



CASE STUDY 2

A core product of the Employability Skills Forum, National Business and Education Centre

Program *Partnership*

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Name of Program
Simon Fraser
University's Integrated
Studies Program

Skills Developed
• *Academic*
• *Personal*
Management
• *Teamwork*

Developing mid-career employees' employability skills

SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY'S INTEGRATED STUDIES PROGRAM

Developing Employability Skills Through Engagement with the Western Canon of Great Books

BY MICHAEL R. BLOOM, PENNY BRADY & KURTIS KITAGAWA

August 1998

Simon Fraser University is developing the employability skills of adults who have completed half of a four-year degree by exposing them to the great books tradition in a program that allows them to work, on a part-time basis, toward a Bachelor of General Studies degree in the liberal arts.

Overview

The Integrated Studies Program is a new type of undergraduate degree completion program, tailored to developing the employability skills of mid-career adults and giving them an opportunity to obtain a Bachelor of General Studies degree in liberal arts. It is a three-year program intended for employees who have completed half of a four-year degree and who wish to finish their degree on a part-time basis. It helps those with specialized work backgrounds become more flexible and better able to take on new roles in their organizations.

This novel program demonstrates how employability skills can be developed through a combination of humanities and business courses. The program aims to broaden students' perspectives by helping them to learn to think more critically,

communicate more clearly and persuasively, understand the context of Canadian business, and develop team-building and other managerial skills. Students develop their employability skills by (1) reading and reflecting on key texts from the Western tradition and (2) having clear learning objectives that are understood and agreed upon by students and faculty who deliver the program.

The pilot program is a co-operative venture between Simon Fraser University and two major employers in the Vancouver area—BC Hydro and Canadian Pacific Railway—and involves 34 employees as students. The pilot program has been so successful that the Integrated Studies Program has been made into a permanent program of the university and many more employers have joined the program (see Achievements/Outcomes below).

Groups Served

Employees of:

- Canadian Pacific Railway,
- British Columbia Hydro and Power Authority (BC Hydro),
- MacMillan Bloedel Limited,
- Vancouver City Savings Credit Union,
- Finning (Canada) Ltd.,

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NBEC Mission

We help business and education leaders work collaboratively to promote the development of a learning society that will prepare Canada's young people for a changing world.

- Hughes Aircraft of Canada Ltd.,
- City of Vancouver,
- BC Rail,
- Marsh & McLennan, Limited,
- BC Tel,
- Greer Shipping, and
- Small and independent businesses sponsored by the Vancouver Board of Trade:
 - Quincy Management Group (Int'l) Ltd.,
 - Images and Style by Karen Heaps,
 - West Coast Express, and
 - Richard Campbell, independent consultant.

Objectives

- To broaden participants' employability skills by helping them learn to think critically, communicate clearly and persuasively, understand the context of Canadian business, and develop teamwork and other management skills.
- To assist participants with specialized backgrounds to become more flexible and better able to take on new roles within their organizations, and to earn a fully portable education credential.

Activities

The Integrated Studies Program is structured using a cohort model. All students admitted in a given year take the same courses at the same time and progress through the program as a group. This provides support for participants and solves two problems of part-time study: limited course availability and poor access to courses when they are offered.

Students complete the program by taking 18 courses over three years. There are two courses per semester and three semesters per year.

Students attend classes in three-day blocks—Thursday, Friday and Saturday—with four blocks per semester. Total classroom hours over the three years are equivalent to regular full-time classroom hours over two years.

Courses begin with one of three team-taught interdisciplinary seminars focusing

on the relationship between academic study and workplace issues, and an accompanying introduction to academic writing. The second term involves introductory courses in mathematics and social sciences. The balance of the curriculum is devoted to the four major program focuses: improving critical thinking, learning to communicate clearly and persuasively, understanding the context of Canadian business and enhancing management skills.

All courses are taught so as to highlight their relevance to contemporary issues and develop the students' capacity for informed judgement. Important literary, philosophical and other texts from the Western canon are used as case studies. For example, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is used to understand leadership; writings by Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant are used to study independent thought. These great works lie at the heart of the Integrated Studies Program. They are studied to shed light on the contemporary issues and specific problems that students encounter when they are working at their jobs. The central concept is that these texts embody our deepest understanding and insights into human relations and the world at large. They offer students profound understanding of universal issues and problems that have faced humanity through the centuries and also powerful guidance into how today's problems can be solved by applying their own judgement.

Resources Required

The overall cost of implementing and maintaining the Integrated Studies Program over the course of three years is \$400,000 for the first cohort of students. This figure does not include development and evaluation costs.

Commitment from Employers

- First cohort: commitment to cover the full \$400,000.
- Second cohort: \$13,000 per student over three years.
- Third cohort: \$12,000 per student over three years.

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The Employability Skills Forum Mission

We are committed to improving the productivity and quality of life for individuals, organizations and society by enhancing the employability skills of the current and future workforce of Canada.

This study was made possible through funding by members of the Employability Skills Forum.

Forum Members

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- Additional textbook costs of about \$1,200 per student over three years.
- Up to 72 days of paid leave from the workplace over three years (eight days per semester times nine semesters) per student.

Commitment from Employees

- From 36 to 72 days of personal time for classes over three years (four to eight days per semester times nine semesters) per student.
- About 2,000 hours of private study time over three years per student (three hours per class hour).

Achievements/Outcomes

- The first cohort retention rate is 97 per cent.
- In 1998, students of the first cohort of 34 participants will graduate from Simon Fraser University with a Bachelor of General Studies.
- Sixteen students from five employers entered as the second cohort in January 1997.
- Sixteen students from nine employers entered as the third cohort in September 1997.
- Participating employers are so confident of the benefits of the program that two that placed employees in the second cohort also placed students in the third cohort even before their second cohort employees had graduated.

Benefits

Employers

- Education and training dollars are invested in long-term upgrading of the workforce.

Employees

- Work experiences and responsibilities are related to career advancement and personal interest. By gaining a wide range of employability skills and a degree, employees are able to compete for higher level jobs.

University

- Opportunity to become more versatile and responsive to customer needs.
- Opportunity to meet the needs of mid-career students in times of limited resources for universities.
- (As a result) improved ability to fulfil its educational mandate in changing circumstances.

Innovation

This innovative program demonstrates how a liberal arts education is directly applicable to the workforce and the workplace:

- It shows how a liberal arts education can enhance students' academic, personal management and teamwork skills for the benefit of both employers and employees.
- It uses surveys of the core users of the program to help it meet its chief goal of enhancing participants' employability skills while the program is under way.
- It uses a combination of assessment techniques to make improvements to program delivery.
- Students have frequently been involved in assessment. They participate in focus groups each semester to assess the program's performance. They also complete a semi-annual questionnaire that asks them to evaluate their instructors, the curriculum and the overall value of the program.
- After the first and second years of the three-year pilot, the program was evaluated to assess its worth. The evaluation was based on a written and telephone survey of the managers of participating students.
- Evaluation will continue after of the program's conclusion.

Keys to Success

Employers

- Must be committed to support employees financially and with work flexibility.
- Must ensure employees' jobs continue to grow with their abilities.

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Employees

- Must be committed to the program.
- Must demonstrate readiness to take part in the program.

University

- Must be prepared to modify standardized schedules for degree acceptance and completion.

NBEC Publications Relating to Employability Skills Development and Assessment

Employability Skills Profile

Science Literacy for the World of Work

Best Practices in Assessing and Developing Employability Skills—20 Case Studies (Sept. 98)

The Economic Benefits of Improving Literacy in the Workplace, 206-97 Report.

Enhancing Employability Skills: Innovative Partnerships, Projects and Programs, 118-94 Report.

Linking Teachers, Science, Technology and Research: Business and Education Collaborations That Work, 144-95 Report.

1998 100-Best Partnerships IdeaBook

1997 100-Best Partnerships IdeaBook

1996 100-Best Partnerships IdeaBook

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