

# Can Online Experiential Learning be Successful?

The Johns Hopkins Carey Business School offers Experiential learning courses as part of elective options for many graduate degree programs. First, let's define experiential learning in a business program. Experiential learning is applying business knowledge and skills in real-world environments while embracing the complexity of teaming, partner engagement, context and creative problem solving. During the COVID pandemic and the increasing popularity of online programs, the question was asked if an experiential learning course could be successfully converted to an asynchronous format. The Johns Hopkins Carey Business School has successfully transformed an onsite experiential course to an online platform. Both advantages and disadvantages of online format such as expanding the geographic range of both clients and students are examined. Other variables discussed include the ideal size of teams, number of teams/projects per session and length of course calendar. One of these courses is the Health Care Strategy Client Practicum. Part-time students enrolled can be in either the MS Health Care Management Program or the MBA Health Care Innovation concentration. Use of Learning Management System tools in design of online format will be assessed. This course has several levels of learning that includes (a) teaming with a diversity of team members; (b) developing relationship with clients to acquire information; and (c) application of business tools to a real-life health care related business. This presentation will review: (a) the model for experiential learning in an online format, (b) basics tenants for design of the online course, and (c) provide examples of projects and learning outcomes conducted in online experiential course. Projects have included: (a) Marketing of a Dementia Program using collaborations, (b) International marketing of a prosthetic device, (c) ROI for a software program for hospital oxygen tank location and quantity, etc. Both the client and students benefit from the course. Often clients are either too busy with day-to-day activities to solve other less demanding problems or need a fresh set of eyes to formulate unique alternatives. Presentation will review: (a) role of diversity in the teams, (b) assigning teams to most appropriate client project, (c) tracking progress of team-client progress and (d) evaluation and selection of clients and projects. Lessons learned and updates made from past rounds of online experiential learning courses.

*Keywords:* Experiential Learning, Online learning, Student teaming, Client project selection

## Introduction

Johns Hopkins was a businessman in Baltimore, MD who was always moving forward and started America's first research university in 1876, modeled from the Germany's Heidelberg University. The hospital was begun in 1893 and was the first to admit women as students. Although the university

1 has offered business for many years, the business school was named for  
2 William Polk Carey in 2007. The Carey Business School’s mission is to “Build  
3 for What’s Next.” The four values emphasized are: 1. Relentless Advancement  
4 – Challenge the status quo; 2. Boundless curiosity – Have a hungry mind, wired  
5 for exploration, always seeking, discovering and innovating; 3. Unwavering  
6 Humanity – Commit to business with humanity in mind; 4. Collaborative  
7 Leadership –Foster an inclusive environment.

8 The approach is to convey a holistic approach to business in a way that  
9 society’s needs be addressed in conducting business. The business teachings  
10 emphasize a strong focus on impact and accountability of business to society.

11 The online Health Care experiential learning course was modeled after the  
12 Full time MBA Innovation for Humanity Course. The primary goal of the  
13 course was to prepare students for a business environment that is global,  
14 technological and complex. The M.S. Health Care Management program online  
15 curriculum offers an elective for students after completing foundation courses.

### 16 17 18 **Experiential Learning Conducted Online**

19  
20 Experiential leaning is defined as learning by doing or hands-on-learning.  
21 There are levels of complexity in various approaches. The basic is using real  
22 data such as sales, accounting and financial, collected from corporations.  
23 There may be a specific objective and reports may be provided to the  
24 participant. The level of involvement from the client may only be providing  
25 data or periodic contact with students. Experiential learning can incorporate  
26 travel to museums, touring business facilities or other cultures. Engagements  
27 allow for students to conduct hands-on practice. The experiential learning  
28 discussed here will be graduate level consulting projects in the health care field.  
29 Projects involve business aspects analysis including feasibility studies,  
30 competitive analysis, marketing research, pricing strategies, determining  
31 distribution channels and market segments in the health care space. The  
32 successful onsite full-time experiential learning course where students met in  
33 person as a team, had real-time in-person contact with the client and the ability  
34 to visit and tour the health care facility now had to be translated to an online  
35 environment.

### 36 37 **Course Learning Outcomes**

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39 By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- 40 • Size up, quickly and accurately, complex and unstructured situation by  
41 identifying the core problems and issues.
- 42 • Analyze quantitative and descriptive data to identify strategies which are  
43 appropriate to each situation, evaluate alternatives and recommend  
44 specific courses of action for creative solutions to problems/issues.

- 1 • Link theory and practice, and develop understanding of when and how to
- 2 use what “tools” in particular problem-solving situations.
- 3 • Develop a Global mindset regarding health care to include cultural
- 4 diversity of health care providers and patients as well as health care
- 5 industry’s global perspective.
- 6 • Apply leadership skills to team work. Realize when to lead and when to
- 7 follow.
- 8 • Learn about strategy concepts, synthesized and integrated, in a pragmatic
- 9 context.
- 10 • Present recommendations in concise, framework driven and convincing
- 11 manner with appropriate research and argument.

### 12 **Course Structure**

13 The course is structured into two sessions each being eight weeks. The

14 first eight-weeks the following activities are completed:

- 15 • Content is from a health care strategy text book is covered
- 16 • Students are assembled into teams and assigned to a project and client
- 17 • Student teams are introduced to their client and project
- 18 • Student teams research the specific health care industry segment and
- 19 write a concise project objective statement
- 20 • Student teams on week eight present understanding of project and a work
- 21 plan for part 2 in order to produce a recommendation report at the end of
- 22 part 2.

23 The second eight weeks, the following activities are completed:

- 24 • Following the Kolb Experiential Learning Model, students complete
- 25 numerous reflections on elements of the experiential learning.
- 26 • Routine meetings with the client to syndicate the team process.
- 27 • Complete the consulting team project with a written report to the client.
- 28 • Teams virtually present findings and recommendations to client with
- 29 time for discussion and questions.

### 30 **Faculty Lead**

31 Faculty leads must have skills, experience and temperament to monitor

32 students and clients. They are to provide feedback and encouragement to

33 students without direct involvement in the project. They ensure that the clients

34 are available and providing the students with pertinent information in a timely

35 manner. Faculty leads are responsible for communicating with clients to set

36 expectations for their role. Faculty available to the students is essential. In part

37 2 of the course in addition to three virtual synchronous sessions in week 1, 4,

38 and 7, each team has the opportunity to meet virtually with faculty in week 3

1 and 6 to discuss any challenges, concerns or needed direction. The faculty  
2 monitors teams for potential conflicts and challenges. Pulse check tool has been  
3 developed for this purpose.

### 4 5 6 **Elements of a Successful Online Program**

7  
8 In order for the program to be successful, a high level of coordination must  
9 take place as there are many moving parts. These elements include:

- 10 1. Client selection
- 11 2. Promoting expectations to students
- 12 3. Matching students with projects
- 13 4. Size of class, size of teams
- 14 5. Determining number of projects
- 15 6. Learning Management Systems
- 16 7. Support Staff – Office of Experiential Learning
- 17 8. Network for acquiring projects
- 18 9. Role of Reflection Assignments
- 19 10. Pulse Checks

#### 20 21 22 **Client Selection**

23  
24 It is most important to select appropriate clients and projects. Since the  
25 course is online, it is important that the client understands the importance of  
26 availability to the students. Students require timely responses to questions and  
27 request for information, particularly in part 2 of the course. In part 1 of the  
28 course the student teams and client agree upon the method of communication.  
29 Asynchronous communication modalities have included email, slack, WeChat  
30 and/or text messaging. The client may also include other colleagues who can  
31 address specific areas such as finance, marketing, human resources, etc.

#### 32 33 **Promoting expectations to Students**

34  
35 It is essential for the students to understand the elements of the course.  
36 These include: (a) students understanding that the projects are with third parties  
37 engaging with the students to obtain recommendations for implementation, (b)  
38 students work in teams (writing a team contract) and collaborate with project  
39 clients, (c) requires flexibility of meeting times/dates with teammates to  
40 accommodate locations in different time zones, (d) requires a significant time  
41 commitment and (e) students recognize they are representing the university in  
42 their manners within the teams and with the clients. Students are eligible to  
43 enroll in this course after only after completing half of the program credit hours  
44 which include marketing and finance. Students must either be in the MBA  
45 program Health Care Innovation track or the MS Health Care Management  
46 degree. Being able to form teams with a combination of students from each

1 program helps to cover the skills required for projects. Students who prefer to  
2 work alone and not in teams should realize this is not the course for them.

### 3 4 **Matching Students with Projects**

5  
6 Prior to the start of the course, registered students who are required to have  
7 completed the foundation courses, complete an extensive questionnaire. The  
8 questionnaire gathers pertinent information to be used for two purposes. One  
9 purpose is to access student educational backgrounds, health care specific  
10 expertise and years of experience. This information is used to match students  
11 with the project requiring those skill sets and experience. The questionnaire  
12 also collects information to be used to diversify teams. This information  
13 includes gender, ethnicity and domestic or international status. Since the course  
14 is online, physical location and time are also considered for practical purposes  
15 of arranging meeting times. However, it is not a deal breaker if teams of  
16 students live in different zones. Locations in various time zones mimics our  
17 global business environment today and allows students to practice methods to  
18 overcome these challenges.

### 19 20 **Size of Class and Teams**

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22 Team size appears to be optimal at four students per team. Four students  
23 allow for diversity in the team to cover academic backgrounds and diversity.  
24 Teams of five or more complicate logistics for arranging synchronous  
25 meetings. In order for the faculty facilitator to follow and mentor teams, four  
26 teams and projects are optimal. This of course depends on the faculty's  
27 additional teaching schedule.

### 28 29 **Determining Number of Projects**

30  
31 The Carey Business School originally offered the course in the Spring  
32 semester. There was always a wait list since the student enrollment was capped  
33 at 16. The course is now offered both spring and fall semesters now allowing  
34 for a yearly total of 32 students to enroll. Initially the addition of the fall  
35 offering required at least four more projects. It was a concern that enough  
36 robust and appropriate projects and clients could be identified. This turned out  
37 to not be a challenge. The project list continues to grow for consideration for  
38 the course.

### 39 40 **Learning Management Systems**

41  
42 There are many learning management systems (LMS) available. Institutions  
43 decide the LMS since it will be used university-wide. Familiarity with  
44 Blackboard and Canvas suggest most LMSs have similar capabilities and can  
45 incorporate many other applications. Couse lead should work closely with the  
46 instructional technologist to gain understanding of the capabilities of the LMS

1 system. Online materials need to accommodate numerous disabilities and  
2 working with an accessibility expert is recommended. Software programs and  
3 text books that can be read to the student is just one accommodation and use of  
4 closed caption for meetings and voice-over lectures is recommended. Online  
5 assignments must be detailed and explicit about submission formats, due dates,  
6 and rubrics. Since the course is online it is essential to give deep thought as to  
7 both methods to post course content and assignments and also to consider  
8 collaborative tools for student to upload presentations and to collaborate with  
9 teammates.

10 Regarding course content consider the following:

11  
12 (a) methods to convey content materials

13 It is known that students learn by different approaches such as reading, hearing  
14 and seeing. Therefore, content material is presented by voice-over PPT  
15 lectures (hearing) with availability of printable PowerPoints; readings from a  
16 text and supplemented by literature articles (reading); and videos (seeing).  
17 Remember to use closed caption for accessibility.

18 (b) creating simulating discussion prompts.

19 Discussions require that the student posts and once submitted the other posts  
20 appear. This forces the students not to be biased by other postings. Creating  
21 discussion questions around real-life complex situations provide an opportunity for  
22 students to develop critical thinking skills and assimilate theories and content  
23 into practice.

24 (c) accessibility of library resources.

25 Along with the instructional technologist, consult with the librarian for the best  
26 way to link to course specific library resources and library research databases.

27 Student/team use of media and collaboration tools

28 (a) use of presentation and media capabilities.

29 The instructional technologist can assist with the best method to accomplish the  
30 uploading of student media. Students may be submitting podcast, voice-over  
31 presentations, pecha kucha presentations to name a few. These media assignments  
32 ppts, mp3, mp4 to name a few. It can be challenging and cumbersome for  
33 instructor to access for grading. Be clear on your objective for the assignment.  
34 For example, the assignment/media presentations may be only for grading by  
35 the instructor or may also be available for student comment. There are methods  
36 for uploading directly into the assignment area where it is only available to the  
37 instructor and easy to access for grading. If team presentations are to be shared  
38 with students, depending on the LMS, a file can be set up for students to upload  
39 media into file and then the instructor can copy to open file for all to view.  
40 Other tools are VoiceThread which allows for numerous ways, text, voice, etc.  
41 to post comments directly into the presentation. Most LMSs can incorporate  
42 media software such as Panopto and Kaltura.

43 (b) availability of collaborative tools.

44 One of the primary objectives of this course is for students to team with other  
45 students. In order for successful teaming, students have to be able to work with

1 their team online. Some LMSs offer the ability for the teams to have  
2 discussions and share documents. Student teams will need to have a Zoom link  
3 or use another meeting app. For this course, teams can determine the method to  
4 use for team collaboration to include MicroSoft Teams, Slack, Google Docs or  
5 others.

6 Assessments for calculating an individual student course grade is  
7 recommended to be a combination of individual and team submissions. This  
8 course has many formative low-stake assignments and the high-stake final  
9 summative report. In addition, a peer review allows for each team member to  
10 evaluate each other.

### 11 **Support Staff – Office of Experiential Learning**

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14 The course has strong support and assistance from the Office of Experiential  
15 Learning (OEL). The Carey Business School emphasizes experiential learning  
16 throughout all program curriculums including Full time MBA, MS programs in  
17 Health Care, Finance, Marketing and Business Analytics Risk Management to  
18 name a few. The OEL activity tracks and seeks out clients in the various areas  
19 for student projects. The staff appointed for the MS Health Care course also  
20 provides back office support of arranging initial meetings with potential clients,  
21 executing legal documents and assisting with assigning students to teams. The  
22 OEL staff when available, attends the synchronous sessions and student client  
23 presentations.

### 24 **Network for Project Acquisition**

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27 It is important to engage other faculty and divisions within your university  
28 for providing projects. The course being discussed is in the Heath Care  
29 discipline. Therefore, the faculty teaching in the health care program and the  
30 health innovation track of the MBA are informed about the course. The faculty  
31 are often in contact with health care organizations and refer potential clients  
32 with projects to the OEL. In addition, the university has Johns Hopkins  
33 Technology Ventures and Technology Transfer Office. Johns Hopkins being an  
34 international leader in health care, has a dedicated office within Technology  
35 Ventures dedicated to health care innovations. It is not unusual for clients to  
36 refer other colleagues to the program. Word spreads and organizations of all  
37 sizes from start-up to growth phase are interested to partner with the student  
38 teams for free consulting services.

### 39 **Role of Reflection Assignments**

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41 The program is successful from the student perspective in addition to real-  
42 life experience with clients, but also from the role reflections play. Part 2 of the  
43 course requires students individually to reflect on a series of questions. The  
44 Kolb model emphasizes the role reflections. Reflections allow the students to  
45 process what happened in the experiences of the project. In this course students  
46 reflect on the following:

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- Effectiveness of the team contract
- Challenges and positive aspects of working in a diverse team
- Ability to practice empathy within their team and with the client
- Opportunities to practice leadership skills
- What do you wish you had known early on in the project?
- How have you practiced growth mind set?
- Dealing with a gear-shift
- Have you experienced a sense of accomplishment?

Too often in course work and life, the students (and all of us) are too motivated to complete a task and move on. There is no time to stop and reflect on the experience. It is essential in all learning to reflect on what worked, what could have been done differently and what were alternative approaches. This has to be an intentional and required exercise in experiential learning courses.

### **Pulse Check Tool**

The pulse check tool has been developed to assist the faculty lead to monitor each team weekly throughout part 2 of the course. The tool is introduced in the week 4 of part 1 to team members to develop the habit of completing at the end of each week. The tool is a survey of seven questions presented on a Likert scale. Examples of the type of question asked are the perception of each team members on areas of: (a) client cooperation, (b) functioning of the team, (c) confidence about the project objective, (d) effective team internal communication and (e) effective communication with the client. Student responses are anonymous with the intent of acquiring honest responses. Results are viewed by the faculty on a collective basis as a number of responses per Likert scale. The tool allows for the faculty lead to quickly identify any team problems and be able to intercede promptly to avoid more serious team consequences.

### **Examples A Successful Projects**

#### **Mentia**

Mentia Inc.'s mission is to provide people with evidence-based non-pharmacological therapy anywhere, anytime to help meet the global longevity challenge. Formed in 2017, Mentia brings groundbreaking digital solutions to the non-pharmacological support of people living with dementia. The company engaged the students to provide recommendations for a growth plan to expand the use of their digital technology. The students' objective was to develop a high-level healthcare marketing strategy for the U.S. market, which includes the value proposition for potential business partners. The team conducted



1 market research into Dementia Care Organizations, Complementary Startups,  
2 Healthcare providers & Insurers, Remote Patient Monitoring Companies,  
3 Senior Care Facilities and Pharmaceutical companies.

4 The students recommended five US states with the largest population of  
5 dementia patients to target five potential partnering opportunities that included  
6 a therapy organization, large senior living facility and a pharmaceutical  
7 company for collaborations and evaluated the future of CPT codes for  
8 insurance coverage and FDA clearance for prescription digital therapeutics.

### 9 10 **iFIT Prosthetics**

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12 iFIT Prosthetics offers a wide array of prosthetic sockets to fit even the  
13 most challenging limbs. Through clinical research, an array of different size  
14 sockets for prosthetic legs was developed to accommodate both above knee and  
15 below knee amputees. Advantages of the prosthetics are: (a) prosthetic sockets  
16 developed for ultimate comfort, fit and flexibility, (b) fit and aligned in one  
17 session and conforms easily to the limb, (c) created to be an ideal preparatory  
18 or cost-effective secondary prosthetic socket, (d) tough reliable and waterproof  
19 socket and (e) easily adjusted by the wearer to accommodate volume fluctuations.

20 The client was interested in targeting international businesses in Africa  
21 and South America, best method to penetrate the EU market after receiving the  
22 MDR and CE mark; targeting relief organizations helping in Ukraine; targeting  
23 philanthropic organizations and data on who can fit prosthetics internationally  
24 in accordance with regulations.

25 The project objective was is to identify market entry strategies and  
26 improve competitive positioning in target markets through joint ventures and  
27 partnership opportunities.

28 The students conducted extensive research into the market size and needs  
29 for the prosthetics and the number of prosthetists, technicians and apprentices  
30 in these areas. Challenges identified included distribution issues in foreign  
31 markets, language barriers, fragmented health care system, EU regulatory  
32 approval and competitors in the regions. Also, partnership opportunities were  
33 identified with local agents/representatives, non-profits and NGOs, and  
34 government entities. Additional barriers of entry were presented such as  
35 ongoing conflicts, US Trade Embargo with Syria, local regulatory approval,  
36 capital for Proper outside US commercialization and cost of goods. Shared  
37 market entry strategies were presented.

### 38 39 **Intelligent Oxygen Tank Sensor**

40  
41 An innovative hospital team was motivated to invent an oxygen tank  
42 sensor due to oxygen tanks location availability and tanks running out of  
43 oxygen at inopportune times. The project was to determine the market  
44 feasibility of the sensor in the health care facilities. A smart phone app tied to  
45 the tank sensor would be able to access information to identify location of  
46 oxygen tanks and the level gas in the tank. The students researched competitive

1 products and the differentiation of functions with the new sensor. Also, the  
2 students surveyed health care institutions for interest in the product/service and  
3 amount they would be willing to pay. The students realized the marketing  
4 material should be able to demonstrate the return on investment for the product  
5 to be successful. Surveys were conducted at Acute Care facilities to include  
6 academic hospitals with 700 beds and regional hospitals of 200 bed size. The  
7 routine was to receive a standing order size for the same number of tanks per  
8 period. Students questioned gas tank suppliers such as AirGas and Roberts  
9 Oxygen, costs of tanks to hospitals and number of tanks misplaced or returned  
10 not empty. Students' research identified competition, incompatibilities with  
11 some hospital diagnostic imaging equipment and other shortcomings such as  
12 battery life. On the other side of the equation was the opportunity for better  
13 inventory management reducing costs. The recommendations outlined for  
14 continued improvement to develop a strong marketing value proposition  
15 emphasizing better patient care due to improved inventory control and savings.  
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### 18 **Conclusions**

19  
20 The Carey Business School has demonstrated that experiential learning  
21 with teams of students can be successful online. A value chain has been created  
22 with the clients. When the clients receive valuable recommendations; this leads  
23 to additional projects and word of mouth to colleagues generating interest,  
24 inquires, and referrals for additional client participation. The students have  
25 rewarding experiences and recommend the course to other students. The course  
26 is now offered in both Fall and Spring semesters often with five projects per  
27 term.

28 Some comments from clients include:

29  
30 "We had the pleasure of working with two teams from the Health Care Strategy  
31 course. The teams identified ways to support the long-term sustainability of our  
32 school-based health care program and potential new streams of funding that we  
33 hadn't considered before. The students' experience and expertise in a broad  
34 range of health and health care fields made this a great opportunity for us." Sara  
35 Johnson, Director, Rales Center for the Integration of Health and Education  
36

37 "This program helped us dig into specific business scenarios that our team did  
38 not have the time or capacity to invest in. This resulted in us receiving relevant  
39 business insight beyond our own planned capacity." Nick Culbertson, SCEO and  
40 Co-founder, Protenus  
41

42 Student comments:

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44 "This course provided me with the necessary insight and experience to further  
45 my career capabilities and allowed me to recognize my worth and value as a new  
46 budding consultant. I look forward to using this new knowledge to help evolve

1 my career down a path that I honestly would not have known to be available to  
2 me.”

3  
4 “This class was one of my favorites at Carey because it allowed me to use  
5 everything I’ve learned in the program to make a difference for a client and their  
6 patients. From business communications and statistics and leadership, to  
7 strategy, financial analysis, and marketing, this class was the perfect culminating  
8 experience in the MBA program.”

9  
10 This class gave me an opportunity to aggregate my three years of  
11 education plus with my 20 plus years of experience in medicine and business.  
12 The experience of this class has been one that has accentuated my knowledge  
13 base while increasing my confidence in what I have learned. It felt amazing to  
14 share that knowledge with our client through our final project and paper who  
15 were extremely receptive to our strategies.

16 This two-part course has really helped put all the work and learning I’ve  
17 received at Carey together. I’ve seen this experience as almost a capstone  
18 project for the MBA. Working with our client at Hopkins has been a nice  
19 introduction to the world of consulting and a safe place to apply our cumulative  
20 learnings.

21 This has been an eye-opening experience for me, one I do not take lightly.  
22 I came into this course unsure of what to expect, wondering how external  
23 factors influenced organizational strategy. I leave with great knowledge of  
24 external factors, and real experience in providing consultancy services!  
25 Outstanding!

26  
27

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