**RETAINING (62.407)**

In Fall 2012, the Management Department in the Manning School of Business introduced a new course – Retailing – for business majors at the junior and the senior levels. This course is designed for students who are interested in pursuing a career in the Retail industry. Its primary goal is to help students understand the fundamental principles and diverse strategies of retailing, and lead them to develop analytical and critical thinking skills through the case projects. The highlight of the course was a retail case project I collaborated with the Target Corporation – the second largest retailer in the U.S. – which provided our students with a practical and experiential learning opportunity.

**DESCRIPTION of THE COURSE**

The Retailing course is a marketing elective course that introduces students to various types of the retail institutions, stimulates students’ interest in the retail industry, and equips students with knowledge of becoming future retail leaders.

Some learning objectives include:

- Identifying, estimating and evaluating retailing opportunities.
- Analyzing the performance of a retail firm and developing innovative strategies and tactics accordingly.
- Developing and applying analytical thinking, critical thinking, team working, problem solving and decision making skills using the case project method.
- Demonstrating interactive research and communication skills.
- Coordinating and developing professional business presentations.

**REACHING OUT to THE INDUSTRY**

In order for our students to gain a real world experience in learning and applying retail concepts and operations. I reached out to Target Corp. and suggested a collaborative retail case project titled Target Case Project for students. Meanwhile, through Target Community Relations (https://corporate.target.com/corporate-responsibility/grants), I applied for Target campus grants and received $1,500 for the proposed Target Case Project in the Fall 2012 Retailing class.

**HOW IT WORKS**

Working with industry professionals on retail topics presents a great opportunity for our students. The Target case project was a semester-long project that engaged the students from the very beginning.

At the second week of the semester, the student teams were exposed to a list of retail topics (i.e. City/Target, Multichannel strategy, Target and the Grocery Guest, Sustainability, etc.). Each team chose a topic of interest and did a preliminary research on the topic. During the third week, Target sent a team of store managers to class. Each student team was assigned a Target “buddy”. The Target Buddy then took the student team for a store tour. Through touring the Target stores, the student team was asked to identify a problem/issue relevant to the topic, and completed the team proposal. After conducting further research (including the secondary/primary data collection necessary to the project), in the middle of the semester, each team reported to the class their proposed strategic solution for solving the identified problem/issue. After obtaining feedbacks from the Target buddy and the instructor, each team revised (and collected data when needed) and submitted the final paper.

At the end of the semester, all teams presented their Target case project in front of a group of Target Executive Team leaders. Based on the creativity of the proposed solution and the overall quality of the project and the presentation, the Target team chose the First Place Winner and the Second Place Winner for the awards.

**APPLICATION and EXTENSIONS**

Experiential learning is a powerful “hands-on” learning experience that helps prepare our students for being Work Ready and World Ready. From analyzing the situation, identifying the problem, collecting the data, till proposing the solution, student teams working on the Target Case Project were immersed in learning and research activities that successfully integrated study and practice, creating an unparalleled way for our students to learn.

I believe that the experiential and collaborative learning approach can be applied to other courses that may benefit from collaborating with the industry. To further extend the approach, the instructor may also consider small businesses instead of big players. Small businesses usually lack for resources. Partnering with small businesses on the relevant course project not only provide a practical learning opportunity for our students but also offer a resourceful help to our local communities – a potential win-win situation for both.