

# Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Learning, Volume 26, 1999

## A REVIEW OF MY ABSEL-RELATED WORK

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### ABSTRACT

Alvin C. Burns, Copeland Professor and Marketing Department Chair at the Ourso College of Business, Louisiana State University is conducted. Dr. Burns' work covers every year of ABSEL's existence. It entails thirty-one papers, a best paper award, the Association's Presidency and the naming as an ABSEL Fellow in 1993. On reflecting on his ABSEL-related work, Dr. Burns notes four major areas of activity-- simulation design and game administration, pedagogical research, the business gaming field's theory base and the nature of experiential learning.

#### Simulation Design and Game Administration

This is an area which I have pursued over my entire career within ABSEL. My earliest papers were descriptions of simulations I had developed and run such as the mainframe game MAILIT (1976). Other games were either hand-scored, the Marketing Channels Game (1977), or written in BASIC as was the case for the Retail Location Strategy game (1982). In the early 1980s I moved onto PC-based student-oriented simulation facilitators such as DIS 'n DAT (1991), The SPSS Student Assistant (1995) and a game administrator-oriented facilitator *Ambition Gradient* in 1993. My most recent venture in this area was the running of a simulation on the Internet which were reported in a 1998 ABSEL paper. I am now at an experimental stage of using distance education as a platform for marketing simulations and this will move me into a completely different area of activity.

#### Pedagogical Research

My doctoral training included a goodly dose of simulation but it also included a stronger measure of empirical research methods. Accordingly I have created a group of six empirically-based research

papers. There is, however, no pattern to this work other than it has always dealt with the effectiveness of alternative knowledge-delivery methods. This work has involved a path-analytic study of the effects of alternative pedagogies (1984), computer-based versus workbook-based methods for teaching marketing principles (1990) and defining the moderated and mediated performance consequences of alternative pedagogies (1992). This body of work also includes papers on communication barriers (1983) and a paper on using single-cases in experimental designs (1985). Overall my work in this area was concentrated between the years of 1979 to 1992 with the peak years being in the mid-1980s. It has also been eclectic and has allowed me to do joint research with my wife Jeanne as well as with Steven Golen and James Gentry.

#### The Theory of Business Gaming

This, and the next area of my activities, have been heavily influenced by my collaboration with Jim Gentry. Early in our ABSEL experience, we began thinking of the considerations and factors that combined or conspired to make experiential teaming happen or not happen. These thoughts were first enunciated in 1977. Our next step was the conception of a "model monster" (1980). Our "Grand Plan" was to identify and test all the variables in a theory of experiential learning (1981).

This plan was indeed "grand" as we conceived of getting simulation and game users involved in a gigantic field study that would create a database for empirical research in the spirit of the PIMS database. Unfortunately we hit a brick wall at the operationalization stage (1980) as we could not find or generate consistent or common operational definitions of the variables, particularly the definition of learning. The "theory's" resting-place is in the *ABSEL Guide* (1988)

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where it served as a model for categorizing the field's research streams in existence at that time.

### The Nature of Experiential Learning

One of my recent concerns has been on experiential learning per Se-- what is its nature and how can it be influenced in a positive way? Beginning with some of my early works, such as "Do We Learn from Experiences?" (1983) and Megatrends (1984), this area has again been very heavily influenced by Jim Gentry who instigated this research stream and has perpetuated it over the years. As joint authors we are in the growth stage of this area with contributions to ABSEL appearing each year from 1996-1998. We may be on the right track as our efforts have resulted in a lead article in *Simulation & Gaming* (1988). In that paper my "tension to learn" theory, which had previously been presented as an ABSEL workshop, appeared. This theory, the rules of learning are definitely different.

It is a brave new world in a great many ways. I know the technical side of such skills as programming html pages, setting-up PowerPoint presentations and uploading files. But being the master of learning in this environment is a daunting, but not discouraging, task, and I am definitely a neophyte in this area.

The real, daily challenges I am facing in my role as an educator deal with questions such as the following:

- What is the proper role of the Internet as a business course facilitator?
- What are students' expectations for the Internet to help them learn?
- What non-Internet learning concepts apply to Internet-facilitated courses?
- What are the learning "rules" for today's students?

however, remains theoretical as no empirical test has been conducted on its efficacy

### On To a New Quest

I am now wrestling with how to structure and run a course in an Internet support environment. For 1998 the Louisiana State University Marketing Department had as its goal a 100% movement into multimedia classrooms. This year our new goal is one of conducting "paper-less" classes where the Internet is the host of all our PowerPoint files, handouts, syllabi, announcements, assignments, assessment materials and whatever else can be put on the net.

In doing this I am finding the landscape is far different from the course-by-PowerPoint scene. Everything seems different--the students, the media and the classroom. Most importantly

- How can we motivate passive students to become active learners?

In future years I hope to share these myriad issues with my ABSEL colleagues.