FACULTY PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (TEACHING & LEARNING)

SMU EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION DAY (SEED) DIGEST – ISSUE 1

Initiated by the Centre for Teaching Excellence (CTE) in partnership with SMU-X Team, SEED serves as a platform where faculty members share their expertise with the SMU academic community in experiential learning and/or its related topics.

Strategising Digital Transformation: Creating Meaningful Impact on Student Learning
21 August 2018

In this inaugural issue of SEED Digest, we feature Adjunct Faculty Wong Yuet Nan and Annie Ng from the School of Information Systems (SIS) who shared on their approaches, experiences and critical success factors with teaching the SMU-X IS425 course, "Managing Information Technology (IT) Systems for Business Value".

IS425 Managing IT Systems for Business Value Course

2014 APEX Biz-IT case competition

DBS Digital Bank Strategy

Meant as a "Finishing Touch" course for the Information Systems (IS) students to appreciate IT management before they graduate, the IS425 course highlights the business aspects of IT. It also provides students with opportunities to apply IT to deliver business value to organisations. Through this course, SMU students produce innovative digital strategies that address real-life and complex issues faced by organisations. Yuet Nan and Annie shared about the evolution of the term projects since it was first introduced in 2012. The term project has become the cornerstone of this SMU-X course. In 2014, the student team coached by them won first place in the APEX Business-IT Global Case Challenge.

In 2015, Yuet Nan and Annie collaborated with DBS Bank for the term project. Their students' proposed strategies on Digital Banking impressed the Managing Director (DBS Digital Bank) and Chief Technology Officer so much that all students working on the term projects were offered jobs or internships with DBS Bank. Impressed with the calibre of their students, sponsors often contacted Yuet Nan and Annie to recommend their students whenever there are job openings. Just last year, they partnered with the Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to conceptualise and streamline processes for Singaporeans to eRegister with MFA before departing Singapore using ChaBot and Virtual Personal Assistant. Impressed with the students' works, MFA called for a news conference together with SMU to showcase the students' ideas.

To provide students with a better way to organise their learning, Yuet Nan and Annie created a customised textbook for the course adapted from the best of several IS Management textbooks. Additionally, they would source for the right projects and problems at least 3-6 months before the course commenced.

Project Sponsors Engagement

Annie shared how they went about managing the term project sponsors to ensure a win-win situation for the sponsors and their students *before*, *during* and *after* the course.

Before
- Met up with the sponsors ahead of the course to align the project deliverables with the sponsors' expectations
- Shared the sponsors' involvement throughout the term ahead of time so as to minimise business interruptions to them
- Required a point of contact from the sponsor company for students to approach for information or assistance on queries regarding the projects
- Communicated to sponsors on students' schedules and how they typically put in more efforts to improve their project solutions only after the mid-term review
- Requested sponsors to provide cash prizes (circa $400 each) to the winning teams in a bid to encourage healthy competition amongst students and to motivate them to work harder

During
- Arranged for briefings by sponsors to students in Week 3
- Organised student consultation sessions with sponsors in Week 8 based on students' outlines of problem analysis and solution completed in Week 6
- Invited sponsors to judge students' presentations in Weeks 12 and 13 based on instructors' created presentation rubrics
- Collated sponsors' feedback on students' reports

After
- Offered sponsors the opportunity to continue working on the projects in IS480 Capstone course, where system prototypes can be developed
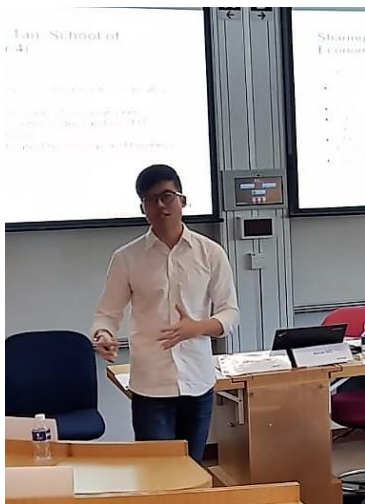
Students' Voices

Patrick Tan Kun Wei, a final-year student at School of Economics, who took the course last term, was invited to share his experiences. Despite the rigour and demands of the course, he viewed that the pros greatly outweighed the cons. Patrick shared how working on real-world projects and the process of applying classroom learning to solve the sponsors' problems, gave him the opportunity to appreciate the importance of business value to organisations. He also benefitted from the career counselling provided by the instructor (Yuet Nan) and the Adjunct Teaching Mentor (Annie) which shed light on IT careers from the practitioner's point-of-view. Patrick also found the active case discussions engaging. The mix of IS and non-IS team members provided diverse and complementary skill sets and perspectives which he appreciated greatly.

Like Patrick, Bryan Lau Peng Liang, a final-year student at SIS, also took the course last term. The course had equipped him with not only technical knowledge about IT, but also a better understanding of the relevance of the course from a business perspective. Bryan also shared how the experience from working on the term projects benefitted him in his job interviews. Working with the sponsor also provided him with a clearer picture of how project management works in real-life. He also opined how his confidence level increased through the multiple presentations where he had to share the project progress with his peers, and how the in-class discussions provided equal opportunities to the class to exchange ideas and share their opinions.

Patrick Tan

Bryan Lau

Critical Success Factors and Advice for Other Colleagues

Annie and Yuet Nan also shared about the critical success factors that they found important for teaching the course. They also urged other instructors to consider these factors if they were keen to design and teach experiential learning courses.

1. ***Be enthusiastic.*** Being enthusiastic about the teaching enabled the instructors to exude positive energy that was contagious. This in turn led to students' own motivation for learning, and/or their desire and excitement about achievement, to increase.

2. ***Support students in their learning.*** Providing students with guidance on strategy frameworks, having multi-discipline student teams (IS and non-IS students), sharing of past project samples, arranging site visits, organising guest speaker lectures and hiring Adjunct Teaching Mentors were some of the ways they implemented to support their students' learning.

3. ***Make learning relatable for students.*** Sharing of personal experiences, anecdotes and relatable examples made students see the relevance of the course. Annie and Yuet Nan would invite guest speakers (e.g. Living Analytics Research Centre (LARC)) to class to share about their industry projects and research.

4. ***Provide career coaching and advice to students.*** Helping students to see the big picture of paving their career paths after the course (and upon graduating from SMU) was something Annie and Yuet Nan took on in addition to teaching the course.

5. ***Emphasise to students, the importance of ethics.*** Annie and Yuet Nan saw the need to impart to students, the importance of their moral judgments on their actions (differentiating the right from the wrong) in areas of school, career and life.

6. ***Set appropriate expectations for students and sponsors.*** Expectations were clearly established and communicated to students, (e.g. workload, deliverables, assessments, PC usage in class etc.), so that everyone is on the same page. Similarly, they ensured that expectations for the term project sponsors were clearly established and communicated to them.

7. ***Be selective in the choice of Teaching Assistants (TAs).*** TAs served as an important bridge between instructors and students; and were a useful resource in getting student views and supporting informal student consultations. Two TAs - Jeremy Lim [TA Period: AY 2014/2015] and Wong Qi Wen [TA Period: AY 2015/2016] had created a TA guide for IS425 course which has proven to be very useful in bringing new TAs up to speed with their roles and responsibilities.

8. ***Commit to continuous improvement.*** Continued learning and staying updated about the latest issues in IT Management ensured the currency and relevancy of the course. Feedback and suggestions solicited from sponsors, TAs, students and the Adjunct Teaching Mentor were also incorporated to further improve the course. Additionally, Annie and Yuet Nan shared how they benefitted from the CTE workshops they attended that helped them improve their teaching.