Appendix III-A-1: Experiential Learning Project

An Experiential Approach to Developing Behavioral Skills for Project Managers

Section E: Ground Rules for Project Teams

1. They must be legal and comply with external regulations (e.g., games of small chance, solicitation, etc.). Projects must also conform to all university policies and any and all campus procedures must be followed to obtain approval for use of facilities, sponsorship of events, and so forth, including campus advertising policy, responsible use of campus resources, policies on solicitation and ticket selling, procedures for documenting donations and costs, and compliance with external laws and regulations (e.g., games of small chance).

2. The projects are NOT fund-raising activities (although “profits” earned are donated to a nonprofit organization). They must be substantive (i.e., several steps above a sorority or fraternity car wash). Teams must engage in a project that can be accomplished in a semester (actually a little less), and that requires activities such as designing, organizing, marketing, advertising, accounting, and so forth. One way to think about events is to set a goal that your event is a “first annual,” with hopes that it is so successful that it’s adopted by a university organization. The most successful projects are those that have constituencies and thus a basis for support—if you provide value to your stakeholders by meeting a need then you will increase your likelihood of success.

3. Projects must engage all members of the team. Projects always entail the risk of “free riders,” and this project is no exception. Each group will, however, be responsible for developing an internal methodology for evaluating the contribution of individual group members. This evaluation will figure importantly in the peer assessment component of each student’s final grade.

4. Seed money: Experience shows that students tend to regard the projects more seriously if they have some “skin” in the game. Therefore, students will be required to fund their efforts by lending start-up money, if needed, to their project. If contributions are required, they should come from all participants equally. After the semester, all investors are to be paid back their investment out of the profits. Any residual profits should be contributed to charities chosen by the project team.

5. Accurate records should be kept of income and expenditures. You will be required at the end of the semester to show evidence that the profits earned have, in fact, been contributed to the designated nonprofit entity. This can be in the form of an official receipt, letter from the charity, or canceled check. All teams must establish internal financial management control procedures that include, at a minimum, the requirement for two signatures on any financial transfers or withdrawals.
6. At the conclusion of the semester, the books will be audited and the project organization showing the greatest profit will be awarded a prize. Creativity is not regarded as a virtue in accounting.

7. Students will note that a substantial component of the course grade depends on performance. Performance in the real world is almost solely dependent on financial outcomes. Even though this course is intended to mirror the real world, an exception will be made here in that other factors will be considered in the evaluation of this component. The ambitiousness of the project, effectiveness of the project team in working together, adroitness in handling the inevitable unexpected crises, and strength in planning and time management are among the considerations that will be weighed along with financial performance.