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INTERCOLLEGIATE BUSINESS GAMING FROM A PARTICIPANT' S VIEWPOINT

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INTRODUCTION

In presenting some views about intercollegiate business gaming from a participant's viewpoint, let me begin by outlining briefly Harding's experiences in these games.

Our first experience in intercollegiate business gaming was in 1965 when Dr. Cox, who is now Vice President at Harding, entered a team in the marketing competition sponsored by the Marketing Club at Michigan State University. Harding placed second in the competition that first year. Harding then won the competition the next year, 1966, and again in 1968. Harding won for the third time at Michigan State in 1970. Because of interest generated in business gaming due to the success of teams entered at Michigan State, a second team was entered in the Intercollegiate Business Game and Conference sponsored by Emory University beginning in 1967. Harding won that conference for the first time in 1969, placed second in 1970, and then won the conference again in 1972 and 1973. Harding then won this competition for the fourth time and the third straight year in 1974.

In addition to our experiences in these two intercollegiate games, this year we entered a second team in competition sponsored by the University of Nevada at Reno. That competition will be concluded later this year.

BENEFITS OF GAMING EXPERIENCES

Now that I have described to you Harding's participation in these three intercollegiate business games, I would like to make some comments concerning the benefits of these gaming experiences to the participating students and Harding College. In the interest of time, I have categorized my comments concerning these benefits into five areas.

The first comment has to do with the kind of learning experiences which gaming provides. I am very excited about the benefits of intercollegiate business gaming as a learning experience for students because they become self-motivated as a result of their involvement in it. Rather than trying to force students to do a minimum level of work, I have found that quite the opposite is true with competitive gaming experiences. Students become so involved in what they are doing and so excited in it that they literally have to be limited sometimes in order that they do not neglect some of their other responsibilities during the competition. In the Emory competition, for example, I have seen students become so excited as the printout was coming in over the TWX machine that they would jump up and down and become quite ecstatic over a good statement of results for a particular quarter. That to me is exciting as I see students so interested in the learning experience that they become almost emotionally involved. I have seen students stay up all night before the presentation

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in the Emory competition in anticipating questions that might be asked and in preparing their final formal presentation of their strategy and results achieved. I'd like to stress that this is voluntary work. They receive no academic credit for the work which they do.

The second benefit which I would like to relate to you is the avenue gaming provides for students to gain a conceptual understanding of what the entire business operation is all about. I have seen undergraduate students grasp the entire process of running an organization to a very high degree as a direct result of their involvement in the games. I have seen students be able to intelligently define objectives for business organizations, be able to specifically discuss policies and strategies which will lead to the implementation of selected objectives, and be able to analyze a mass of data and be able to determine that which is important in determining whether one company or another has been successful. I have seen students learn which results matter. I have seen students learn how to present material and to defend it to a panel of judges, under stress. I have seen them be able to realize that it is a balanced operation and not just an overemphasis on either marketing or production or finance or accounting but rather the total approach that matters. As a direct consequence of this conceptual skill which has been developed for many of the students that have been in these games, I have seen them develop personal goals for themselves, dreams as to what they were going to do in later life. This conceptual understanding simply cannot be taught through a lecture method or a textbook. I believe its something you learn as a by-product of these games.

A third benefit that I would like to relate to you is that of the human relations skills that necessarily come to be sharpened as a result of game experiences. In working with their peers and with older individuals, with faculty members, with judges at the competition, many times in periods of stress under timed conditions, and yet wanting to beat their competitor because of their intense involvement in the game, I have seen a great camaraderie develop. I have seen people who do not perhaps know each other very well learn to work together very well. I have watched them complement each other in terms of their abilities in order to develop a unity in a team action that would cause them to win championships at Michigan State University and Emory University. The camaraderie developed while working many hours as a member of one of these teams has continued on while they are in school and has continued on even to this day even though separated after graduation by time and distance.

A fourth benefit would be that of the immediate as well as long run results that I have seen come about from student involvement in these competitions. Immediate results like confidence are sometimes gained by students in their first experience. For example, a relatively shy young man with a tremendous amount of ability learned in the period of competition to express himself and to defend his position and to speak out. In the first presentation at Emory of the team strategy and then a defense of it to a panel of judges at the industry level, this young man did not say a word. He knew the answers and was quite capable but didn't say anything. That night he worked on himself. The next day he was a different person. He spoke out on many occasions to tough questions; he

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knew the answers. He had grown a lot and is continuing to grow. He is one example of an immediate effect. But what about those that have been out of school for a number of years? As I indicated, we started in this competition back in 1965. Some of those students have now been out almost ten years. What have they done? We have kept in constant contact with these individuals; they visit the college often and are very much involved in on-going programs at Harding. We are proud of their accomplishments. Some forty people now have been on one of our intercollegiate business teams. Their record is, I believe, outstanding. I believe that we are seeing dreams come true. Dreams that had their beginning in many cases on one of these business teams. Further, as evidence of the effect of these intercollegiate business games, I believe the testimony of these veteran team members is very important. Their testimony is that these games were definitely the highlight of their undergraduate career. Their enthusiasm was obvious when they were on the team; I think it's important to note that now several years later they still believe the same way.

The fifth and final benefit that I would state comes under the category of some side effects which we have noticed at Harding as a result of our involvement over a ten-year period of time. Student interest has led to the development of an elective course which we offer our seniors so they, too, can have some of the experiences that the members who are selected for the intercollegiate teams have. We are now using The Management Laboratory, by R. L. Jensen in this course. Certainly, there are a host of students who very much desire to be on the team and who work toward that end. That fact helps our entire program. Another side effect can be seen in the growth of the business department at Harding. Over the past four years both the number of students in the department and the number of majors in the department has tripled. Intercollegiate business gaming has certainly been a major factor in this growth.

These five benefits of gaming which I have described are the major features of the competition but not the only ones. Our experiences have shown us that the competition at the intercollegiate level has been one of great value to our students at Harding both in the immediate run and in the long run.

FUTURE VALUE OF GAMES

Now in closing, I'd like to make a few comments on intercollegiate business games which might lead to the further development and value of the games in the future. The first comment is that I would like to see more participation among colleges and universities in intercollegiate business gaming. I think this could be achieved through greater publicity about the benefits of the games to colleges all across the nation. While it may not be feasible for many more colleges and universities to participate in existing competitions, perhaps new regional or national intercollegiate games could be established. Perhaps a national competition could be established by members of the proposed organization on business gaming and experiential learning.

Secondly, I would suggest that periodically the faculty advisors of the teams which are entered in these competitions meet for purposes of

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discussing the kind of competition that is going to be held. I think this could help everyone get off on the same foot as I know from previous experiences it is very helpful to have been entered in competitions in the past since you have at least some idea as to what intercollegiate business gaming is all about. I think a meeting, if financially possible, of the faculty advisors each year prior to the running of the competition would be very helpful.

The third and final suggestion I would make would be to use, whenever possible, current economic models which could be related to real life situations so as to make the simulation as real as possible. I would further add a note that while it is not possible to accurately predict the direction that the game is going to take, an effort should be made to avoid having a loss situation during the entire period of the competition since most students are not adept at running a company which is always in a loss situation over a three or five-year period. As a matter of fact, I'm not sure how many managers in real life are adept at doing that. I know as professors and writers of textbooks, we do a poor job in writing about how to run a company which has a history of losing money.