



Business in Practice

At the Peter T. Paul College of Business and Economics, we take a broader more comprehensive approach to experiential learning. In addition to encouraging and supporting outside activities like internships, study abroad, and corporate projects, we have brought experiential learning into the classroom through the creation of our Business in Practice program (BiP). In doing so, we have been able to provide our students with the opportunity to see how the theoretical constructs they have learned as part of the core curriculum can be put into practice.

Instead of relying on a collection of self-directed opportunities for students, we have instead created an entire program comprised of guided experiences which are led by industry professionals and carefully crafted around well-defined learning and developmental goals. *It is experiential learning by design; a design that attempts to accelerate the learning process by giving the student an opportunity to gain insights as they learn by doing with the assistance of a professional who has seen much of it before.*

Within the Business in Practice program (BiP), students are required to take 4 two credit courses as part of their degree program. These courses are designed to “sit on top” of the existing curriculum and serve as a bridge between business practice and the foundational knowledge taught in the core curriculum. They are organized within intelligences: Professional, Analytical, Competitive, and Professional. Each student must take a course from each of the intelligences to successfully complete the degree in business administration.

BiP learning experiences are designed around the passion, interests and work history of the industry professional who serves more as a guide or facilitator than an instructor. Courses are offered in person, synchronously remote, or some combination. This enables us to recruit talent from national companies such as Facebook (California), DOMO (Utah), Hubspot (Massachusetts), Vera Bradley (Indiana), and Zillow (Washington State).

Each course employs active learning within an environment where students can take risks, learn from failure, ask candid questions, and build a rich portfolio of experiences and skills. They enable our students to see firsthand how business principles can be applied to achieve real world outcomes in courses designed to give them a head start with those tools, techniques and skills that are desired most by today's employers.

More than just a collection of courses, the program serves as a central hub that spans a vast network intended to enhance the traditional business school experience. It is designed to foster meaningful relationships between the business and university communities that contributes to the professional success of our students. Whether it is learning a useful skill, forming a better understanding of how things actually work, or making a connection that leads to that first job.

Our courses are much more process than outcome oriented. Each learning experience takes the student on a journey that has them completing a project or series of steps that are designed to enhance their understanding of how things need to be or should be done. We ask our instructors to create a learning experience that answers the why something is done a certain way as much as what and where. By sharing their own past mistakes and successes, our instructors can provide their students with insight into how they might best respond to a similar set of circumstances when they become employed after graduation.

What sets the BiP program apart from the core curriculum is the degree of control we can exert over the learning process. We can easily spin up new courses as market-based needs emerge and discard those that emphasize topics or skills that are no longer relevant. All potential instructors go through an identical course development process and we ensure that each course shares the same basic structure in order to create what we refer to as the BiP experience.

While all courses share a common structure, they are not exactly the same. We encourage each instructor to infuse their course with a sense of what it might be like to work at a particular company or in a distinct role. We want our students to get a taste of the diverse work environments that populate the work landscape, however, within an active learning context and a set of well-defined learning and developmental goals.

Adopting a comprehensive approach that encompasses the entire program simplifies the continuous improvement process. We assess performance utilizing standard teaching evaluations, our own surveys, a careful review of the syllabus and materials stored on our university's learning management system, mid-semester and end of semester check-ins, and feedback from our student guides. Our industry professionals who are new to the program, are assigned a student guide who works with them to prepare their course, help to manage activities during class, and serve as an informal conduit for gaining student feedback.

All of this contributes to a culture of continuous improvement where we can make adjustments in real time and further revisions before a course is offered a second time. Having reached a critical mass of courses and instructors, we have formed a vibrant community of practice where our participating professionals can share teaching tips, become exposed to new technologies to enhance the learning experience, and participate in regularly scheduled webinar/meetings designed around best practices.