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# REAL-CLIENT PROJECTS IN THE LSP CLASSROOM: BUSINESS AND GERMAN STUDENTS TEAMWORKING ACROSS DISCIPLINES

ABSTRACT
This paper presents a cross-disciplinary project in which business German and international marketing management students were teamed up to complete work for a real client. Each team developed a proposal for a new marketing and communications strategy for a non-profit organization focused on the German language and cultures. We first examine real-client projects as a subcategory of experiential learning, with benefits highlighted in the secondary literature, including the opportunity for students to apply their course-gained knowledge and skills, and to interact with local communities, which lends purpose and authenticity to their classroom learning. We then present our cross-disciplinary version of a real-client project, outlined in four phases with specific tasks, deliverables, and goals. Project outcomes demonstrate the ways in which the real-client project allowed students to apply content knowledge and skills from their respective fields, while supporting peer-to-peer learning within a disciplinarily diverse team in a professional setting. We conclude with recommendations to facilitate developing and carrying out cross-disciplinary real-client projects in business language or other LSP fields.

KEYWORDS: business German, cross-disciplinary collaboration, experiential learning, international marketing, Language for Specific Purposes (LSP), real-client project, service-learning, teamwork

## INTRODUCTION

Cross-disciplinarity has become the calling card for educational innovation in our increasingly globalized world. As with some literal borders, disciplinary divides are becoming less rigid, allowing for an increased flow and exchange of ideas among scholars, teachers, and students. Courses focused on Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) are by their very nature cross-disciplinary, linking the study of language directly to another field, such as business, law, medicine, or music. Nevertheless, these courses are most often taught by language instructors willing to stretch into another discipline; actually partnering with faculty and students from another discipline is far less common. For business programs in particular, working collaboratively across disciplines makes sense, as it is akin to the way companies and organizations function: Employees from various units work in teams, all members bringing their field-specific knowledge and skill sets to the table, resulting in an end product or outcome that has benefitted from multiple inputs. Yet in spite of this natural fit for business training, collaboration beyond the confines of business schools is also rare.

This article presents a collaborative and cross-disciplinary project in which students in both a business German course and an international marketing management course were jointly engaged in work for a real client. Students across the two courses worked in teams to develop an online marketing and communications strategy for an organization connected to the target language and cultures (in this case, German). Project outcomes show how the real-client project allowed students to leverage content knowledge and skills from their respective fields and fostered peer-to-peer learning within a disciplinarily diverse team in a professional setting. The real-client project was chosen as the platform for this cross-disciplinary venture for several reasons. First and foremost, an opportunity arose to assist a local German-related non-profit in need of new marketing strategies in order to expand its reach to a younger audience. A team of students with expertise in both marketing and the German language and German cultures were able to participate. Since both skills—German and marketing—are not a very common combination in the United States, putting together a team with students from the two fields seemed a viable approach. At the same time, by expanding the real-client project to be a project that used teams from two academic realms that rarely collaborate (business and humanities), we could contribute to the scholarship on real-client projects, addressing the value of this new, truly cross-disciplinary dimension.

We begin by providing an introduction to real-client projects, placing them in the larger scope of experiential learning and considering their potential for cross-disciplinary learning. We then present our joint real-client project in detail, outlining the process as four phases, as well as the outcomes, noting, wherever appropriate, the specific contributions of students from their respective fields. Based on this cross-course experience, we provide concrete recommendations for implementing a cross-disciplinary real-client project.

## EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING THROUGH REAL-CLIENT PROJECTS

Real-client projects fall into the category of experiential learning. More than ever, educators are eagerly acknowledging the value of having students learn by doing—through components either integral or complementary to their academic studies. Experiential learning flips the traditional classroom so that students become more active in their own learning, taking responsibility for it rather than expecting the instructor to impart information or knowledge to them. While potentially useful across all fields, experiential learning has been readily embraced by business schools as a response to the call by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) for helping students gain practical skills in tandem with their academics. Accreditation guidelines underscore the value of experiential learning, arguably placing it on par with coursework while acknowledging the importance of linking the two: “Student academic and professional engagement occurs when students are actively involved in their educational experiences, in both academic and professional settings, and when they are able to connect these experiences in meaningful ways” (AACSB, p. 40). Examples of experiential learning activities, according to AACSB, are “field trips, internships, consulting projects, field research, interdisciplinary projects, extracurricular activities” (p. 41). Indeed, in contrast to many traditional business teaching tools, such as the business case, experiential learning gives students “a direct, personal encounter” in which they come “face to face with making decisions that are real rather than merely thinking about a situation” (McCarthy & McCarthy, 2006, p. 201).

As Kolb and Yeganeh (2011) stress, direct encounters alone will not automatically result in learning. Experiential learning is more than “a set of tools and techniques to provide learners with experiences from which they can learn” (Kolb & Kolb, 2005, p.193). According to the Experiential Learning Theory devised by Kolb (1984), experience must be “transformed into learning” through a cyclical process of “experiencing, reflecting, thinking and acting” (Kolb & Yeganeh, 2011, p. 3). In many business fields, such as marketing (Gremler, Hoffman, Keaveney, & Wright, 2000; Klink & Athaide 2004), business communication (Cooke & Williams, 2004), and public relations (Aldoory & Wrigley, 2000; Fitch, 2011), educators have touted real-client projects more specifically as an experiential learning approach that can "help course concepts come to life and greatly enhance students' ownership of the learning process" (Lopez & Lee, 2005, p. 172). They see such projects as the opportunity to give students real-world experience while helping them better grasp course content (McCarthy & McCarthy, 2006; Shea & Weiss, 2013).

Language educators have similarly embraced experiential learning, primarily as service-learning or "community-based" projects (e.g., Grim, 2010; Lear & Abbott, 2008; Overfield, 1997a). For language students, this often involves having the opportunity to use their language and cultural knowledge for real-life interaction, thereby lending a concrete purpose and authenticity to their classroom learning (Bettencourt, 2015; Grim, 2010). Like real-client projects, service-learning projects partner students with a local client, typically a non-profit organization with a need that language students can help address, such as accompanying Spanish speakers to health clinics (Pak, 2000) and translating Parks and Recreation Department documents into Russian (Alsufieva & Comer, 2018). While scholars like Thompson (2012) tout the linguistic benefits to students from interacting with native speakers during service-learning, most place equal emphasis on gains in sociocultural competence, and on connecting to communities (Abbott & Lear, 2010; Carney, 2013; Jorge, 2011; Overfield, 1997b).

There are undoubtedly numerous challenges in implementing client projects, described by Gremler et al. (2000) as a "messy process" (p. 43). It is first and foremost recognized as a time-intensive venture, demanding constant vigilance in monitoring student work as well as communicating with clients (Aldoory & Wrigley, 2000). The need to be flexible is emphasized, for example, by Cooke and Williams (2004), who stress that instructors engaging in real-client projects "need to be comfortable with a bit of uncertainty" (p. 150), because no two projects or outcomes will be exactly alike and thus will need equal attention even when repeated across semesters. Many have noted that undergraduate students do not always handle the ambiguity of real-client projects well, especially when they are still "just learning the fundamentals" (Parsons & Lepkowska-White, 2009, p. 155). Yet most stress that the benefits outweigh these challenges, and, as Klink and Athaide (2004) point out, challenges can be addressed through careful planning, making real-client projects doable even at the introductory course level. Finally, real-client projects offer benefits to a variety of stakeholders, including for schools themselves through the opportunity "to create long-lasting, mutually beneficial relationships with businesses through an academic consultancy service" (Cooke & Williams, 2004, p. 139).

Structured as a cross-disciplinary collaboration, our particular real-client project aimed to bring together business and German majors, each of whom could contribute with knowledge, skills, and experience from their own field, while gaining these from others as well. On the business side, students could contribute background knowledge in marketing in general (e.g., consumer behavior, branding, and promotional strategies), as well as a familiarity with analytical tools and frameworks used in international business. In addition, they often bring consulting experience or have prior exposure to professional corporate settings through internships, etc. Last but not least, business students master the basics of managerial accounting and financial modeling and could contribute this knowledge to the team.

Contributions from language and culture students include perhaps most apparently their proficiency in the language and their knowledge of the cultures where that language is spoken. Perhaps less obvious are the complementary skills they could bring to the table via their language and literature coursework (Gonglewski & Helm, 2010). These typically include interpreting character motivation (often revealed through non-verbal means), close textual analysis, and advanced research and writing skills. Through prior interaction with the culture through extensive engagement with that culture's products and practices—and possibly from having lived abroad themselves—language majors can offer deep insights about cultures which are otherwise unfamiliar to other students. Their experience makes it possible for them to recognize cultural differences and interpret perspectives from another culture's viewpoint.

Our expectation was that by engaging in a cross-disciplinary real-client project, students would benefit from each other's background knowledge and experience, and the client from an outcome that could successfully address their specific requirements of expertise in marketing and German language and cultures. In the next section, we present the real-client project in detail, beginning with a description of our own history of cross-disciplinary collaboration, which led to bringing our students together for this project.

## THE CROSS-DISCIPLINARY REAL-CLIENT PROJECT

### BACKGROUND

The project described here grew from several years of close collaboration within the framework of the Center for International Business Education and Research (CIBER) at The George Washington University (GW). Funded by the Department of Education, the now 15 CIBERs nationwide are mandated to develop "a variety of activities to advance the study and teaching of international business and to support applied research on United States competitiveness in the global marketplace" (CIBER-WEB, 2018). In order to accomplish this work, CIBERs often extend beyond universities' business schools into a wider variety of disciplines (e.g., political science and economics). Extension into the humanities, and more specifically world languages and cultures, stems from the additional requirement for CIBERs to "[p]rovide instruction in critical foreign languages and international fields needed to provide an understanding of the cultures and customs of US trading partners" (US Department of Education, 2018). From 2007 to 2018, the authors served as co-coordinators for the business language program within the CIBER at GW and have together contributed to both local and national CIBER programming a unique mix of pedagogical methods and materials applicable to multiple languages and business subfields (Gonglewski & Helm, 2010, 2013, 2014, 2017). With nearly a decade of learning from each other about our respective fields and teaching methods, we were ready to embark on a joint class project to explore how our students could benefit from direct cross-disciplinary interaction.

### COURSE DESCRIPTIONS

The two courses involved were business German and international marketing management. Business German is an elective course offered within the Department of Romance, German and Slavic Languages and Literatures in GW's College of Arts and Sciences. The broader goal of this advanced-level course, capped at just 15 students, is to prepare students to participate in German in professional, business-related communicative situations, both in speaking and in writing. This preparation is contextualized within culture-steeped topics, such as the job application process and sustainable business practices. Students are constantly applying and improving their language skills through specific tasks, such as summarizing and analyzing data presented in visual graphics or interpreting and synthesizing content of business news videos. The course also addresses pragmatic aspects of intercultural communication, including discussion of cultural and language-specific differences in business practices between the United States and the German-speaking countries. In place of a textbook, materials are taken from relevant German websites for up-to-date news, statistics, etc., and several business cases are utilized.

International marketing management is an elective in the Department of International Business in GW's School of Business, typically offered every semester, sometimes in multiple sections capped at 45 students. The course is highly interactive and features a combination of regular lectures and class discussions. In addition to a traditional textbook that introduces students to relevant definitions, concepts, and frameworks, they also read and discuss cases, and participate in an online international marketing simulation, in which they launch a personal care brand into a specified regional market (either Latin America or Asia). During some semesters students also engage in real-client projects that are either organized in such a way that each student team has its own unique client, or as a live case where several teams work on the same issues for a single company.

This particular real-client project emerged because we saw an opportunity to engage our students together in a project that was relevant to both the marketing and the German students. The marketing courses that semester already included real-client engagements, and we wanted to capitalize on the opportunity to allow some of those students to collaborate with the German students on a project that required both marketing skills and advanced level German language and cultural proficiency. Although the two courses were taught separately by each of us, they were scheduled simultaneously which enabled us to hold some classes together and allow for student group work within the boundaries of the scheduled class time. Student teams were, however, expected to do the bulk of their work outside of class.

## THE CLIENT AND THE TASK

Our partner for this project was the German Language Society (GLS), an organization local to Washington, DC, with the mission to "provide a cultural forum with the German language as a medium of expression."[1] In a broader sense, the GLS is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to the promotion of culture of German-speaking Europe as well as the influence of German heritage in the United States. The GLS stages monthly events at the German or Swiss Embassy, featuring guest speakers who hold presentations in German on a subject within their narrow area of expertise, and then interact with the audience more informally during an hour-long reception afterwards. At the time of the project, GLS had over two hundred members in DC, Maryland, and Virginia, many of whom were German, Swiss, or Austrian expatriates employed in the Foreign Service, the World Bank, etc. Membership is open, however, to anyone interested in attending German-language programs and events.

In terms of the collaboration with our students, the GLS was interested in revamping its image to become more enticing to a younger target audience, particularly to college students and young professionals in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area. Thus far it had maintained a somewhat antiquated approach to marketing its events, primarily through mass mailing of flyers, which was believed to have limited both the knowledge about and participation in the organization's events. GLS was eager to establish a web presence and support appropriate social

[1] The description here portrays the GLS during the time of our real-client project in spring 2015. In late 2017, GLS members voted to combine with the German-American Heritage Foundation of the USA, and, while their mission endures and their events continue to be held, they are no longer a separate legal entity.

media activities, but they had neither the staff nor the know-how to take on this seemingly daunting task.

Because of its connection to their field of study, the GLS project was the sole option for the German students, whereas the marketing students could choose from six other projects in addition to the GLS project. These projects ranged from proposing an export strategy for a company in Bali to building strategies for internationalizing a crowdsourcing platform. Through a prioritization process, the marketing students were able to decide which projects were of greatest interest to them, and they were then matched with other students to form even-numbered teams. The project description for GLS asked for marketing students with a general interest in learning about German culture. It was made clear that the project was competitive in nature. Representatives from the GLS would attend the final presentations at the end of the semester and select one winning proposal.

The planning for the project started in the fall preceding the semester in which the courses were taught. We met with the client in order to clarify expectations as well as discuss the potential deliverables from the student teams through the project. Once an agreement was finalized, the real-client project description was drafted with input from the client and then shared with the students. The three GLS-focused teams had either four or five members with at least two members from each class to ensure sufficient disciplinary representation from both fields.

## REAL-CLIENT PROJECT TEAMWORK: PROCESS AND OUTCOMES

The process of the teams' work over the course of the semester can be grouped into four phases (see table 1). Within each phase, we detail the specific tasks that the teams undertook and note deliverables that were drafted and due during that time period. The tasks are generally pertinent to any real-life project and reflect similar descriptions reported in the literature (see e.g., Klink & Athaide, 2004). However, we highlight points relevant to the interaction of the two disciplines during these phases, noting both strengths and challenges. Our recommendations for setting up a similar real-life project in the last section, then, are based on the lessons learned from this semester-long undertaking.

Table 1. *Phases of the Cross-disciplinary Real-Client Project*

| Phase | Team Tasks (Deliverables bolded) | Cross-disciplinary Goal |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Plan & Launch | · get to know teammates<br>· develop a **team charter**<br>· meet with client<br>· write up a **scope of work** | Students orient themselves to the other (different) discipline and their team members. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 2. Research & Analyze | · do background research<br>· gather relevant data<br>· follow up with client<br>· develop coherent proposal based on research and analysis | Students leverage their own disciplinary knowledge/skills for the project. |
| 3. Prepare & Present | · finalize project<br>· prepare presentation materials (**PowerPoint**)<br>· give **live presentation** of final project to client along with **written report (memo)**<br>· receive oral and written feedback from client and faculty | Students from both disciplines mesh their knowledge/skills to build new insights in the form of their project deliverables. |
| 4. Review & Reflect | · complete **evaluation** of real-client project experience<br>· write **reflections** responding to specific prompts<br>· participate in **focus group** reflection/discussion | Students recognize and appreciate their own and their team members' discipline-based contribution. |

PHASE 1: PLAN AND LAUNCH (WEEKS 1–5)

As the starting point of any real-client project, the initial launch revolved around the critical activity of getting the teams off to a good start in order to optimize results. During phase 1, students took time to get to know each other and understand each other's key areas of interest and capability. This was also the moment to delineate the parameters of the teamwork and the expectations as well as to formalize the collaboration with the client. Because of the cross-disciplinary aspect of the project, this phase was particularly important for helping students orient themselves to their collaborators from the other discipline, while potentially strengthening their own disciplinary identity. They needed to negotiate a common set of expectations based on a newly found comprehension of the parameters of another discipline, and creatively imagine how their disciplinary contributions can inform each other.

To kick off their joint work on the real-life project, we brought together the students from both classes for a presentation on the basics of hypothesis-driven consulting methodology. The international marketing management faculty gave this presentation, followed by structured team meetings. This was the first time the newly formed teams came together to start defining their collaboration. To assist them in this process, all teams were required to create a team charter using a provided template, which prompted them to share contact information, set meeting times outside of class, and devise specific roles for the team members to leverage their strengths and expertise. Additional points of agreement were also required, such as deciding how to handle teammates not performing up to par. Students were required to submit completed, signed team charters by the end of the third week of class.

In the team charter template, students were not explicitly asked to assign roles based on their disciplines. Indeed, the template was the same for all teams, whether for GLS or international marketing management teams. Nevertheless, all three GLS teams defined their official team roles in accordance with the team members' disciplinary background, and some provided additional task descriptors specific to the assigned roles. In one team, members from the German program were assigned a job title that capitalized on their language proficiency: "German language expert." Another team used the title "German culture/outreach coordinator" for a German team member tasked to "work with German texts and translations for the project and website" as well as "use knowledge of German culture and current connections to German organizations in DC to look at how to better serve the client." Similarly, the business students' roles were anchored in conventional business practices, such as "productivity manager."

In advance of the first client meeting, slated for the fourth week of the course, teams convened outside of class to prepare questions. The purpose of the meeting with two GLS board members was to ensure that the teams started building a strong relationship with the client early on in the project, and for them to start formulating together the parameters around the project. Following the client meetings, teams focused on the development of the formal scope of work to outline the specific expectations for outcomes and deliverables. Here students operated without a template. The process allowed time to make changes to the narrative based on feedback from the client. By the mid-semester point, the scopes of work needed to be formally approved by the client.

## PHASE 2: RESEARCH AND ANALYZE (WEEKS 6–10)

The second phase centered around the core work of the project, during which the teams completed background research, developed tools to gather relevant data, and drafted a coherent proposal based on research and analysis. This phase was a highly iterative process. Students were expected to constantly revisit previous work, test their assumptions and adjust their recommendations as necessary. They were to check in with the client regularly to make sure they were on the right track for the desired outcome. Throughout phase 2, the cross-disciplinary goal was for students to use their own disciplinary knowledge and skills to maximum advantage while working on the project. By applying their disciplinary expertise to the project, they could contribute valuable input (content) and insights (points of view) that may not have been familiar to team members from the other discipline.

Once the teams had formulated their plans and these had been approved by the client, the students devoted their time and energy to carrying out their plans through research and data collection. At the beginning, students spent time brainstorming ideas, contextualizing them within German culture to ensure applicability, negotiating their understanding of preferred project outcomes, and vetting different members' research against that of others in order to leverage the viewpoints from the different disciplines. The teams also conducted primary market research, such as phone interviews and exploratory visits on and around our campus. Later in the projects, teams debated the costs of implementation of their proposed activities, often in the absence of full budgetary information from the client.

Guided by the roles they were assigned in the team charter, each student took on tasks to move the project along. Typically they completed tasks related directly to their discipline-based skills. For example, financial concerns were raised by the international marketing management students, and ideas that went counter to German cultural norms were pointed out by the business

German students. Interestingly, there was also evidence that some students went out of their disciplinary comfort zone to get the job done. In one team, a business German student worked on identifying local German organizations as possible partners for collaborating on or marketing GLS events; however, it was one of the international marketing management students who made the actual contact with these German organizations.

## PHASE 3: PREPARE AND PRESENT (WEEKS 11–14)

The research and analysis culminated in the final stages of preparation and the formal presentation of each team's work to the client. During phase 3, the teams composed their presentation materials, as well as a five-page memo explaining their recommendations, accompanied by justifications and supporting documentation. At the end of this phase, teams received oral and written feedback from both client and faculty. The cross-disciplinary goal during this phase was for students from both disciplines to mesh their knowledge/skills to build new insights in the form of their project deliverables.

Each team was required to prepare a formal 10–15-minute presentation using PowerPoint to illustrate their recommendations to the client. This was followed by a question and answer period (5–7 minutes) which allowed the client to delve deeper into the ideas and the teams to further substantiate their rationale for their recommendations. To ensure that students were working towards tangible results and actionable recommendations for their client, all consulting teams did a "dry-run" presentation in front of the teaching assistants for the marketing course, who gave constructive feedback on the teams' analytical conclusions, recommendations, and presentation style.[2] Because the business language students were unfamiliar with the consulting process and had never done client presentations, we arranged for them to attend the marketing team presentations prior to doing their own. At the time of the final presentation, teams also delivered to the client their five-page memo which outlined the project recommendations and research in detail.

Our observation was that all teams incorporated business frameworks, such as a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis and the 4 Ps of the marketing mix (product, price, place, and promotion), into their deliverables. One team created a survey to gauge preferences of promotional methods and analyzed and presented their data in a manner typical for business classes. This data, in turn, helped substantiate social media strategies proposed as part of these projects. Teams used flowcharts to represent relationships and sequences in ways commonplace in professional business settings. In other words, there was clear evidence in the presentations and written memos that the business students had been able to leverage some of their disciplinary background to the benefit of the project.

Similarly, we saw evidence in the project deliverables that the German students had applied their knowledge of the language and culture to the project. Language-wise their contributions ranged from the basic (e.g., they greeted and thanked the client in German) to the more involved: one German student mocked up a GLS Facebook page in German. In several cases, explicit references were made to prior German-related experiences that had informed their recommendations. For example, one student brought into the narrative his experience living abroad in a German-speaking household in order to support his recommendation to initiate GLS board game socials, an activity central to mainstream German culture. Other students alluded to

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[2] These TAs were hand-picked and had previously participated in an international client consulting project. They were trained in consulting methodology and well suited to provide feedback on students' mock presentations.

being members of the school's German club and the local German cultural institute, both of which were proposed as potential event partners. By referencing their connections to German organizations, the students heightened their authority on the subject matter, and generally their credibility vis-a-vis the client.

## PHASE 4: REVIEW AND REFLECT (WEEK 15 AND POST SEMESTER)

During the fourth phase, students focused on examining the cross-disciplinary consulting experience. Students were encouraged to take a step back from their work and think deeply, not only about the success of the final outcome, but also about the entire process. The following questions were asked: How well did the team function together? What were the high points and the challenges along the way? What opportunities could they have taken better advantage of? In addressing these questions, students were encouraged to consider the value of their own and their team-members' discipline-based contribution to the project process and outcome.

To reach multiple angles of students' experience with the real-client project, we designed several reflective components. First, students completed a written review in which they formally evaluated the real-client experience. One portion of the evaluation was the same for all teams (i.e., including those not working on a cross-disciplinary project), with questions pertaining to team members' general participation level, respect for others' ideas, timeliness and adherence to deadlines, and quality of work. Several additional questions were given to the cross-disciplinary teams, asking them to explore the impact of the cross-disciplinary interaction on their project. We then scheduled follow-up focus group meetings with each team. Here we were particularly interested in students' view of concrete advantages and drawbacks of working with students from a different discipline, including any new knowledge or skill development, but also surprising roadblocks in completing tasks.

Reflective feedback from these various feedback loops revealed students' general satisfaction with the project outcome. Students from across the teams reported pride in their proposal and its reception by the client. At the same time, students reported working in cross-disciplinary teams to be at times challenging or even frustrating, and some did not acknowledge that the project benefited from the cross-disciplinary aspect. The complexity of students' reflections on their cross-disciplinary experience is akin to the nature of cross-disciplinary work itself, which arguably requires more flexibility and negotiation skills than working exclusively within their own discipline. This brief glimpse into students' reflective feedback reveals that a more in-depth analysis is well warranted and will be reported in a future article.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHERS

Working in teams on a real-client project is an enormous challenge, but one that numerous educators have found worth doing in order to afford students real-world experience directly relevant to their classroom learning. Many see that adding the cross-disciplinary aspect compounds the potential benefits. Boni et al. (2009) note that cross-disciplinary teams allow for multiple perspectives that can create "unique combinations of knowledge that could not have occurred separately" (p. 410). Yet working in cross-disciplinary teams can also create or exacerbate problems or frustration, as team members from two different disciplines must struggle to communicate across their disciplinary vocabularies and cultures.

Based on our experience with a cross-disciplinary real-client project, we have devised recommendations for setting up a similar project. Because others have already provided recommendations for developing real-client projects, here we focus on three aspects specific to working in the cross-disciplinary context.

## 1. FIND AN APPROPRIATE BALANCE BETWEEN THE TWO DISCIPLINES

A critical aspect of the planning is to identify a suitable client whose project has the potential to thoroughly leverage all students' disciplinary expertise. Selecting a balanced project allows both fields to feel that they equally contribute towards the project and this promotes a sense of ownership. As with any real-client project, there are some clients that are better suited than others for cross-disciplinary teamwork. The instructor needs to ensure that the client's objectives align with the instructional goals of the course. Questions to consider include: Does the client need and value equally the input from both disciplines? Can the client handle potential questions from either disciplinary perspective? It is likewise crucial that the client be genuinely interested in the project outcomes and students' recommendations. If the client does not sincerely intend to utilize the findings to further the organization's strategy, then students will be less motivated to go the extra mile.

Equally important is setting up teams for balance between disciplines. When organizing the team constellations, it is crucial to strike a balance between the disciplines, so that the representation is equally distributed. To be sure, evening out the playing field from the outset will not guarantee that all voices are heard at all times; however, it may prevent relevant contributions from being drowned out by a majority in the other discipline. Perhaps more than single discipline teams, cross-disciplinary ones need to negotiate the terms of their collaboration in an active and ongoing manner, and faculty must be ready to gauge when intervention or reset is necessary.

## 2. REQUIRE STUDENTS TO FLAUNT THEIR DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC SKILLS

From our experience, students tend to underestimate the importance of their disciplinary contributions or not grasp their full impact. Therefore, the instructor needs to offer guidance and encouragement in order to unleash the cross-disciplinary powers in this kind of collaborative student consulting project. To fully capitalize on the rich disciplinary perspectives of all students and to ensure productive collaboration, it is advisable to have students explicitly identify in their team charter the discipline-related strengths that they bring to the project and the way that those strengths help define their roles. According to Boni et al. (2009), such a team contract "serves to make explicit aspects of teamwork that often remain implicit until a problem arises" (p. 411). For a cross-disciplinary project, the potential for misunderstanding and inefficiencies is much more acute because students are part of different courses and have varying expectations about how to work in a team or on a project. It is thus doubly important for teams to solidify the parameters of their collaboration in the team charter.

Similarly, in the scope of work document, students should be directed to include specifics about cross-disciplinary contributions, along with a problem statement and the goals of the collaboration, a list of deliverables (tasks, expected outcomes, etc.), the workflow and administrative steps, metrics of success, and a timeline. The clarity of the components is critical in order to avoid any confusion with client expectations, something the teacher can also help mitigate, as Cooke and Williams (2004) emphasize. It is a common tendency for clients to realize that the completion of additional tasks would be beneficial to the project ("scope creep") —many times due to impressive work by their student consulting team—and a clear and concise narrative alleviates potential misunderstandings.

### 3. ASSESS CROSS-DISCIPLINARY CONTRIBUTIONS EXPLICITLY

When planning the assessment aspects relating to a cross-disciplinary course it is important to be explicit about expectations for each discipline. It is conceivable that each discipline might have different norms, and rubrics need to reflect this reality and make clear the expected contributions of both disciplines. Rubrics and assessment standards should reflect students' self-identified disciplinary skills. Following Lopez and Lee (2005), we suggest that evaluation criteria should be prepared in advance and shared with students so that they can refer to them and feel more in control of their grades.

Contributions from the two disciplines should be evaluated explicitly in the assessment tool, giving equal weight to both, to the extent possible. Language students should be expected to contribute cultural insights and language proficiency, components that can be spelled out in the rubric, either directly or indirectly. For instance, teams can be required to include a specific number of sources in the target language. Business students are expected to use business frameworks and a rubric could evaluate both their presence and the appropriateness of their application. Teachers will of course proactively ensure integration of discipline-specific tools and skills by incorporating these requirements also into the description of the assignment.

While separate disciplinary contributions should be assessed, so, too, should aspects of the work that indicate effective cross-disciplinary integration and collaboration. For example, an expectation addressing effective communication across disciplines could be part of the rubric. Insights into this area can be gained from students' reflections, a component that any experiential learning, whether a real-client project or service-learning project, should include (Eyler, 2001; Hagan, 2012). It is advisable to intersperse reflective moments throughout the semester to ensure that it is clear to students how they benefit from other students' disciplinary perspectives and how they themselves contribute to the overall project. We recommend that students are given the opportunity to complete written reflections in private, but also orally together as a team multiple times during a semester.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this article was to present an innovative approach to having students work across disciplines on a project for a real client. The project gave students real-world experience and potential to highlight their discipline-based knowledge and skills. While the context of the cross-disciplinary real-client project presented here was business, it is clearly possible, and arguably desirable, to attempt similar ventures in other areas where LSP has already made its mark, through partnerships with engineering, museum studies, public health, and more. Zlotkowski (2001) points out that many faculty fear experiential learning, especially when done in cross-disciplinary collaboration, due to the potential for messiness or even confusion. Our hope is that through this comprehensive presentation and discussion of one successfully completed cross-disciplinary real-client project, that fear is somewhat abated so that LSP faculty will be emboldened to develop a project within their program for their students.

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