fascinated by different cultures and especially Asia. I picked the Southeast Asia IBS tour since that is an area of the world I most likely wouldn’t have went on my own.

IBS had an amazing itinerary of different companies for us to visit. My personal favorite was visiting a non-profit, the American Chamber of Commerce in Thailand. I’m currently the financial administrator for a non-profit at the Center for Governmental studies in DeKalb, IL. Being able to learn about something so relatable to my everyday life and have the opportunity to network with those professionals was incredible.
I signed up for this trip completely on my own and throughout my seminar I know I have gained some lifelong friends. Some of the highlights of my trip include giving a baby elephant a mud bath, watching a traditional Muay Thai boxing match, and crawling through the cu chi tunnels in Vietnam. I can confidently say the IBS tour was one of the best weeks of my life.

**From Tom Fisher, Masters of Accountancy student:**

Every single company visit was a valuable professional experience and every excursion outside of the itinerary was a first for me. The most memorable part of Thailand was Elephant World, which is an elephant sanctuary that is home to 27 elephants and counting. Their whole mantra was that people work for the elephants and not the other way around. That same warm attitude was extended towards our group everywhere we went it seems. I was humbled by the graciousness of the Thais daily.

Before this trip, I was really confused about what to expect and a little skeptical of any practical knowledge that could be gained. I could not have been more wrong. Experiencing Thailand and Vietnam’s cultures firsthand has made me realize how much of a bubble I have been living in. Going into accounting, I feel that an experience like this is absolutely necessary. With more and more shifts towards international business, an experience like this is a wise investment for anybody's future.

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**Celebrating Your Impact on Us**
Each year, we celebrate the accomplishments of impactful alumni and others who have made an impression in our world. This year, we will recognize the following individuals:

- **Distinguished Alumnus Award** - Deborah Brucker (BS Management 1988)
• Young Alumnus Award – Allison Fishman (BS Marketing 2010; MBA 2016)
• Honorary Alumnus Award – Katie Duxbury
• Innovation & Entrepreneurship Award – Jeffrey Aronin (BS Marketing 1989)
• NEW - Student Engagement Award – Christopher Millington

Please join us on May 3, 2019 to celebrate the accomplishments of this year’s alumni award winners.

Register here