

**Reality-Based Learning in a Business Writing Course: How to be a Reality Star  
in a Dynamic Global Marketplace**

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August 27, 2009

Abstract

In the classroom, the focus is on theory rather than reality on how to be effective in the business world. The lack of developing business savvy in the classroom leaves our next generation of leaders without practical abilities to be successful leaders in the global marketplace. The subject Business Writing course of this paper was developed to meet all of the elements of Bloom's Taxonomy and it also focuses on building skills with real-world business scenarios with serious business impact. The reality players (students) are responsible for creating the written policies and solutions (business writing) and learning effective communication skills required in business (communication skills). What developed were learning outcomes where students matured at every attempt in developing critical documentation and delivering confident and effective communications. The goals of this reality-based course result in a clear understanding of real-world business issues including the confidence to deliver materials in a realistic setting. The ability to operate in a dynamic business marketplace is an important dimension for today's students who will be tomorrow's leaders. The students from the subject Business Writing course will have an advantage of being exposed to critical real-world settings that will help them to become more effective communicators and business leaders.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

Research has shown that a variety of teaching modalities in the classroom is beneficial for student learning and comprehension. The purpose of this paper is to examine one course in particular that was developed to not only teach important business communication skills to students seeking a bachelor's degree, but also to reinforce the use of these skills in real-world, problem-based settings. The course is titled Business Writing; however, it encompasses a much wider array of business communication skills, in general. The course, Business Writing, was created in order to provide basic business writing skills to students in an undergraduate program. However, simply teaching the rules of business writing from a book was too static of an approach. Therefore, this course was developed with a focus on problem-based learning so that the course outcomes for the students would not only provide the basics of business writing but also provided a deeper dimension of real-world application. The students in the course, Business Writing, would actually be thinking on their feet, practicing their business writing skills, and they would have the opportunity to develop and fine tuning a higher-level of overall business communication skills! The learning outcomes for the course, Business Writing, are focused to take the students to a 21<sup>st</sup> century skill set for the workplace!

### Problem-based learning and real-world application

The LEAP National Leadership Council (2007) noted that today's college students need to be able to take their degree and apply it in an increasingly complex world. The Council notes the following areas of critical learning outcomes that students must be proficient in:

- Inquiry and analysis
- Critical and creative thinking

- Written and oral communication
- Teamwork and problem solving
- Ethical reasoning and action
- Foundations and skills for lifelong learning

The LEAP National Leadership Council (2007) “challenges the conventional view that liberal education is, by definition, ‘nonvocational’” (p. 3). The ability to integrate and apply learning from the course room to the real world is critical. One of the key principles that is outlined by the LEAP National Leadership Council is the ability to connect knowledge with choices and action. This prepares students for real-world situations by providing appropriate problem-based learning in the classroom. Students who are engaged in the classroom and have the opportunity to practice real-world applications can be better prepared to navigate the increasingly complex world they will face upon graduation.

“Business education is of limited use if it holds onto the concepts and practices of an earlier business and educational era” (Horsley, 2009, p. 1). Horsley (2009) noted that effective modern business education must foster the students’ ability to develop a diverse set of skills including such skills that often considered ‘soft skills’ like communication, creative thinking, embracing diversity, negotiation, and teamwork. Skills that are commonly referred to as ‘hard skills’ that students must master include the ability to integrate knowledge into practice in the workplace, the ability to enhance product delivery, and the ability to provide superior customer service.

Horsley (2009) noted that the ability to create courses that focus on work-based outcomes, problem-solving abilities, evaluation of information, and dealing with uncertainty is a key focus for today’s business educators. This type of focus can often be difficult for educators

to embrace as it encompasses a different perspective from traditional learning. The traditional basics for the course outcomes must be there; however, more effective business education must also add a dimension for students that allows for problem-based learning in an active setting. This will allow students to not only learn those basics but provide them with the opportunity to apply them in real-world settings in the safety of a classroom laboratory.

Sherman and Kurshan (2005) stated that “constructivism is based on the conception that we learn by relating new experiences to our prior knowledge; we construct new understandings based on what we already know” (p. 10). The ability for students to collect a base of knowledge and then relate this knowledge to the new experiences provided in problem-based learning is key. The opportunity that real-world application of knowledge in the classroom provides is an outlet for students to actively relate learning and experience. This allows students to create even stronger understandings of the knowledge they have obtained and creates a solid foundation for both learning and achieving.

Modern business education must have a focus on creating opportunities for students to experience not only team settings in learning, but those team settings must also be in problem-based applications of newly learned skills. Katzenbach and Smith (1993) noted that teams that are successful include those that have complementary skills as well as experiences. A diversity in backgrounds can provide for a well-rounded mix that allows teams to be nimble enough to respond to complex challenges. Diversity and team focus leverage off of each other in today’s workplace and can enhance organizational goals and outcomes (Hickman and Creighton-Zollar, 1998).

It is important to note that Hickman and Creighton-Zollar (1998) reported that studies involving teams in the workplace have not show consistent benefits of diversity in this function.

Gardenswartz and Rowe (1994) stated that how a team's differences are managed can determine the success or the failure of that team. Hickman and Creighton-Zollar (1998) made recommendations for a teamwork training program that included a focus on project and goal setting, making the transition from an individual viewpoint to that of a team viewpoint, being able to align one's personal goals with the organizational goals, and fostering overall communication competency. Gardenswartz and Rowe (1994) outlined the characteristics of effective teams and included the following team dimensions: clearly defining performance outcomes, understanding the different cultural norms and the impact of such norms on communication issues, interpersonal and group problem solving abilities, a cultivation of differing viewpoints, and an openness to new experiences and new processes. Such perspectives are key components in a modern business education experience.

Livingstone and Lynch (2002) stated that team-based active learning that can mirror the workplace develops skill sets that are relevant and valuable in real-world workforces. Wynn-Williams, Whiting, and Adler (2008) noted that the use of business case studies and the proper preparation of relevant case studies is key in providing the appropriate balance of learning and application. Brzovic and Matz (2009) reported that students involved in experiential active learning had an opportunity to mature personally and professionally as they practiced the application of theory into practice. Therefore, it would be critical to understand how problem-based and active learning can be utilized in an undergraduate business program to better prepare the students to enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce.

Educational reformer, philosopher, and psychologist, John Dewey, embraced the idea that education should treat students "not as passive recipients of educational content, but as active makers of meaning, capable of exercising independent judgment and of democratic

collaboration” (Gregory, 2001, p. 399). It is with this view that educators must engage students to become involved in their own learning, and problem-based learning makes this a central point. The ability for students to participate in real-world application of the subject learning is key to providing these students with the ability to navigate an increasingly complex world beyond the classroom.

The New Media Consortium (2009) published a report regarding a study on challenge-based learning where classes focused on solving real-world issues. The outcomes for these classes encompassed all the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills that were provided by over 40 large-scale companies. In these classes, the educators acted as facilitators and allowed the students to work through the issues and apply their learning in unique fashions. “Students self-reported that they were learning and refining skills that closely matched those identified by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, even though they were never shown that listing” (New Media Consortium, 2009, p. 2). These skills included critical thinking and problem solving abilities, communication skills, the ability to think creatively and innovatively, the ability to collaborate effectively with a wide range of individuals, leadership skills, people skills, the ability to adapt to change, and the ability to be self-directed and accountable. These are all key areas for today’s business students to focus on as they prepare to leave the educational setting and create a successful path in the real world.

## REALITY-BASED LEARNING – THE SUBJECT BUSINESS WRITING COURSE

### Introduction

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century there are a number of new challenges for higher education. The definition of a student has changed to the point that we can no longer educate in many of the older methods of producing work based on simple reading and regurgitation of the same

material. In addition, memorization in the more non-traditional programs such as business do not prepare individuals to take their place in the positions that will be vacated by the aging Baby Boomer population. With regard to the Baby Boomers, there are nearly 77 million Baby Boomers that are getting closer to retirement (Ten steps to reforming baby boomer retirement, 2006). Therefore, there is a looming need for well-prepared individuals to move into those positions that will become vacant in a myriad of organizations. The opportunity to impact the learning and raise the level of application of concepts is becoming more of a requirement in the traditional and online classrooms.

The business classroom will be the focus for the change that must occur to increase the level of applied learning for students to become viable candidates for positions in many of the critical positions in many organizations globally. Problem-based learning, or reality-based learning, is an educational method that is gaining popularity in both traditional and online classrooms. Simply defined, reality-based education provides for individuals to learn and apply concepts in a setting that provides realistic scenarios with skilled educators who can impact the individual's performance allowing application of real-world decisions. This activity allows for constructive review of how the individual student performed and can prepare for the next encounter in the scenario.

Maher Hashweh (2005) discussed the importance of the new pedagogical approach to building learning outcomes around seven building blocks or '*constructions.*' These are as follows:

- 1) Pedagogical Content Knowledge represents personal and private knowledge;
- 2) Pedagogical Content Knowledge is a collection of basic units called teacher pedagogical constructions;

- 3) Teacher pedagogical constructions result mainly from planning, but also from the interactive and post-active phases of teaching;
- 4) Pedagogical constructions result from an inventive process that is influenced by the interaction of knowledge and beliefs from different categories;
- 5) Pedagogical constructions constitute both a generalized event-based and a story-based kind of memory;
- 6) Pedagogical constructions are topic specific; and
- 7) Pedagogical constructions are (or should ideally be) labeled in multiple interesting ways that connect them to other categories and subcategories of teacher knowledge and beliefs (Hashweh, 2005).

In the subject Business Writing course of this paper, we have created a reality-based learning lab around the exploits of an aggressive CEO and a completely dysfunctional organization that suffers from extreme growth and poor planning. The students will be placed into teams of 6-7 taking leadership roles in resolution of the company's issues. In this process they will be challenged at a very high level as part of the reality of what business can be when work is not done efficiently.

#### Course Design

The class is designed to engage the student in a live simulation to enhance overall communication skills in a business or personal setting. The student enters the organization, IRSC BAS Inc., as a senior level director in one of seven leadership positions. IRSC BAS Inc. is growing fast and the processes and governance policies are not keeping pace. In addition to the issues of growth, the CEO of the company is not an effective communicator and in many cases is

abrupt and unprofessional. The information supplied and the direction from the CEO is scattered and not always clear.

The course is designed to divide the class into teams that assume the leadership roles and are placed under pressure to solve the issues of IRSC BAS Inc. The case in each segment is subject to unclear information purposely to engage the leadership (students) to take action with the best interest of the business in mind. In addition the teams come before the CEO in the Board Room during each case to present results and the direction of the solution they have decided that will best solve the issue. During the Board meeting, the CEO (aka Course Professor) challenges the recommendation. The CEO's action is pointed at drawing attention to potential risks in the decisions made by the executive team. Then there is a review as a team on how to better control the factors of non-professional leadership or challenges to results in general.

We immersed the students in a live simulation in a real business environment. Each student was put in a corporate environment that simulated the requirements for performance at the business level versus at a college course level. This served as a lab environment for real-world application of business writing and communication skills. Since the leadership positions were real, failure to get involved in the process resulted in a level of business peer pressure within these teams to change poor performers into real team players.

Each simulation that was put forth was real and represented issues that are being faced day-to-day in business environments locally and globally. This class provides for students by increasing their ability to handle operational issues immediately by thinking on their feet and applying information but also analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating the information provided and assembling a solution and communicating the expectation in a clear and precise manner. When you can increase the confidence of students in any situation, despite socioeconomic or

physical presence, they will be motivated to lead and to lead others to success. These are the specific areas involved in the pedagogical construction:

- Technology – The CEO (aka Course Professor) communicates to the teams using video about a situation that is occurring in the business. The information presented in the video is cryptic and direct order driven. It is designed to shake the staff to react versus think, validate, confirm, and provide strong results. The challenge to the students is for them to focus and plan rather than just react.
- Documentation – As a rule most business leadership provides 25-30% of the information required to make sound decisions. This course does the same, everything the students need is available, only they need to extract all of the information from each of the possible sources and make decisions that potentially resolve the issue at hand.
- Role Play – We conduct interactive sessions focused on the issues being presented. These role-play events focus on students managing the process of ‘thinking on your feet’ and utilizing the right sources of language to better communicate a position that will become readily accepted.
- Team Model – All students are part of the team for the duration of the course. They are taken through the team development stages (forming, storming, norming, and performing) and develop methods of communication across teams of any size, shape, and experience level.
- Instructional – The entire process is built on the *‘thinking on your feet’* method. The students are put in a position to make decisions that are for the benefit of IRSC BAS Inc. NOT what the professor of the class wants. During the process, it is then up to the student

team to defend their position and back it with proper responsiveness and communication skills. With regard to Bloom's Taxonomy, this would then take the students from knowledge, to understanding, into application, to providing analysis, into synthesizing, and finally to an evaluation of their work and methods.

- Student Success – The students are placed in a position to make business decisions that are based on real issues. Student success is based on detail of solution, presentation skills of that solution, and the team cohesiveness to accomplish the tasks at hand.

In the current business environment there is a considerable lack of real experience in problem resolution, critical thinking, document creation, meeting management, and clear communication for delivering successful outcomes. By simulating a real business environment, the students were placed into positions of leadership solving real day-to-day operational issues, plus setting policy/governance to prevent the issues from occurring again. The leadership above them (represented by the Course Professors), take a hard-core approach to challenge their solutions. The objectives of these challenges are to promote confidence and leadership by the students to support their solutions in the right context and support the individual team effort with confident leadership.

Our focus is on the following knowledge learning outcomes and skill areas:

- Creating and properly defining the requirements for documents and communication, internal and external (Communications).
- Developing a plan of action to solve real life challenges to the business (Project Management).

- Synthesizing and developing a context of direction with little information (Knowledge Management).
- Presenting solutions to meet the needs of the business, and making the hard decisions (Decision Making).
- Provide the right context for communicating the right action (Leadership).
- Create a comfort zone for providing ideas that solve issues (Self-Confidence).
- Working within an eclectic team of personalities to problem solve (People Skills).
- Reacting to immediate situations with viable alternatives without complete information (Thinking on Your Feet).

Specifically, students learn to become self confident and to be leaders. The course room interactions allow the students to solve critical issues as they arise in their daily lives. Success can have many measures. The knowledge of these topics and possible resolutions gained from this course can impact the delivery of critical thinking with confidence – this is what we believe to be a measure of success. However, the focus on the core learning objective is how a measure of success is defined for this course.

At the successful completion of this course, the learning outcomes students are prepared with include the ability to:

1. Create a mission and a vision statement for an organization.
2. Discuss the role of leadership style in shaping an organization's capacity to fulfill its mission its mission and vision.
3. Demonstrate the importance of team building as a means of influencing internal, external, and interface stakeholders.

4. Describe the subtle differences existing between the formal and informal organization and the influences each exerts.
5. Discuss inter- and intra- organizational relationships and the role played by each in fashioning a successful leadership strategy.
6. Discuss how proper problem-solving and conflict management can facilitate future success in decision making and quality improvement.
7. Demonstrate the ability to lead groups and teams.

#### Results looking at Bloom's Taxonomy

The key aspects of reality-based learning can be applied by looking at Bloom's Taxonomy. The three specific domains of educational growth Cognitive (Mental), Affective (emotions, feelings), and Psychomotor (physical, manual skills) are critical in measuring the levels of growth within the student as they progress in the subject Business Writing course (Bloom, 1956).

#### *Level 1 – Starting the Process*

At level 1, we recognize that every student is starting at a different point on Bloom's Taxonomy. This is the result of their current age, work experience, and level of confidence as it relates to problem definition, resolution, and results communication. The initial activities are focused on developing a structure of understanding what it will take to resolve the issues of IRSC BAS Inc. Everything the students in their respective teams need is in the video presentation from the CEO (Course Professor): the Prospectus of IRSC BAS Inc. and the case studies for the team to resolve. During this stage in the Bloom's Taxonomy Domains, students are looking for the level of direction they would normally receive in a traditional classroom outlining everything from paper length to format – none of this is available to the students who

now have to think like an employee and produce what the leadership of the company is looking for and expecting.

<b>Bloom's Taxonomy Domains</b>		
<b>Cognitive</b>	<b>Affective</b>	<b>Psychomotor</b>
Category: Knowledge	Category: Receiving Phenomena	Category: Perception
<i>Actions</i>	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Actions</i>
Reproduces simple tasks to provide minimal work.	Ability to listen and take direction for simple tasks. Respects authority.	Reacts to non-verbal cues from leadership. Can make adjustments to physical conditions so as not to get hurt.

Diagram 1-1: Level 1 Bloom's Taxonomy Domains

*Level 2 – Finding the Answer*

At Level 2, the students begin to develop an anxiety about what is expected during their first encounter at the company board room. Their team is struggling through the forming, storming, norming, and performing stages where certain individuals take a leadership role, however, they lack refined leadership skills to bring the team to an understanding to move forward. At this stage, the students begin to search for answers from other teams and the professor. They begin to understand that success is going to be measured by their knowledge and the knowledge of those on the team and outside the team. When they encounter the CEO (Course Professor) at the board room table, the team struggles to deliver an answer and each concept delivered is challenged by the CEO because there is not a unified position from the leadership team (See Appendix B for Team Leadership Roles).

Once the delivery of the team’s position is complete, the professor offers a debriefing of the proceedings in order for the team to begin to recognize issues requiring work, and it is a coaching opportunity for each member. The professor will focus on weaknesses in the delivery, word selection, posture, and if individuals have accents, we discuss methods of minimizing the impact in business situations. These coaching sessions offer the teams clear issues to begin working on resolutions and to prepare for their next issue (case study).

<b>Cognitive</b>	<b>Affective</b>	<b>Psychomotor</b>
Category: Comprehension	Category: Responding to Phenomena	Category: Set
<i>Actions</i>	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Actions</i>
Generalizes and defends position with general information and will maintain they were unaware and will do what is requested of them.	Engages in discussion to ensure they know what is right and they do not make mistakes.	Responds to the tasks required to complete a job. Shows the right emotion in order to complete given activities.

Diagram 1-2: Level 2 Bloom’s Taxonomy Domains

*Level 3 – What Would the CEO Do?*

At Level 3, the students begin to develop a low level of confidence that they can master the outcomes of this course. What they begin to do is start looking for materials outside of what is discussed in class and applying research to find effective answers to the challenges. There is still an underlying concern about ‘what does the professor want and what is the page count’. During instruction, it is clearly defined that what is produced to resolve the issues at IRSC BAS Inc. is entirely up to the students, however it must pass muster of the CEO (Course Professor) and meet the specifics of the issue. To be clear, the issue is loosely defined and in many cases there is no real outline for the students to follow. Moreover there is a need for the students to

compile points that they perceive need resolution and take action. This allows the students to develop more focused problem-solving skills.

What develops in the next action with the CEO (Course Professor) is a team that develops a larger scope for what is necessary to resolve the issue and they begin to dazzle the CEO with numbers and processes and activities that would drive an organization into the ground attempting to put the actions into motion. The CEO points out these issues and drives the team to either support or go back to the drawing board with their plan. The purpose is for the team to determine if they have the confidence to stand together or are there still cracks in the armor that need to be resolved. We know in business that confidence breeds success, and if the team has the muster to stand together then their plan has viability. At this point in the process, most teams still lack the confidence to drive a solution.

The debriefing at this level brings about a different set of results. We find that the choice of words becomes more defined and positive, along with posture and confidence growing to step out and experiment. The focus changes from personal attributes to more of a team delivery approach. The instruction talks about how to choreograph delivery and drive the results as more of an update on action versus a pursuit of approval. Additionally, we still discuss language and control of the meeting. At this level the movement is towards taking the meeting out of the hands of the CEO (Course Professor) and the team is now in control.

<b>Cognitive</b>	<b>Affective</b>	<b>Psychomotor</b>
Category: Application	Category: Valuing	Category: Guided Response
<i>Actions</i>	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Actions</i>
Constructs a plan using materials for details and will look for approval before	Differentiates between right and wrong. Appreciates opinions of others, and will	Imitates what has been seen before to deliver a task. Repeating actions by

engaging to reduce chance of failure.	only do what the authority in charge wants done.	leadership and will make adjustments for their individual comfort.
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Diagram 1-3: Level 3 Bloom's Taxonomy Domains

*Level 4 – Actions and Words Speak*

At Level 4 the students begin to grow their confidence level and begin utilizing language of control in the application of the plan they have developed. The leadership on the team begins to materialize and roles become clearly defined and the team understands the expectations they need to produce. The performing stage of the team finds that understanding of the different personalities becomes transparent and begins working as a unit in the mode of operation that best serves the company. However, there are exceptions to this outcome. It is evident that at times, teams never make it out of the storming phase, and then coaching the team then focuses on how to build trust and support for ideas. In many cases, this result is due to 'legend in their own mind' issues and a change in leadership is required. One of the first requests is a move to another team or more coaching to assist them in getting through the process. The idea for the professor to instill is this is not going to happen, that this does not happen in business and it will not happen in this reality-based learning environment. The team is encouraged to take it up a notch.

Teams that are developing on the correct path begin to expand the roles of the team in order for everyone to grow stronger in their weakest areas. Someone who may feel weak in a leadership role is encouraged by their peers to take control of the team to meet the challenge, and the team assists them in accomplishing their personal learning objectives. At this point in the learning process, there is significant growth in the team's ability to function as a group and as individuals.

The debriefing takes on a completely different form based on the development of the team. Where the instructor would lead the debriefing session and provide feedback on performance, approach and recommendations for changes, the team being evaluated provides their own feedback recognizing what they needed to be perfect and what issues came out from their performance at the board table with the CEO (Course Professor).

<b>Cognitive</b>	<b>Affective</b>	<b>Psychomotor</b>
Category: Analysis	Category: Organization	Category: Mechanism
<i>Actions</i>	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Actions</i>
Develops plan of resolution by investigating and seeking understanding of circumstances. Will execute slowly to make sure investigation was correct.	Modifies action as necessary and can defend position based on results. Can make decisions and support them with facts based on results.	Comfortable with required actions and developing methods of teaching it to others behind in the process. Able to articulate how and why.

Diagram 1-4: Level 4 Bloom’s Taxonomy Domains

*Level 5 – Mastery to the Test*

At Level 5, the students have reached the point where they have a mastery of the concepts of confidence as it relates to problem definition, resolution, and results communication of the plan developed. In addition there is a mastery of working within a team to use the talents and skills of others to provide an effective result to any issue or challenge.

The action developed to show the level of mastery gained by the students is defined in a Reality-Based Final Exam. The conditions are created to put the team in an emergency situation. The team will select an unknown situation. They will have 30 minutes to review. The situation will be an emergency of some type that will make for a tense meeting with the CEO (Course

Professor) at the board room table. The CEO will also raise the level of intensity to apply pressure to the team and the potential solution they provide.

The rubric is as follows:

<b>Category</b>	<b>Area of Evaluation</b>	<b>Percentage of Score</b>
Team Coordination	Did the team master choreography and everyone participated in delivery of the final solution to the issue?	25%
Communication	Did the team control the flow of the call and in the process did they control the CEO from his normal obnoxious antics?	25%
Control of Process	Did the team make sure there were no holes in delivery?	25%
Overall Quality of Solution	Did the team provide a quality solution that resulted in problem definition, resolution, and effective communication of the plan developed?	25%

Diagram 1-5A: Reality Based Final Exam Rubric

During the final debriefing with the entire class, the comments and learning outcomes are always focused on the level of confidence they have achieved in conjunction with the ability to properly define problems, create clear resolutions, and communicate effectively to upper level leadership.

<b>Cognitive</b>	<b>Affective</b>	<b>Psychomotor</b>
Category: Evaluation	Category: Internalizing values	Category: Adaptation
<i>Actions</i>	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Actions</i>
Decisions are second nature. Hiring the right workers and confidently promoting position on what is necessary. No fear in conducting business and doing the right thing	Developing a value structure of what is important and what is not. Begins working independently of others and will take on larger role for tougher activities. Recognizes	Can change movements immediately to meet altered needs. Can articulate the how and why clearly so others working in the area understand. Ability to use

without fail.	individuals and what they bring to the table in the workplace. Implements, revises, and delivers results.	alternative methods to achieve same results.
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Diagram 1-5B: Level 5 Bloom's Taxonomy Domains

## CONCLUSION

The subject Business Writing course is, in essence, an educational approach that requires participants to not only create documents that enable a business to function more efficiently, but also verbally communicate and justify what has been written. To further increase the rigor and relevance of the course, the students are also required to work in groups and interact with one another in both a face-to-face and virtual setting. Moreover, each of the teams are further tasked with presenting their resolution to the CEO (Course Professor) and respond to questions requesting who, what, how, and why these approaches will correct the company's issues. This methodology prepares students for real-world scenarios that are similar to those challenges that they are likely to encounter in today's fast-paced and dynamic global marketplace.

In addition, to further develop the students, the course also places them in an environment that is not focused on right or wrong, nor true or false, which initially creates feelings of confusion and frustration. Throughout their formal education, many of them have been trained to expect certain parameters and guidelines when completing a task. However, the subject Business Writing course presents a new structure that does not require a particular word count or format. Therefore, the students have to rely on their own personal perception and that of their team members to gauge what are the organizational expectations at hand. This newly created state of confusion will require each of them learn how to work in an atmosphere that requires them to be

the judge and developer of what the final product should look like, and ultimately they will learn to have to rely on one another.

As stated by Hickman and Creighton-Zollar (1998) teamwork training should include a focus on project and goal setting, making the transition from an individual viewpoint to that of a team and being able to align one's personal goals with those of the organization. This belief has been infused in the subject Business Writing course by requiring participants to work in teams while completing individual assignments that are the primary focus of the team debriefing. In addition, this team aspect allows students to move through the four stages of group development and create an even stronger understanding of the knowledge that they have obtained and created together. Therefore, the students' refined critical thinking skills, ability to articulate their rationale and to think on their feet, and the increase in their level of applied learning will equip them with the necessary tools to pursue a myriad of job opportunities in a dynamic global marketplace in today's 21-century world. This can provide them with a significant advantage over their more traditionally trained peers.

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APPENDIX A: COMPANY PROSPECTUS (FOR SUBJECT BUSINESS WRITING COURSE)

**IRSC BAS Inc. Prospectus**

**Introduction**

IRSC BAS Inc has been in business for 10 years providing computer products and service to customers in the State of Florida. We have received awards for Entrepreneur Company of the Year in 1998 and the Outstanding Service Provider 4 years in a row from 2002-2006. We have grown from a \$500,000 company in 1998 to a \$10,000,000 company in 2008. IRSC BAS Inc. has 4 offices and a manufacturing location across the state of Florida: in Tallahassee, Orlando, Ft. Pierce, and Miami. All of the IRSC BAS Inc. products are built in Miami and development of new product lines occurs in Tallahassee. Our Corporate headquarters is located in Ft. Pierce.

**Mission Statement**

Our goal is to provide the best products with the greatest service possible. We will position IRSC BAS Inc. as the service leader in Florida. If we can get customers to associate the IRSC BAS Inc. brand with the absolute best service, then we can expand into other product categories. Maintaining our dedication to the information technology, we will continue to refine our quality, expand our capabilities, increase our efficiency, and elevate the superior level of customer service we now provide to heighten the standard of excellence we have set in the industry.

**Customer Base**

We have over 1000 customers from small businesses to major corporate businesses. These customers utilize our products and services for all of their computing needs. IRSC BAS Inc. is a full product and service organization with a proven track record of providing world class products and services. Our customer base resides within all regions of the state of Florida. 50% of our base is on the Treasure Coast down through Alligator Alley and Miami. 25% is located on the Gulf Coast, with 15% in the Orlando Metropolitan area. The remaining 10% is located in the Tallahassee area. To support this geographic spread, we have 1 technician in Tallahassee, 2 techs in Orlando, 2 techs in Tampa, and 5 techs spread across the Treasure Coast to Miami. We support on an average yearly basis of 3200 service activities. After the Third Quarter of 2006, we increased our service activities by 2100 to 3200 average per year.

**Product Line and Services**

In the third Quarter of 2006, IRSC BAS Inc. expanded our support to include third party products in order to become a full service provider for our existing customer base. This level of service included systems, networks, desktops, printers, and mobile devices. In addition, we began providing consulting services to meet the advancing growth of our customer base and expanded to include new customers within our service area.

**Our People**

We boast having the most ingenious and innovative people in the business. Our technical engineers in the field are trained to support an ever-expanding group of products as we continue to expand our service to a large variety of third party products for our customers. These techs receive on average 80 plus hours of training a year. Our product development staff is growing. We are recruiting new engineers monthly to keep our product in step with many of the large

hardware producers. In addition we have a large administrative staff that is increasing at a rate of 25% each of the last two years. Our call center currently develops new talent monthly and operates a 24/7/365 center.

**Our Metrics**

Our Customer base 1000+

Our revenue \$10,000,000 annually

87 employees (10 open positions)

Techs: 10

Call Center: 22 (3 Open Positions)

Engineers: 20 (2 Open Positions)

Accounting: 23 (3 Open Positions)

Human Resources: 12 (2 Open Positions)

Turnover Rate (Companywide) 22%

Customer Satisfaction Index 79%

APPENDIX B: LEADERSHIP TEAM (FOR SUBJECT BUSINESS WRITING COURSE)

**Leadership Positions**

**Director of Operations**

Responsibilities include managing day-to-day operations, customer service, facilities management, call center operations, security.

**Director of Human Resources**

Responsibilities include employee development, performance management, recruitment, hiring and firing, policies, HIPAA data, employee safety.

**Director of Legal Operations**

Responsibilities include managing all legal issues for IRSC BAS Inc.

**Director of Product Development**

Responsibilities include all product development across the entire company. This includes the development of new Services, Support, Hardware, and Software.

**Director of Marketing**

Responsibilities include all advertisement, programs, and Public Relations.

**Director of Sales**

Responsibilities include performing all sales of equipment and services from small to large customers.

**Director of Finance**

Responsibilities include management of all financial records.

APPENDIX C: CASE STUDIES (FOR SUBJECT BUSINESS WRITING COURSE)

**BUSINESS WRITING COURSE**  
**Weekly Case Studies**

<p><b>Week 1</b></p>	<p><b>CASE STUDY:</b>                  A review of the IRSC BAS Inc. will reveal that the business has grown much too fast for the people to keep up with change and growth. As the CEO I believe is it time to make some significant change.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have a disconnected staff that appear to have issues making sure the business is profitable</li> <li>• Our Human Resource Polices are non-existent</li> <li>• Our Product Portfolio needs to be re-worked to provide revenue streams to maintain our standing as a top Florida company</li> <li>• Customer satisfaction is fading and this will not be tolerated</li> <li>• Our contracts are not legally sound and it is costing us money</li> <li>• We need a new direction and a new image</li> </ul> <p>Change is scary even for a Maverick like myself. It is time and I expect a great deal from my people – I expect sound leadership.</p> <p><b>Expectations:</b>                  Our objectives will be to create comprehensive set of documents, emails, and proposals. Each section will be conducted over 2 weeks and the assignments are due by the end of the second week. In addition, we will have 2 weeks of training from the IRSC Grant Team to provide knowledge regarding the world of grant writing.</p> <p>The Team Project is just that, a Team Project. You will be required to work with your team in the classroom and independently to complete the assignments. I will be flexible and allow the teams to define their own how and why.</p> <p>We will have a Mid-Term exam.</p> <p>We will have a Final Exam that will be a 4-Question Essay that you will have 1 week to complete.</p>	<p><b>Documentation Expectations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process flow for all departments to communicate</li> <li>• Employee Etiquette Policy</li> <li>• Problem resolution process for each department to obtain quick resolution to issues that are priority</li> </ul>
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<p><b>Week 2, 3</b></p>	<p><b>CASE STUDY:</b>                  The organization is fighting internally when we should be partnering to make money. There is a complete failure among all of the teams, marketing, finance, sales, service, R&amp;D, call center, and operations. The CEO has reached a point where firing the entire staff and starting over is an option that has become appealing.</p> <p>The CEO has decided to give an ultimatum to the entire staff to develop a new strategy and operating procedures in order to provide clear governances for the company to make money and open up the business to new markets.</p> <p>The opportunity to bring in a consultant is an option, but there better be significant results. The CEO expects to be updated on the progress and any new governance policies that will drive the business in a positive fashion. The bickering and poor performance will come to an end.</p>	<p><b>Documentation Expectations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Process flow for all departments to communicate</li> <li>• Employee Etiquette Policy</li> <li>• Problem resolution process for each department to obtain quick resolution to issues that are priority</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 4,5</b></p>	<p><b>CASE STUDY:</b>                  Since our the beginning of our existence, our HR policies have been lacking. HR was not properly involved in the creation of our corporate strategy and has been attempting to catch-up ever since. We have been through 5 HR Director; the last one left 6 months ago. Their biggest complaint was the lack of support in developing the basics of policies for managing employees effectively. It is time to develop the right policies to deal with our retention issues. We are competitive, but seem to struggle with turnover in the service area. As the CEO, my suspicions are we are not developing our people effectively. It has been on the strategic plan for HR for the past 4 years and it has not been achievable.</p> <p>Actually, there are 5 items on the Strategic plan that are the responsibility of HR:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff Development Strategy</li> <li>• Performance Measurement Plan</li> <li>• Organizational Efficiency Restructuring Plan</li> <li>• Employee Data Protection Policies (HIPAA)</li> <li>• Benefits Plan</li> </ul> <p>Based on all of the issues, including the current legal issue involving that former employee, it is time to develop and deploy these critical strategic items.</p>	<p><b>Documentation Expectations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff Development Strategy</li> <li>• Performance Measurement Plan</li> <li>• Organizational Efficiency Restructuring Plan</li> <li>• Employee Data Protection Policies (HIPAA)</li> <li>• Benefits Plan</li> </ul>

<p><b>Week 6,7</b></p>	<p><b>CASE STUDY:</b>                  At our inception, we had a very strong product line and our development was as good as it gets. In the third Quarter of 2006, IRSC BAS Inc. expanded our support to include third party products in order to become a full service provider for our existing customer base. This level of service included systems, networks, desktops, printers, and mobile devices. In addition, we began providing consulting services to meet the advancing growth of our customer base and expanded to include new customers within our service area. What has occurred recently is our inability to develop the strong products as usual. It appears that we have bitten off more than we can handle. We seem to struggle getting product from development to deployment. In addition, we seem to be failing to support our customers effectively. We need to determine what is missing in our process to get products to market and successfully support them. We are losing business!</p>	<p><b>Documentation Expectations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revised Product Portfolio (What we should and should not be supporting)</li> <li>• Project Management Process</li> <li>• New Service Portfolio</li> <li>• An Organizational Change needs to occur</li> <li>• End of Life Product List</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 8,9</b></p>	<p><b>CASE STUDY:</b>                  We have fallen down and cannot get up! Our customer satisfaction numbers have fallen below 80% satisfaction and this is continuing to fall. I have had to talk to as many as 30+ customers in the last few weeks because of our failure to support their service needs. In addition, they have complained that our customer service management has failed to reply to the urgent calls for information. Our policies are not capable of handling our current activity. It is a must that we contact our customers with estimated times of arrival (ETA's) in order to maintain our level of support to our customers. We need to make strides in supporting the contractual commitment we have to our customers. We are impacting our profit margins when we do not meet our contractual commitments. Penalties are a real issue.</p>	<p><b>Documentation Expectations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plan to restore 95% customer satisfaction</li> <li>• Escalation Plan</li> <li>• Communication Plan</li> <li>• New organizational chart to meet commitments</li> </ul>

<p><b>Week 10, 11</b></p>	<p><b>CASE STUDY:</b>                  Our expanded services were not taken into account in our existing service contracts. We engaged in providing services and penalties for performance without updating our contracts to meet these new services and criteria. We have been sued 7 times in the last year for failure to perform based on our commitments. Our mission-critical responses are running 6 hours to respond and 4 hours to repair – our contract is for 2 hour for response and 2 hours to repair – we stink! The CEO is tired of taking nasty calls and getting sued.</p>	<p><b>Documentation Expectations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New contract language for our services</li> <li>• New organizational chart to meet commitments</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 12, 13</b></p>	<p><b>CASE STUDY: **** EMERGENCY PLANNING ****</b>  <b>This is a critical announcement to the Executive Team!</b>                  We have an impending Category 5 hurricane called Hanna. It is expected to make a direct hit on the Treasure Coast. It is roughly 450 miles wide and is expected to bring about devastation to all parts of Florida.</p> <p>Our survival as a company is crucial. We need to develop a Disaster Recovery Plan that will allow IRSC BAS Inc. to recover from this disaster. There are several points we need to make sure we have in place in order to protect our ability to do business in the aftermath:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our records should be protected and access should be easily made after the impending disaster</li> <li>• Our customers should have the ability to get support once the danger has passed</li> <li>• Our people should be accounted for and support should be given to take care of their needs</li> <li>• Our available inventory of products should be free from harm and easily accessible</li> <li>• Our property needs to be reviewed and accessed immediately to determine usability</li> <li>• Define a list of assets that will be required and a list of assets need to be accounted for to protect the viability of IRSC BAS Inc.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Documentation Expectations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Build a Disaster Recovery Plan</li> <li>• Make a list of actions needed to conduct business during and after disaster</li> <li>• Determine the list of assets required to maintain the viability of business</li> </ul>

<p><b>Week 14</b></p>	<p><b>CASE STUDY:</b>                  With all of the changes that have been made, the current strategic plan no longer fits the company direction. There is a need to develop a new strategy based on the significant changes made.                  In addition, the creation of a new mission statement is required based on the changes as well. IRSC BAS Inc. needs a mission statement that matches the direction and position of the company</p>	<p><b>Documentation Expectations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Strategic Plan</li> <li>• New Mission Statement</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 15</b></p>	<p>Final Exam – Live Exercise</p>	
<p><b>Week 16</b></p>	<p>TOPIC: Debriefing on the Class</p>	