

Integrating Extension Materials in An Existing Course:
Example of ApEc 3821(Retail Center Management)

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The classic dilemma for a classroom teacher is how to find new and relevant materials to use in existing course. The usual choices are to adopt publisher's materials or to develop original materials including textbooks and other books featuring exercises or cases which augment existing materials. Another option is to utilize other teaching materials developed expressly for adult audiences as part of Extension programs. This practice has been used in farm management classes in particular. The exercises dealing with partial enterprise budgets, cash flow planning and production planning are commonly part of introductory farm management classes. The success of *Agriculture In The Classroom*, a national curriculum to integrate a knowledge of agriculture in public schools is an example of curriculum integration of outside materials for public education (Malecki et al, 2004). Extension materials are also integrated in graduate curriculum in natural resources (Jones et al, 1997). Technology education involving computer applications is another area of integration of extension with classroom curriculum (Richmond, 2002). Software developed by the Center for Farm Financial Management is used in courses at the University of Minnesota. The curriculum standards for agricultural education specifies certain technology training activities in Kansas and other states. At least one source suggests ways to create an integrated classroom. One key step is to formulate the educational plan first and then integrate extension curriculum that fits these objectives. This integration will be discussed later.

The Kellogg Commission has called for a redefined and expanded role for outreach at major land grant institutions. Even so, it is far less common to see extension material used in courses in entrepreneurship, marketing or retail management. The exercises used in retail management in particular are usually generic business case studies and are

provided with course materials. These materials do not serve the purpose of the existing course- ApEc 3821,

Development of ApEc 3821(Retail Center Management)

The origin of the course-ApEc 3821- stems back to the semester conversion activities which occurred in the period of 1997-1999. As part of these activities, the existing courses which existed under the quarter system were converted to semester equivalents. As this time, an interest was expressed by the Department of Horticulture to offer a course in retail garden center management to serve student in their program. Since this time a chair has been funded by *Bachmans* in the area of Horticultural Marketing. These activities are part of a repositioning of the undergraduate majors in Horticulture to management positions in the broad areas of Horticulture including retail management. The course was taught by the author during spring semester of 2000,2001,2002,2003 and 2004. The course content as originally proposed was changed over this period of time. These changes consisted of the incorporation of selected case studies, business location decision modeling with Geographic Information Systems such as BusinessMap(ESRI) and retail simulations based on horticultural data. Recently, materials from Cornell as part of the Horticultural Business Management program were incorporated. These materials consist of greenhouse cost data and other information relevant to horticultural decisions. An AAEA selected paper on stochastic modeling of greenhouse activities was included on the reading list. Materials from the University of Tennessee authored by

Charles Hall were also incorporated for the Spring 2004 course offering. These materials dealt with assessment of image for retail garden centers.

Importance of Website Teaching Activities

The rapid adoption of eCommerce and web-based activities in agricultural and related business warrants the incorporation of teaching materials which instruct how to design and maintain a retail website. One chapter in the assigned text by Berman/Evans on Retail Management deals with this topic. The sense of urgency to further skills in this area is reflected by the adoption of website activities to promote and sell products in the horticultural businesses. *Flowers.com* and other websites are finding success in reaching retail customers. Many of the retail garden centers are establishing websites and will rely on students to adapt existing or develop new websites. New graduates will undoubtedly be consulted about the development of retail websites. In an informal survey of past graduates, over 67% reported that they had a role in developing or maintaining a company website. ECommerce activities also relate to the development of supply chain activities. The horticultural industry is developing these relationships with its suppliers. A course unit on supply chains is taught as part of ApEc 3821.

Development of *Project Mainstreet*

The Minnesota Extension Service engaged in a project to introduce downtown merchants to the use of the internet in 1998. This project was called *Project Mainstreet*. This

project consisted of the development of curricula which would instruct adult learners in the process of developing a website for their business. A consulting firm was hired to write the initial curriculum. This curriculum has since been revised to accommodate changes in technology. The last version was cowritten by EDS computer professionals. The second phase was to train trainers for the curriculum. The author was trained in August of 2000. Each trainer was then allowed to order materials and teach the curriculum. The author initially taught two sessions and then incorporated this training into the ApEc 3821 class. Example of the curriculum are included in the Appendix.

Evaluating the Success of Project Mainstreet Module

So what did students think about the course module. The results of a course survey are shown as follows by question:

Question 1: How familiar were you with the process of setting up a retail website prior to this class? Not familiar –13 Somewhat- 3

Question 2: Did you feel the course module was useful in helping to learn about developing a retail website? Yes-14 Somewhat- 2

Question 3: Did you actually set up a website as part of this project?

Yes- 16 No-0

Question 4: What would you suggest to improve the teaching of this course module?

Work in small groups or labs-14 Take more time- 2

Question 5: How has instruction in this module helped you beyond this retail website assignment?

It was practical- 15 Helps to know how to do it -1

Question 6: How would you change this unit of material to make it fit your needs better?

More time to do-2 computer lab- 13 show other websites-1

Summary and Conclusions

The students completing the course unit did feel that this experience in setting up a retail website was useful to them. The Project Mainstreet personnel report that over eighty operational websites have been developed and countless people trained in this program. In the evaluation conducted by the course instructor, students indicated not only an interest, but also a willingness to pursue an online retail business. This course unit accordingly provides career direction as well as specific technical skills. Example of the use of online business utilizing eBay exclusively are also commonplace. In fact, many

retail business are using eBay to reduce inventory of slow moving items. The lessons learned from the incorporation of this module will be instituted at the time of the next instruction of the course.

References

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