

# Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 9, 1982

## EXPERIMENTAL THREE WEEKEND COURSE: EMPIRICAL RESULTS

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### ABSTRACT

An experimental, highly concentrated three semester hour credit course was completed in three successive weekends. Although the sample size was too small to draw any definitive conclusions relative to the efficacy of this type of offering generally, the results were so dramatic as to warrant specific attention.

The reactions of the participant students were most positive. Excerpts from their course evaluations are included herein.

This experiment has spawned considerable interest in alternative programming methods. The administration at Keene State College has already set into motion the machinery to implement many more offerings in this format.

### OBJECTIVES

The college's objectives were:

1. to provide a vehicle to satisfy the requirements of community segments which might otherwise be unable to attend college;
2. to improve utilization of the physical plant; and,
3. to provide a data base for determining the viability of this type of programming.

It was uncertain that this approach would be of interest to traditional students; however, there was a strong feeling that weekend courses in an accelerated time frame would be appealing to those interested in honing their professional skills or recycling their careers.

### THE EXPERIMENT

#### Course Selection

It was postulated that the course selected would influence the outcome of the experiment. It was important that the students be able to relate the subject matter to their career goals, be exposed to topical areas of broad current interest and have access to the College's superb audio-visual resources. Industrial Relations satisfied these criteria.

A sensitivity to industrial relations issues is requisite for all managers. Topics such as productivity, conflict resolution, sexual harassment, discrimination, affirmative action, contract negotiation, economic impacts of strikes, crime in the work place, attitudinal changes on the part of labor, management and government, new management/labor programs, arbitration and social responsibility are timely, and understanding their ramifications is necessary to meet the demands of our turbulent environment.

Another consideration was that the professor had taught Industrial Relations courses at the undergraduate, continuing education and graduate levels. This provided an excellent basis for critical comparison and evaluation of the course results.

#### Preliminaries

In the early planning stages it became evident that it would be necessary to make modifications in the registration procedure, communications to students, standards of performance and student responsibilities. The announcement specified the registration deadline as three weeks prior to the first class meeting; however, the textbook, syllabus, handouts, cases and the first assignment were available for examination much earlier. The workload, course objectives and student responsibilities were clearly defined. Students were informed that the first assignment was to be completed prior to the initial class meeting. This involved reading approximately four hundred pages of text, handouts and cases (all students were prepared). They were also advised that attendance at all sessions and completion of all assignments were mandatory in order to receive credit for the course.

In developing the format and structure, many questions and concerns surfaced which could be answered only after the course had been completed. We hoped to determine whether

there would be interest in an intensive, rigorous course offered in a non-traditional time frame (Friday, 5:00 p.m. -9:00 p.m., Saturday, 9:00 a.m. 12:00 Noon, & 1:00 p.m. 5:00 p.m. on three successive weekends)

interest could be sustained during almost twelve consecutive classroom hours each weekend without impairing the quality of the learning experience

undergraduates would be able to compete with more seasoned individuals in a classroom requiring continuous interaction

it would be possible to cover all the material to satisfy academic requirements

a full-blown mock labor negotiation could be satisfactorily concluded in the narrow time frame

students would be willing to make the commitment necessary for completion of their assignments and devote additional time with their respective teams to plan negotiating tactics and strategies

the professor would be able to plan, lead, direct and motivate without losing momentum.

#### Student Composition

The ten students enrolled in the course represented a cross section that was ideal for this experiment (See Table I). There was an equal distribution of females and males, a mix of traditional, non-traditional and



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The three-week structure of this class accelerated the learning process. The intensity of a group of people working together in three long weekends allowed us to break through the formal classroom atmosphere very quickly. People contributed more openly, and we did not have to recover the precious ground which is lost between hourly classes. The course was more of a practicum than most courses can be. The concentration on current literature and case examples made the coursework directly translatable into the work place. This translation was enhanced by the long blocks of time in which we had to work. They made it possible for us to understand our subject matter in a more connected manner than the traditional piecemeal nature of a course permits.

The workload of the course was certainly comparable to a standard semester course. The advance preparation required was a key. The syllabus had to be picked up in advance. More than half the text and a sizeable quantity of additional material was read prior to the first class. Thus we came into the course with an historical foundation and no time was lost. The text was a solid history of labor relations in the U.S. Many courses I have taken would stop there and test one on a myriad of dates and specific acts. Professor Rosensaft used the text solely as a springboard. The substance of the course was current and future labor issues. We read an enormous number of pertinent articles and case studies. To give you an idea of the range and relevance of the subject matter permit me to note a few specific topics. We covered the Japanese approach to labor relations; we learned of innovative flexible benefits programs; we discovered how the federal government affects the issues; we gained a legal perspective on topics ranging from affirmative action to unionization and industrial pollution; we studied a variety of creative concepts on employee motivation; we talked about the current U.A.W. strike in Westfield, Massachusetts, only sixty miles from here.

The students found the course unusually motivating. One of the assignments in the course was to negotiate a contract with half the class participating as management and the other half as labor. Each team met outside of class at least six times during the short three weeks. Many hours were spent on calculations and strategy planning. This course not only gave students a background from which to understand the topic academically, it immersed us in the current dilemmas and forced us to make pragmatic, hands-on types of decisions.

Three factors strike me as being particularly critical for a course of this structure to succeed: the adeptness of the professor, the maturity level of the students, and the mere number of students. When these three factors are working positively together, the policing, limiting nature of a classroom can yield to an open, sharing one. The key to the first factor is a careful screening process by the college. To achieve maximum concentration by all students during the long time blocks it is obviously essential that there be strong individual participation and a variety of teaching approaches. Professor Rosensaft was very skillful in the use of teaching aids such as films and class exercises to arouse and maintain student interest. These devices must be recognized as important by anyone hoping to successfully teach a course of this nature. The second factor can be affected by requiring prerequisites.

I think our course was eminently satisfactory. I found the level of sincere involvement on the part of all students exciting. The structure of the course allowed us to learn at break-neck speed. As you know, when one realizes that one has just scratched the surface of an iceberg, one has actually learned a great deal. I think that's how all of the students in this summer's labor relations course feel. I have spoken recently with three students who took the course, and each of them said in one way or another that the course had been an exceptional, positive, and significant learning experience.

I hope you strongly consider offering a limited number of carefully selected courses within this time period.

Student 2: The most important component in a successful or unsuccessful class of this nature is the professor. The professor must be very knowledgeable, have lots of valuable experience they can relate and be enthusiastic and excited about what they have to share.

The very first evening you set the learning climate by being very excited about class while emphasizing that no matter what our background was we were all significant to the success and structure of the class. It still amazes me how quickly you learned everyone's name. It was clear from the start that you were going to treat us like mature students and consequently you built a foundation of trust. Several times you would mention how important it is to build the climate of trust between labor and management, how hypocritical it would seem now if you hadn't made us assume the responsibility for our own learning. Your method of facilitating our learning is much more valuable than the spoon-feeding that occurs, which there isn't an excuse for at the graduate level.

The course content was excellent, and even though it was a lot of reading nearly all of the time I found myself anxious to tackle the reading assignments. I believe another good aspect about the articles you gave us was that many of them were concise but still managed to express a lot. The text was also a valuable tool. Overall, the readings were super and proved how so many issues in the business world are constantly changing and how directly it affects our lives

Contract negotiations were a valuable learning experience and not until you actually struggle with costs and percentages, etc. can you begin to appreciate what labor and management are about.

It definitely has been interesting to watch all the personal emotions that have evolved around the contract negotiations. Particularly in the beginning I felt sorry for the management side because they had nearly all the undergrads and more of the reserved people. It appeared that all of the extroverts or a polite way of saying: big mouthed, aggressive, domineering people including myself were on labor's side. As I was to realize later you were receptive to labor's feelings and so you added your own ideas and blockades to make the activity more challenging to us. Personally I've experienced most meaningful learning usually has a level of frustration and finally a sense of real accomplishment.

There were a few times when items of discussion became quite heated and personally I was saddened that the kindness and liking the group had developed for one another was deteriorating by a role play situation.

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I'm sure this was not your intentions at all. However, at the end of the course everyone remained comrades in learning and with a real sense of group accomplishment. The extent of our learning was actually reliant on one another.

The use of movies, discussions, and Individual presentations kept the class rolling and you always seemed to be receptive of the student's needs even *if* it was a stretch break.

Overall, I enjoyed the class immensely and felt that the three weekend arrangement wasn't detrimental to my ability to learn. It probably intensified my learning in that everything was constant for almost twelve consecutive hours. I would highly recommend the course and its structure, and hopefully await the next course I can take at K.S.C. with his format in mind

Student 3: This has been the best course I have ever taken at Keene State, because Professor Rosensaft brought reality into the classroom! Industrial Relations has been a marketplace of ideas. The handouts, the films and the lectures have provided the student with a current macroeconomic look at labor and management issues. Furthermore, Professor Rosensaft this summer has demonstrated a rare and cherished gift the ability to encourage, to create, and to stimulate intellectual growth in his students - to teach:

In addition, I honestly believe the three week format of this course also stimulated a real learning experience. It provided the student with intensive group interaction; he no longer could be passive; he had to participate. He was forced to use his mind, real learning took place:

This format is a far cry from most of the traditional 13 - 16 week courses which the student merely memorizes and parrots the facts back to the professor.

If institutions of higher learning are to survive in the marketplace of ideas, it should redesign its value system as it relates to class structure....

### Continuing Education Students

Student 4: The Industrial Relations course was excellent.... This course was presented for three weeks beginning Friday night and all day Saturday and as a result, work inconvenience was at a minimum....

The films provided me with additional insight into labor relations....

The labor/management exercise was exceptional. It brought out the worst and the best in all of us. The worst was exhibited by strong inter-group tension that resulted in group members having second thoughts about ever joining the group. The best was shown by the group finally getting back together and pulling towards a common goal of negotiating. I believe that we could not have received this sort of experience through a regular classroom environment. My overall impression of the class and expected outcome was one of excellence. WE NEED MORE CLASSES LIKE THIS ONE!

Students can gain an extraordinary amount of knowledge from a course of this type. I have found that this type of structure in a course helped my ability to retain more information.

Student 5: Industrial Relations, Management 422, was a memorable learning experience on my part, and I am sure that the rest of the participants will agree. The three weekend concept was excellent, the subject matter was well paced, and there was never a sign of lack of interest or concentration. This applies to both the four hour session on Friday evenings and the full eight hour meetings on Saturdays....

Through our classroom discussion and the sharing of experiences we have developed an insight into the degree of sexual harassment in local industry, and we may also note that in many instances, like racial overtones, it is at times practiced unconsciously: industry advocates one course but we unwittingly negate its efforts by issuing vague memos or directives leading to an end result of confusion with the harassed party either being ignored or forced to seek other employment....

It was amazing the number of variables that arose in negotiations. Dissension, on both sides . . . within groups. Lack of understanding, personality conflicts, nerves, and this was a mock negotiation. Perhaps we now have a feeling for both sides in prolonged labor! management bargaining sessions. However, we reached an agreement, (with a little help) and we found that we were really not as prepared as we thought we were. I think our final approach was to 'catch flies with sugar.' It eased the tension, and set up a climate for cooperation rather than confrontation....

There were many instances that the "Pygmalion approach" was used by Professor Rosensaft. It worked.

Student 6: The first class period Professor Rosensaft went through the Syllabus specifically stating the requirements of the course. He introduced the required reading material with an explanation of each section and asked if there were any questions. He constantly offered his support at any time a student needed his guidance.

Through Professor Rosensaft's insight into the business world and his knowledge of teaching, concepts of labor relations were learned. His informative lectures; constant encouragement of class participation from each individual student; and his utilization of specific films developed an overall core of learning skills for the entire class.

Professor Rosensaft made it apparent that we would need to be prepared for class by reading the first 10 chapters of the text for the first class meeting. During the first class period we discussed certain sections of the text and discussed specific areas of concentration. Throughout the duration of the course, questions were answered concerning the text and material was utilized from the text for class discussion and implementation of a mock labor negotiation.

It was particularly rewarding and extremely beneficial to constantly receive up-to-date information concerning labor relations today. Professor Rosensaft very diligently saw to it that we would receive current newspaper articles from The Wall Street Journal, The Harvard Business Review, July/August, 1981, New York Times, and other periodicals carrying articles relevant to labor relations. These articles were always current and added to the overall scope of knowledge we acquired.

An average of 3 to 4 hours per day were spent on specific areas of the course. Ironically, other students in the class acknowledged spending the equivalent of 20 to 30 hours each week on course work. I

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feel it was imperative to spend this much time on the material within this type of course structure. Professor Rosensaft was honest and sincere the first class meeting explaining it would take a great deal of time outside the classroom to acquire all the knowledge pertaining to this course topic.

During the completion of the first segment of the course, we were instructed in the area of labor negotiations. The class was divided into two groups, one representing labor and one representing management. Before the second weekend of class we were to present a mock negotiation (utilizing the information in Chapter 10 of the text, Contract Negotiations, and up-to-date handouts), which I am proud to say was an added bonus for the entire class. Through Professor Rosensaft's guidance and support for each group, the negotiation sessions came off well. Each group had the experience of working together and communicating ideas beneficial for solving union disputes in the area of business today. The class met separately on their own time in their specific groups and together as a whole to pursue the negotiations outside of class in search for a resolution and an agreeable contract. This experience was emotional, rewarding, and highly intense at times. It provided a greater understanding of what is currently happening in society today. This aspect of the course was an excellent learning experience.

Each student was encouraged to bring questions and current articles to class pertaining to Industrial Relations. Each student was able to offer information concerning a particular topic and class discussion was affluent. If a certain individual was concerned about a particular issue, Professor Rosensaft took the time to talk about it in detail and sight specific sources for the student to consult for more background information. Individual students also gave extra presentations on current issues such as: Theory Z (including Theory X & Theory Y); Company Flexible Benefit Programs; The Productivity of Japan; and other current issues. These contributions from individual class members added to the knowledge each individual learned in class and from each other.

I look forward to other courses structured in this fashion. It is beneficial as it allows students to acquire college credits in a reasonable time span while learning the exact amount of knowledge in a typical 16 week semester

In closing, I would like to pledge my total support for this type of course structure. I feel very positive about the entire experience and I am happy I was able to be an active participant.

Student 7: This has probably been my most difficult course. As you know, I wasn't convinced that I would be able to cope with your demands. I am much more comfortable when I can be anonymous in a large class situation. So, I can honestly say thank you for persuading me to stay and helping me to grow.

Now that I can look back at the past weeks without terror, it is much easier to be objective. I think the concentrated class concept is very worthwhile. The only thing I might change would be to have 3-4 hour sessions--possibly Thursday, Friday and Saturday, 3 consecutive weeks. Your sessions are so intense, it took most of Sunday to settle down!:

I enjoyed the mixture of activities you presented. The combination of movies, lectures, discussions, etc. kept a very fast pace. It was obvious that you had to be more prepared than we were. And the handouts made us feel that we were very current.

Your enthusiasm for the subject matter is contagious. This whole concept would be spoiled if the professor was ineffective.

My classmates were stimulating. We learned to trust each other and you. My exposure to my union cohorts was a learning experience in itself. Would there be any way that you could balance the sides so the more outspoken ones weren't all on the same side? Believe me, I know this can be a very intimidating experience. For me it worked out well, but maybe more balance would equalize the negotiations.

The session was the highlight of my summer. I'm glad I stayed!

### Full-Time Undergraduate Students

Student 8: With this type of class a student/person from the community has a chance to pick up a course that someone might not have time to take otherwise. The course also could be a special interest course not normally offered by the college.

The length of time in class is long; however, you have a chance to get absorbed in the material without worrying about where you have to go in the next hour as in a course offered during a regular semester. Throughout the course I never had a feeling of being bored. This was mostly due to Professor Rosensaft's ability to vary the teaching methods. This type of course would have to be limited to upperclassmen, graduates or continuing ed. I also feel a student with a full course load would find it difficult to get full benefit from the course unless he/she is prepared to do the work.

There was a good balance between lecture, short discussion among students, handouts, and the films. The lectures did not run more than one-half hour to forty- five minutes. They were mainly on the order of question and answer type relating to pertinent discussion. The discussion among students was beneficial because most of the people in the class had some work experience they could relate to relevant discussions. The handouts we received all related to current issues. The amount of handouts we received was equivalent to a text in itself. By bringing in current information we were better able to understand the current problems in industrial relations. The films added a lot to our discussions. They allowed us to see what is actually happening in the world instead of trying to form a picture in our mind that might be false or misleading.

The mock labor/management negotiations were the bulk of the course. By this I mean that most of our time was spent preparing for and participating in negotiations. The labor talks were difficult, which I expected them to be, but they allowed us to learn how complex, frustrating, and tiresome labor/management relations can be. What we learned in this mock exercise we could not learn in any textbook.

Student 9: My reaction to this class is mixed. There is no one single word or phrase I can use to sum up what truly are multiple components of this newborn entity. First, I'd like to deal with my reaction to the concept of a weekend class. My honest reason for being here was not experimental because of the unique set-up, nor because I have any great desire to understand labor relations from a psychological point of view. This class is to me, at the bottom line, a three-credit social science requirement to complete a hole in my degree core which happens to be offered at

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a time convenient to my 8:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. daily routine. Backed into it as such (I would have much preferred an easier three-credits when I began this class, an opinion to later change), I remembered my enjoyment with Peter Jenkins teaching personnel management. I have read more with this 3 week course than I was ever motivated to in Peter's 13-week class (no reflection on Peter au contraire - I enjoyed his classes immensely). Not knowing you before this class, Mel, upon receipt of the syllabus I experienced extreme diarrhea. My only saving grace was that it would resemble an inoculation - over before I knew it.

HOWEVER, discovering a degree of trust from the professor in me, knowing that the responsibility was mine to perform, I was indeed motivated after the first class session. I must add, Mel, that it certainly was sneaky-pete of you to include in the class structure, a concept which is one of the best as far as developing good labor-management relations.

So, motivated, the class became a challenge in two ways, (1) to compete with my classmates for best participation performance, and (2) to do my best to go you one better when you teased my mind with a devil's advocate position. I seem to be very slow in class, more likely in a daze from the dizzying speed of information exchange.

I found myself questioning situations around me outside of the classroom in terms of fair labor relations practices, affirmative action and sexual harassment

The readings were timely, very current and very interesting on the whole. This is one class where my materials will be shelved near at hand. The assignments were not unrealistic. Overall, the course required an intense concentration and dedication.

We happened to have a very good mix of people in the class. It was somewhat unfortunate that we on the management team were really under-experienced in true-to-life situations. I felt we were disadvantaged that way. No hard feelings are harbored.

The overall concept of weekend classes in an intensified, multi-hours session grand design, has great merit, given:

- (1) the proper instructor with correct attitudes toward a classroom set-up in this seminar fashion
- (2) the proper people meaning upper-level and graduate students, continuing education, etc. (not to exclude the bright undergraduates)
- (3) given prerequisites necessary to understanding and assimilating the major position of this course
- (4) proper student evaluation by the instructor- no schleps allowed. (schlep - noun - means a person who gets credits undeservedly)
- (5) proper class size

The concepts can work, Mel. It is a refreshing, invigorating change from the 13-week session. The continuity afforded by the continuous 9:00 a.m. -5:00 p.m. Saturday almost pays for itself.

Student 10: I'd like to start off saying that I truly enjoyed this course for many reasons of which most are mentioned below. First off, I think the idea of a concentrated course is very good, but like anything else, it must be placed in the proper environment. Our class worked out fine because the subject matter allowed for the concentrated number of hours; whereas, other courses would not work with this structure. I feel another important point is the instructor, Professor Rosensaft, and his particular type of teaching method. I think Professor Rosensaft did a fine job of budgeting the class time between lectures, films, handouts, etc. This is important and he did a good job because out of the three weeks not once did anyone fall asleep or even seem disinterested. (My compliments)

I feel another positive aspect of this course and its concentration was the cohesiveness that developed between the members of the class. The nervousness left after the first meeting and people really started to open up and get to know one another.

The long classes helped to get the class out of the idea that they are in a class for a given number of hours and helped get the class into the frame of mind for labor relations. I think the idea of mixing experience and age groups turned out to be an asset to the group.

The real ringer of this course was the mock negotiation. In the process of setting a contract agreement I had feelings of confusion, ignorance, anxiety, frustration and then finally booming satisfaction. The closing of the contract allowed for great relief even though we should have closed sooner (at 13.5 million to wipe out the union).

This course helped me greatly in my communication skills which need work. It not only helped me open up and learn more but it also allowed for others to learn from me. At first I thought that the course was too short but after the last session I realized that we had covered an extremely large amount of information. Between the book, the handouts and Professor Rosensaft's experience, I think we covered much more than a 14 week course. I think another weekend of this concentration would have been too much.

Overall, I have to say it was a truly genuine learning experience and I wouldn't hesitate to take another one like it.