

Teaching Business



ONLINE

BY ROBYN MACKILLOP

Business is integral to the functioning of the national economy, politics, education and everyday living. It is without question that business education is a vital part of the high school experience, and should be seen as required courses rather than electives. Preparing high school students for real life beyond high school happens in the business classroom, whether face-to-face or online.

Online education has grown exponentially in the last decade. Companies have been created that produce online curriculum, build learning management systems and open online-only schools. However, with the massive growth, one subject area still seemingly remains on the backburner—companies are not writing online business curriculum, and quality online business courses are hard to find.

They do exist, and the best courses are teacher-written, student-centered, and utilize active learning that engages students from a distance. Online business education is a microcosm of current real-world business practices. Think of the multitudes of jobs that require meetings via Blackberrys, programs such as Elluminate, Wimba, or Citrix, and e-mail. Meetings can utilize cameras to bring people from all over the world into one place synchronously. Online business courses prepare students for the real world.

Characteristics of a Good Online Business Course

A good business course needs to be relevant to current industry business practices and rigorous in teaching students what the workplace will expect. Online business courses allow teachers and students to utilize the same processes as companies when it comes to the use of computers and the Internet, as well as communication, teamwork, self-direction and meeting deadlines from a distance. As quickly as technology is changing, it is necessary that we as educators keep ourselves and students caught up. Teaching business online entails the basic tenets of online teaching—building relationships, cohesiveness in the course room, constant synchronous and asynchronous communication, and keeping students engaged with interesting, relevant, project-oriented assignments that promote critical thinking.

Putting it into Practice

It is clear business can and should be taught online, so how is it done? As said above, business education lends itself to online teaching because it so easily mimics processes in the business world. Students must learn about business concepts, and skills such as interpersonal communication, critical thinking, decision making and problem solving. Teaching business online means utilizing video, audio, text

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and classroom communication to lay the groundwork for learning business concepts.

Take a business law course for example. Law is inherently text heavy, but an online course should not be a textbook on the computer. That means other mediums of active learning must be part of the basic curriculum. Videos can be made by the teacher so there is a teacher-led feel to learning concepts. Youtube and many other sites have videos created by business gurus and experts that capture the interest of students and are up-to-date and relevant. Major law universities allow online access to legal teachings, documents and

cases. Students are honing research skills while seeking out the information needed to perform their assignments.

Students can join blogs pertinent to the subject they are learning, and can create blogs to inform teachers and fellow students of their learning. Sharing blogs within the class allows students to provide

feedback to one another, gain perspectives on issues, and have more information to work with. It has been said that cell phones currently marketed have more technological power than what it took to send the NASA shuttle to space and back. Incidentally, this is an excellent question to pose to students. Have them find out the

power of a space shuttle versus the power of the cell phone they own. Ask them to write their thoughts about the possibilities the future holds, whether they would get on one of those shuttles armed with the information they found, and have students provide the URLs to their findings. This will create in the class an interactive dialogue among students and the instructor: What does that mean for students and teachers with that power in their hands? What sort of assignments can be created in real time as technology improves?

Online Learning Center Debuts New Resource for Business/Marketing Teacher Prep

BY JAMES GLEASON

Schools are increasingly challenged to find qualified business and marketing teachers for local career and technical education (CTE) programs. With traditional teacher preparation programs in decline, local districts have turned to business practitioners who are eligible for special (usually temporary) certifications and licensures. Although effective in meeting immediate employment needs, the challenges remain of helping new teachers understand the unique aspects of business administration standards, curricula, pedagogy (including CTSOs) and program structures. To address the need for certification and professional development options, the MBAResearch consortium of state education departments has committed to the development of a new online learning center. The center will help address states' teacher education needs in a variety of ways, including:

- Supporting existing teacher preparation programs that lack faculty by providing specialized business/marketing expertise and experience. Generic CTE programs will utilize the MBA Learning Center to access specialized, comprehensive online courses, or as a resource for specific topics and assignments unique to teaching business administration.
- A distance-based graduate-credit program offering complete, specialized graduate programs via MBAResearch faculty and college partners nationwide. (Watch for

partnership announcements later this winter.)

- Professional development opportunities for individual teachers working to address specific needs, or who need documented learning experiences to meet continuing education requirements.

The center's modular design allows both colleges and individual students to build custom programs to best fit specific needs. For example, faculty or students might select from a series of 12 to 15 modules focusing on business administration curricula, and from a similar series of modules focusing on student organizations to create a customized course focused on the integration of the two. Additional information on the MBA Learning Center can be found at www.MBAResearch.org. 

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is CEO of MBAResearch and Curriculum Center. He can be contacted at Gleason@MBAResearch.org.

The Marketing and Business Administration Research and Curriculum Center (MBAResearch) is a not-for-profit consortium of 40 state education departments; it is based in Columbus, Ohio. The organization supports the teaching of business administration curricula via a variety of delivery models, including business and marketing education.

The Role of Social Media

Facebook is becoming the number one site for people to connect. A teacher can build a Facebook page primarily for a class, or for a selection of classes. Students can answer teacher-led questions, respond to one another and build cohesiveness in yet another way. Students may get to know each other well enough that they become friends. The teacher controls the content of what is put on the Facebook page, so there is no real concern for inappropriate subject matter. And students who use Facebook use it all the time. This is a great way to build and retain connections with students. Use what they use. Set the mediums for learning to that which they are comfortable. This includes texting (if the teacher has a phone for school (do not use your personal phone)), blogging, e-mailing, social media sites and others.

Adapting to Change

Marketing has turned into social marketing. Textbooks are no longer needed when teaching marketing. There are companies that provide free Webinars weekly on what is happening in the marketing world—whether it is branding, product, pricing, promotion or distribution. The Internet is filled with games to learn marketing and accounting procedures and managerial insights. Accounting is accessible online through the use of accounting software. There are few accountants left who still fill out ledgers with a pencil.

Everything is done online. Students can find the income statements of almost any large company via the Internet. Again, students are researching, finding information that is relevant and up-to-date, and working on projects that develop meaning because of familiarity with a product or company. As they learn accounting principles, they can access current GAAP (Generally Accepted Accounting Principles) information and build their knowledge base. Students can turn in video or audio assignments. Written work should be performed using software such as Microsoft Word, primarily, because that is what is used in the workplace, and students still must know how to write and communicate properly through the written word; reports should not be filled with texting-style abbreviations.

A New Game Plan for Marketing Education

All subsections of business can be taught online. Students who take business classes online are at an advantage because as shifts in the business world take place, students are there to see them, follow them, and know them. A textbook does not offer the fluidity of an online course, or the ability to easily change an assignment as something in the world changes. Business education should have been the first courses out of the gate when online education began to grow. There is still work to be done, but it is most important that teachers know they can take their face-to-face courses to a higher level with online teaching and learning. There is a reason the number one bachelor's degree earned nationwide is in business. The National Center for Education Statistics reports that the top three bachelor's degree programs are business, social science and education; twice as many business degrees are earned than social science degrees.

Looking Ahead

The benefits of online business education to students are immense as stu-

dents gain perspective on how they fit into the world, have the ability to try on different subsections of business to find their niche, and move with the flow of business—which keeps their learning relevant and rigorous. No doubt, online business education opens the door to the future in which we already live. **I**

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