

2013 PRME SUMMIT – 5TH ANNUAL ASSEMBLY
New Ways of Developing Leaders for The Future We Want

Mendoza of Business, University of Notre Dame

Addressing global challenges with actionable foresight

Introduction

[Mendoza College of Business](#) at the University of Notre Dame is a premier Catholic business school that seeks to foster academic excellence, professional effectiveness and personal accountability in a context that strives to be faithful to the ideals of community, human development and individual integrity.

In January 2008, Mendoza College of Business became signatory to PRME. In doing so, it joined business schools and academic associations worldwide in committing to align its mission and strategy, as well as its core competencies – education, research and thought leadership – with UN values embodied by the Six Principles of PRME.

Mendoza continues in its concerted efforts to create measureable progress towards the fulfilment of these Principles, including Principle 3 to create educational frameworks, materials, processes and environments that enable effective learning experiences for responsible leadership. At Mendoza, research opportunities are vital to gaining a deeper understanding of the power of business and its impact on the environment and the human community. This case story shares one example of these efforts, through the realisation of an undergraduate course called *Foresight in Business & Society*.

Foresight in Business & Society is a signature course required for all undergraduate business majors. Each academic year since Fall 2009, 500-700 students are challenged to identify and evaluate major issues, trends and uncertainties impacting business and society, and to explore potential business opportunities that can drive sustainable innovation.

The course provides students with a framework, based on foresight skills, for thinking critically about change and decisions regarding the future. It exposes students to quantitative and qualitative methodologies to identify trends, to consider the implications of change, to plan for alternative futures, and to suggest strategies leading to preferred futures. *Foresight* challenges students to demonstrate critical, creative, and systems thinking skills in order to fully understand complex change and how business can drive positive outcomes across all stakeholder groups. The students apply these thinking skills and the foresight framework in a semester-long team project on a topic of their choosing that combines a significant issue facing the world today with business implications and opportunities in light of moral and ethical concerns. Past projects have addressed a wide variety of topics including health, water, food, energy, education and sustainability related issues around the world. At the end of the semester, the student teams present their projects at a public presentation using a variety of multimedia options.

Since the team projects involve areas of business where change is imminent, likely to be disruptive, and evolving in real-time, there is tremendous opportunity for students to learn from professionals currently working in these areas. Therefore, student teams are given the opportunity to work with corporate executive mentors that can offer their experience and knowledge throughout the project creation

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process. Past and current corporate mentors include IBM, GE, Rocky Mountain Institute, Interface Carpet, Dean's Beans and Changing Our World, Inc.

As a result of this course and emersion in their team project, students emerge with a better understanding of how business is addressing global trends and issues, and how they, as future business leaders, can utilise the power of business for societal good.

Challenges

Foresight is a project-based course that is both time and research intensive. The primary challenge for delivering this course is the pace at which teams must proceed through the various stages of the foresight process. The challenge encompasses both in-class design and the design of the project development process. It is critical that students “buy-in” to the value of the process, have access to the information and evidence that they will need to develop their research, and receive timely constructive feedback to guide their progress. Given the tight time constraints of a 16-week semester, it has been the major challenge in developing and refining this innovative pedagogy.

Actions and Results

Two deliberate courses of action were particularly successful in addressing this challenge. The first course of action was linking information and foresight skills that are taught in the classroom with their practical application and use in the students' semester projects. This linkage was achieved by aligning team project assignments with information and the same skills and methods that are being taught in the classroom. Through this alignment and by intentionally setting aside of class time at critical points in the project development process for student teams to work on their projects in alternative learning environments outside the traditional classroom, the foresight projects are more fully integrated into the course.

The second course of action was to engage the support of business leaders and alumni in emphasising that foresight methods and skills taught in class were essential in an increasingly complex and uncertain world, and ones they looked for in professionals joining their organisations. The use and value of the foresight process in addressing complex global challenges was enforced further through the mentoring programme offered to teams as part of their project experience. Early in the process, teams have the opportunity to submit a proposal to work with one of the many corporate and individual mentors that offer their time and expertise to work with a student team. As they work together, students see first-hand that professionals are using foresight methods and skills they are learning in the classroom.

As a result, the students' assessment of the course has continuously improved. It enjoys a level of acceptance that is truly unique for such a challenging course that is required for such a large number of business students regardless of their field of concentration.

For more information about the course and the students' projects, please visit the course website at <http://bizcourse.nd.edu/foresight/>.

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The role of PRME/sustainability principles

- Providing focus to the introduction of global issues and how business can be part of the solution to these issues through the context of global social responsibility and sustainable innovation.
- Providing a common vision for those at Mendoza involved in this course and their business and alumni partners as they work together in the mentorship programme component of this course.
- Providing credibility to Mendoza as a signatory institution of PRME, business partners and alumni understand the commitment that Mendoza makes when allying itself with the PRME initiative and its Principles to deliver on our mission, “Ask More of Business”.