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Teaching International Microenterprise Development: An Interdisciplinary Experiential Learning Approach

In this article, the authors describe the core elements of an integrative economics-marketing course on international microenterprise development. The course covers issues related to poverty, market approaches to poverty alleviation, various methods to elicit willingness to pay, market segmentation, market research techniques, fair trade, and other topics. Students apply concepts and methods learned to a live case study. Assignments and in-class activities are designed to turn the handicraft work of four groups of ethnic minority women in a mountainous region of Vietnam into a viable and sustainable microenterprise.

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1. Introduction

Although still not widely implemented in the economics curriculum, the value of experiential learning is well recognized in the economic education literature. Experiential learning can be implemented through research (e.g., Henderson 2016), data visualization exercises (e.g., Méndez-Carbajo 2015), experiments (e.g., Singh & Russo 2013), classroom games (e.g., Park 2010), competitions (e.g., Aguilar & Soques 2015), or service learning (e.g., Henderson 2018). These approaches improve comprehension and retention of course materials. We introduce an interdisciplinary dimension into experiential learning. An important pedagogical benefit of the course elements we detail below is that students experience how various business fields are linked. In the workplace, concepts and methods from various disciplines are typically used to identify and solve problems. Instructors interested in designing an experiential learning course requiring expertise in various business fields will find this article useful. Currently, the pedagogical literature in economics has not focused on the potential benefits of interdisciplinary experiential learning.¹ Therefore, this article makes a key contribution by providing insights into a successful example of integrating marketing concepts and methods into economic education through hands-on experiences related to a live case of international microenterprise development.

The interdisciplinary experiential learning approach was implemented in a new course in the College of Business Administration entitled International Microenterprise Development (IMD). IMD covered issues related to poverty, market approaches to poverty alleviation (microenterprise development being one approach), various methods to elicit willingness to pay, market segmentation, market research techniques, fair trade, and other topics. IMD was the first course in our university to be co-taught by faculty in economics and marketing. The course was rooted in Hansen's (2001) proficiency approach to instruction and learning. Students learned to access, interpret, and use existing knowledge, and then apply existing knowledge to a new problem area. Furthermore, students integrated knowledge from two disciplines to complete assignments that required group collaboration, an important soft skill in today's workplace.²

These learning outcomes were accomplished through the application of economic and marketing concepts and methods to a live case study. Although not advertised as a service-learning course, at its core IMD had service-learning elements. Service learning fosters increased civic responsibility on the part of the students (Ziegert & McGoldrick 2008) while also providing necessary experience valuable to potential future employers (Holland 2008). Assignments and in-class activities were designed to turn the handicraft work of four groups of ethnic minority women in rural Vietnam into a viable and sustainable microenterprise. IMD was designed to accomplish two primary goals related to the handicraft project: First, students developed marketing materials to boost the market value of these traditionally-made handicrafts. Second, students estimated peoples' willingness to pay for handicrafts made by the women when sold in the U.S. market.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows. A brief background of the real-world handicraft project behind IMD is described in the next section. Section 3 contains a detailed description of the core topics of the course, course assignments and in-class exercises, and student feedback.

1 With over a hundred papers published since 2008, not a single paper in the economic instruction section of one of the leading journals on economic education was on interdisciplinary experiential learning, and only one paper was on interdisciplinary (economics and sociology) teaching.

2 Tied in first place with problem-solving skills, the ability to work in teams is an attribute that over 80 percent of surveyed employers look for in students' resumes (NACE, 2017).

Examples of how instructors might adapt core elements of IMD in other undergraduate business, economics, or marketing courses, and potentially at the middle or high school level are described in Section 4. Finally, concluding remarks are provided in Section 5.

2. Brief Background

Women from four ethnic minority groups in a northern mountainous region of Vietnam have been working together to produce handicrafts using traditional techniques. These traditional techniques had all but disappeared, but with the help of an international non-government organization (NGO) and its local partner, the skills were resurrected. The women successfully handcrafted and marketed a limited number of items in Vietnam during the 2011 to 2014 period. Subsistence farming and livestock ranching remained the primary activities of the women. They made handicrafts during the winter months, or when they were not busy with responsibilities in the household, farm, and community. However, the knowledge of traditional techniques such as making fabric from the hemp plant, dyeing methods using certain plants, and hand-sewing hemp fabric are at risk of being forgotten once again, as fewer and fewer of the women participating in the multi-year project sponsored by the international NGO are interested in making handicrafts. The low prices these handicrafts fetch in Vietnam serves as a strong disincentive for the women to spend time on these activities.

The IMD course provided students the background and knowledge to work on economic and marketing issues designed to ensure the preservation of these traditional techniques by increasing the market value of the handicrafts. Students developed and tested narratives about the women and their handicrafts designed to increase the perceived value of the items to consumers. Students also researched issues related to U.S. market access. The two primary goals of the course related to the handicraft project were for students to develop marketing materials to make these handicrafts attractive to potential consumers in the U.S., and to estimate consumers' willingness to pay for the women's handicraft items when accompanied by value-enhancing narratives.³ These willingness-to-pay estimates, together with cost estimates (e.g., transport cost, duty and sales tax rates, and labeling and packaging costs), informed the pricing of the handicraft items when sold on campus or at local specialty gift shops.

3. International Microenterprise Development

A. Course Structure

The course (three credit hours) was first offered in Spring 2017. Enrollment was initially capped at 15 students, but this limit was quickly reached in the first few days of registration (an indication of latent demand for this type of course). Class limit was increased to 30 students. A larger class size would have made some activities (e.g., focus groups and in-class group exercises)

³ The handicraft items were expected to fetch a higher price in the U.S. market due to their uniqueness that the narratives highlighted. Four groups of women worked together to make the handicraft items. H'mong women planted hemp seeds, and then turned hemp fibers into hemp fabric. Nung women hand-dyed hemp fabrics. Lo Lo and Money Dao women made the design patches used in one of the handicraft items. The Money Dao and Nung women hand-sewed handicraft items made from 100% hemp fabric. When sold in Vietnam, the handicraft items produced by the women competed with low-priced souvenir items available throughout the country's popular tourist areas.

es) unmanageable. The course had an enrollment of 29 students majoring in either economics or marketing, and all but one student completed the course. The students were predominantly junior and senior students who had completed principles of microeconomics, principles of macroeconomics, and principles of marketing.⁴ The class met once a week for two hours and 40 minutes for 16 weeks. An extended class period is ideal to accommodate in-class work. IMD emphasized how microenterprise development can improve the lives of marginalized populations in the world. With this broad objective in mind, and to accomplish the course's two primary goals related to the handicraft project, relevant economic and marketing concepts and methods presented in the course are detailed below.

Economic problem defined. The course started by defining poverty, identifying various market approaches to poverty alleviation, and introducing examples of randomized field experiments in development economics that aim to reduce poverty rates. These provided necessary background information to put the women's handicraft project in perspective. Latest available data (2009) show a poverty rate as high as 93 percent for one of the ethnic minority groups we work with (World Bank 2013).⁵ High poverty rates for Vietnam's ethnic minority groups are due to reduced mobility (they live in geographically remote areas), lower access to markets, lower educational attainment, language barriers, and other reasons (World Bank 2009). One market-based approach to poverty alleviation is microenterprise development (Cooney & Shanks 2010). Students learned about various organizations, such as BeadforLife, Kiva, and Trickle Up, which support the development of microenterprises. Students also read literature that used randomized field experiments to reduce poverty. For example, the Women's Income Generating Support (WINGS) program described in Blattman, Green, Jamison, Lehmann, and Annan (2016) provides basic business skills training, cash grants (for those with approved business plans), and supervision to those residing in villages randomly selected to receive treatment. The finding that for the most part, treated participants had higher business start-up rates and work hours per week, provided justification for the students to focus on the live Vietnamese handicraft case for the semester project.

Consumers' willingness to pay. Mastering this economic concept is crucial to the success of the Vietnamese handicraft project. When this concept is taught in principles and intermediate level courses, peoples' willingness to pay is assumed to be known. In real-world applications, however, willingness to pay is unknown and must be estimated. Students learned various approaches to estimating willingness to pay (Braidert, Hahsler, & Reutterer 2006). Examples in the literature include eliciting willingness to pay for fair trade products (e.g., Koppel & Schulze 2013), or environment-friendly products (e.g., De Magistris, Del Giudice, & Verneau 2015). Students learned the advantages and disadvantages of using revealed preferences (through field experiments) and stated preferences (through surveys) to measure willingness to pay. Relying on one faculty's expertise, several focus groups were conducted to estimate peoples' willingness to pay for the handcrafted items, keeping in mind the limitations of stated preferences. Students learned to develop a focus group discussion guide, helped recruit participants, observed the focus groups, and wrote focus group reports.

4 The course was cross-listed as an economics and marketing course at the 4000 level. For the most part, 4000-level courses have principles courses (2000 level) as prerequisites.

5 We have not been able to find poverty rates across various ethnic minority groups after 2009. But, a 2018 World Bank study reports a dramatic drop in (overall) poverty rates among ethnic minorities in Vietnam from 66.3 percent in 2010 to 44.6 percent in 2016.

Marketing problem defined. As mentioned previously, on the supply-side, a common complaint was that the prices the women received (in Vietnam) for their handcrafted items were “too low.” In other words, peoples’ willingness to pay was lower than what the women considered a fair price.⁶ The marketing challenge then is how to increase peoples’ willingness to pay for these items. One way to do this is through narratives; narratives about the women, the traditional techniques of making the handicrafts, and the embroideries and design patches sewn on the handicraft items could increase consumers’ understanding of the items and potentially increase their value. These narratives could move consumers beyond recognizing the utilitarian needs the products serve (for example, hemp zipper pouches can be used to hold cash or make-up) and activate potential hedonic needs (feeling good about making purchases that make a difference in the women’s lives). To tackle the marketing dimensions of the handicraft project, students read literature on ethical consumerism (Burke, Eckert, & Davis 2014) and just world theory (White, MacDonnell, & Ellard 2012) to understand market segmentation and to identify the appropriate target markets for the women’s handcrafted items.

B. Course Assignments and Exercises

Assignments and in-class exercises throughout the semester were developed with the idea that in the end, students would be able to achieve two goals. First, they could estimate peoples’ willingness to pay, which is needed to price the handicrafts made by the women. Second, the students could develop marketing materials to boost peoples’ willingness to pay for these handicrafts. We sequenced major assignments and in-class exercises as follows: 1) Observation and competitive analysis; 2) Reflections and recommendations; 3) Observing focus groups and writing summary report; 4) Import costs, tariffs, and estimated willingness to pay and demand; 5) Trade costs, foreign exchange, and other trade determinants; and, 6) Marketing materials development. How each assignment conforms to Hansen’s (2001) proficiency approach to learning is briefly described below.⁷

Observations and competitive analysis. Students visited area retail outlets that carry fair trade and other foreign-made handicraft items. The objective of this assignment was for students to determine how products are selected for sale at the stores, and to document the types and country-of-origin of handicraft items available, including packaging, labeling, pricing, and display of these items. Students submitted a summary of their findings and photographs of the products (if photography was allowed). The goal was for students to understand the competitive landscape for related items. This was an observational research assignment assessing students’ proficiency to access and summarize available information. This established a baseline for the prices of similar items in the marketplace and what types of marketing materials are

6 The women identify their time cost (opportunity cost) in making the handicraft items, and refer to fair prices as “happy prices.” The women are primarily subsistence farmers and there are no work options for pay available in their villages. Thus, self-assessed opportunity cost is an appropriate measure of fair prices. Provision of fair prices is a key concept in creating conditions for marginalized producers to receive a larger percentage of the price as discussed in the literature on fair trade (see Dragusanu, Giovannucci, & Nunn 2014). Besides receiving fair prices for the items, the women receive all surplus earnings from our campus sales events as working capital to turn their handicraft making into a viable and sustainable microenterprise.

7 Hansen’s (2001) proficiency approach to learning includes: 1) access existing knowledge; 2) display command of existing knowledge; 3) interpret existing knowledge; 4) interpret and manipulate economic data; 5) apply existing knowledge; and, 6) create new knowledge.

generally used.

Reflections and recommendations. Prior to this second assignment, topics such as willingness to pay, market segmentation, and fair trade were discussed in class. Students also familiarized themselves with the actual handicrafts the women made (hemp zipper pouches, hemp gift bags, hemp Christmas decorations, and others) and the potential colors (natural and synthetic dyes) for these items. Building on the previous assignment, students were then asked to make preliminary recommendations on how the traditionally-made handicraft items should be priced, distributed, and promoted. Compared to the previous assignment, this assignment assesses a higher-order proficiency in that students make recommendations based on their assessment or interpretation of available information.

Focus groups: Observation and summary report. Students recruited at least five individuals⁸ each, and one faculty member conducted eight one-hour focus groups in a two-week window with close to 70 individuals participating. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 73 years old, and two-thirds were women. The focus groups aimed to obtain sufficient information to determine marketing strategies related to product assortment, design, labeling, pricing (willingness to pay), and distribution. Students observed at least one focus group and prepared a summary report of what transpired at these focus groups. One faculty member integrated all student-prepared reports into a comprehensive summary and this was made available to students. Students used this comprehensive summary report in their estimated willingness to pay (with narratives) and demand analyses (see next assignment). In addition to eliciting peoples' willingness to pay (before and after exposure to marketing materials), the focus groups also aimed to uncover the types of narratives that work best. Focus group participants provided feedback on narratives about the women, the techniques in producing the handicrafts, and the embroideries and design patches sewn on the handicrafts.

Import costs, tariff, and estimated willingness to pay and demand. Students worked with estimated fair prices (import costs).⁹ To understand the impact of tariffs on import costs, students collected the Vietnamese dong/U.S. dollar exchange rate and tariff rates (at the 10-digit Harmonized System level) to find the total import cost (in U.S. dollars) of the handicrafts. Using information obtained from the focus groups, students estimated demand and willingness to pay for the handicraft items if marketed on campus and at area specialty shops. Demand estimates were based on 1,000 potential customer contacts at each venue. Students provided justifications for their estimates. This assignment provided an assessment of students' ability to interpret existing information and apply these to new situations.

Trade costs, foreign exchange, and other trade determinants. The trade gravity model was introduced to get students thinking about the possible determinants of the quantity of hand-

8 Students were instructed to recruit individuals in our target markets: students (when these items are expected to be sold on campus during International Education Week) and ethical consumers (predominantly higher educated, middle-aged women) and to not share any details of the handicraft project.

9 Our import costs are the fair ("happy") prices provided by the women. See footnote 6 for details.

icrafts the U.S. might import from various sources. Students collected data, such as gross domestic product, distance from the U.S., time and cost to export, and currency appreciation/depreciation relative to the U.S. dollar, for Vietnam and another country randomly assigned to each student. Students were asked to infer from the data if U.S. imports could be expected to be higher or lower from Vietnam relative to the other country, and why. This assignment assessed a higher-order proficiency in that students applied existing knowledge to understand the implications of currency fluctuations such as a depreciating Vietnamese dong on U.S. imports of the handicrafts produced by the women.

Marketing materials development. Students developed marketing strategies for the handicraft items. Students were grouped based on self-assessment of various skills (such as graphic design or writing ability) to develop templates for the handicraft project's website, brochures, packaging, and labels. They also developed a social media strategy, potential product brand, and logo. These were developed to appropriately communicate and maximize the benefits to our target consumers. Since marketing material development is generally a collaborative activity, we opted for these to be done during the last two class sessions of the semester. Cooperative learning through group work contributes to positive learning outcomes (Askim-Lovseth & O'Keefe 2012), and these activities assess students' proficiency to synthesize concepts and apply appropriate methods to solve a real-world problem.

Besides these assignments and in-class exercises, student learning was also assessed through a mid-term and final exam. All exam questions were in essay form and tested students' understanding of concepts and methods, and their implications to the handicraft project in Vietnam.

As mentioned in the introduction, IMD was designed with two objectives related to the handicraft project in mind. These two goals were reached. Our students contributed to the development of the actual brochure and labels used in our test marketing, and information collected via IMD's various activities (such as focus groups) and exercises (observations and competitive analysis) informed the actual prices charged for the handicrafts.

C. Student Feedback

An anonymous course evaluation tool was administered at the end of the semester that contained both open-ended and multiple-choice questions. Responses indicated that most students acknowledged the benefits of an integrative course with a real-world application, and several recommended offering more unique classes like this. Almost all students appreciated that the hands-on project had the potential of helping others. One student commented: "The idea of helping others build a sustainable business to better their lives really spoke to me. I truly enjoyed this course and everything I learned was meaningful." Commenting on the marketing side of the course, one student noted: "It was fun to be able to use marketing strategies and skills and apply them towards a tangible project. ... The activities in class and assignments for homework helped me to better understand the material and how marketing can be applied towards improving the world and alleviating poverty." Commenting on the economics side of the course and the course's integrative nature, a student said the course "... introduced many concepts that both related to our project and the general education of economics. This was very helpful and insightful by showing us how to put our knowledge to practice. I enjoyed the co-taught class, and highly recommend." For a course offered for the first time, the overall reception was very good. Overall, student comments suggested that the overarching educa-

tional objective of helping students apply economic and marketing concepts and methods beyond the classroom was achieved. Perhaps the most gratifying comment from a mentor's perspective is that the course helped a student see how her "major can be applied towards making a social and sustainable impact."

4. Adapting Core Course Elements

Although the handicraft project accompanying the course described in this article is unique and cannot be replicated completely, the core elements of the course are transferrable to various contexts. Beyond the original IMD course, additional students in other courses have become involved in turning the women's handicrafts into a viable and sustainable microenterprise. For example, students in an industrial organization class (taught by another faculty member) in Spring 2018 conducted an online survey using Google Surveys to quantify the value of the narrative.¹⁰ Additionally, students in an international trade class investigated the possibility of having the women's handicrafts fair-trade certified. These are extensions to the live case not foreseen when the IMD course was designed.

Besides an economics–marketing course combination, one can envision an economics–supply chain course combination where students work out an ideal approach for the various groups of women to work together, keeping in mind the distances separating them. In particular, students can design a procurement system to account for the reality that one group of women plants and harvests the hemp, and spins and weaves the hemp fabric; another group dyes the hemp fabric; and yet another group makes the design patches used in the hemp zipper pouches. An economics–finance course combination is also possible where students investigate available financial incentives that seek to encourage the development of traditional products in Vietnam and to what extent the women's groups can potentially benefit from these policies. Another area of focus could be microfinance where students research available best practices on how to encourage savings in a predominantly subsistence farming community including how to pool savings and then make them available for lending within the group. Although three of the four women groups had a group leader, for the most part, they are unable to manage all aspects of the operations. Thus, coming up with ways to manage the entire operations from the procurement of inputs to the delegation of tasks among members of the group in the context of an economics–management course combination would be welcome. Students can explore the pros and cons of selling the handicrafts online using eBay or Etsy in an economics–marketing–e-commerce course combination. These examples suggest that the possibilities of an interdisciplinary course approach are limitless for our specific live case study.

10 Students designed the survey as follows: All survey participants saw an image of one of the handicraft items. For one group of participants, below the image was a text that read: "This hemp zipper pouch was made by women from a mountainous region of Vietnam. The women are subsistence farmers. In order to provide greater economic security, the women have started a business selling these items." This group was prompted, "Please read the story in the image. What is the maximum you are willing to pay for this hemp zipper pouch knowing that your purchase will go to support these women?" For a second group of participants, the image did not contain a description, and this group was asked, "What is the maximum you are willing to pay for this hemp zipper pouch?" Participants select from these responses: \$20–\$25; \$15–\$20; \$10–\$15; \$5–\$10; would not buy. With 500 participants in each group, results show a smaller percentage of people indicating that they will not purchase the item when they read the narrative (39 vs. 59 percent). Moreover, 18.5 percent (vs. 5.3 percent) would pay \$15–\$25 and 17.2 percent (vs. 9.7 percent) would pay \$10–\$15 when they read the story. The students estimate a value added of \$9.58 for the narrative.

For faculty members who may not have access to a live case such as the one described here, there are other options for introducing a course similar to IMD. Faculty could work with an existing organization that supports microenterprises in developing areas. One such organization is BeadforLife. BFL is a Colorado based 501(c)(3) that does microenterprise training for women in Uganda and in other East-African countries through partner organizations. BFL funds their work through the sale of jewelry made by women in Uganda from recycled paper. The jewelry is sold in the U.S., primarily through a volunteer network, with some retailers and some online sales. Although BFL was founded in 2004, the organization's mission and products are still fairly unknown, making it ideal for the focus of a course similar to IMD. Students would be able to replicate the willingness-to-pay research through focus groups or through Google Surveys, testing willingness to pay with and without the narratives accompanying the products. Students could research and analyze various production and sales costs, and then develop marketing materials for on-campus sales events. By hosting the events and selling the jewelry, students would still gain the benefits of participating in the active support of microenterprise development, just as our students did.¹¹

Beyond the university setting, further potential extensions of the live case project may involve local high school or middle school students.¹² To convince teachers to take on the handicraft project as a service-learning component in their classes (such as hosting handicraft sales events at school), it is important to highlight the economics concepts that students will learn. Currently, there are only voluntary national standards in economics for K–12 consisting of 20 economic concepts (see Council for Economic Education 2010). Each state and Washington, D.C. make the final decision on whether or not to include economics in their K–12 standards, whether to require these standards be implemented in the school districts, whether to require economics in high school, and whether to include economics in standardized tests.¹³ With a few exceptions, each of the 20 content standards provide benchmarks for grades 4, 8, and 12.¹⁴

We provide a few examples of how the handicraft project might contribute to student learning of the concepts included in the economics content standards. Consider content standard 1 (scarcity). Grade 4, benchmark 5 states: 'The opportunity cost ... includes what would have been done with ... the time ... used in undertaking the activity' (Council for Economic Education 2010, p. 2), while Grade 8, benchmark 4 states: 'The evaluation of choices and opportunity cost is subjective, such evaluations differ across individuals and societies' (p. 4). Discussion of the allocation of the women's time between farming and handicraft work, and their subjective valuation of the handicrafts would contribute to students' understanding of this content stan-

11 While there are many relatively unknown organizations that could serve as the focus of an IMD course, one additional benefit of working with BFL is the existence of curriculum developed for elementary through high school students. University faculty could adapt some of the curriculum or partner with local schools for a service-learning extension to the course. University students could lead primary or secondary students through selected units of the existing curriculum. It would also be beneficial to host a sales event in schools in addition to the university sales events. Working with younger students would be an excellent way to reinforce and internalize the microenterprise topics for the university students.

12 We thank Ms. Shawna Koger for helping us develop ideas in this section.

13 According to the Council of Economic Education (2018), as of 2017 all 50 states and Washington, D.C. have included economics in their K–12 standards, but only 44 states and Washington, D.C. require these standards to be implemented by the school districts. Only 22 states require economics to be taken in high school, and of these 16 states include economics in their standardized tests.

14 Only benchmarks for grade 12 are included for content standard 20 (fiscal and monetary policy), while content standards 12 (interest rates), 17 (government failure), and 18 (economic fluctuations) only include benchmarks for grades 8 and 12.

dard. Benchmark 2 for Grade 4 for content standard 6 (specialization) states: 'Division of labor occurs when the production of a good is broken down into numerous separate tasks...' (p. 15), while benchmark 1 for Grade 8 for this content standard states: 'Labor productivity is output per worker' (p. 16). A discussion of each of the women's group's role in the making of the handicrafts (for example the Nung women hand-dye the hemp fabric) and how the women might increase their handicraft output would advance student learning of specialization. Benchmark 1 for Grade 12 for content standard 8 (role of prices) states: 'Demand for a product changes when there is a change in consumers' incomes, preferences ...' (p. 21). Students would be able to work out that the labels (containing the narratives) accompanying the handicrafts is a way to affect consumers' preferences, and these labels are expected to increase demand for the items.

5. Concluding Remarks

In this article, the structure of an economics–marketing international microenterprise development course is described. A unique real-world handicraft project provided students with hands-on experience in estimating willingness to pay and developing marketing materials that could potentially boost peoples' willingness to pay. Interest in the project continued beyond the course as students in the course applied for the opportunity to travel to Vietnam to meet and interview the women handicraft makers. Through the support of a private donor, eight students traveled to Vietnam in June 2017.¹⁵ Students wrote narratives about the women and handicrafts from the information collected in the interviews. These narratives were the basis of the (final) product labels, brochure, and social media postings used for test marketing the handicrafts in November 2017 through several sales events.

Our intent in describing in detail our experience with IMD is to encourage economics faculty to develop courses with colleagues in other business fields, to learn and appreciate methods not common in the field (such as focus groups), and to design courses with experiential-learning elements. The latest (2010) survey of teaching methods in undergraduate economics shows that very few instructors in economics courses use active learning methods (such as experiments or games) in the classroom or team teach (Watts & Schaur 2011). Personal access to a live case study is not a limiting factor. In fact, our handicraft project started with a serendipitous meeting between one of the faculty members (during a Fulbright grant) and the women. Faculty at universities with small business development centers can work with consultants at these centers to identify micro or small businesses in their area as potential candidates for a live case study. For faculty with no access to small business development centers at their universities, reaching out to Chambers of Commerce or small business associations in their area is a possibility. Furthermore, for faculty wanting to retain the international component of the course, working with an existing international microenterprise organization selling products in the U.S. is a viable alternative.

We realize that finding a suitable teaching partner can be challenging. For our specific case, this was not an issue as one faculty's expertise and prior experience working with women in Uganda were invaluable to IMD's success. We recommend familiarizing yourself with your colleagues' passions; when these match your passions, you have found your teaching partner. Our dean did not need convincing; he very quickly realized the educational value of IMD and the potential social impact of the live case study. For now, a factor limiting our ability to offer IMD yearly is the faculty's set responsibilities in teaching core courses in both the undergraduate and graduate programs.

¹⁵ Donor funds also provided additional training for the women and working capital for making handicraft items for sale in our test markets.

With the benefits of experiential learning in mind, it is important to highlight the time cost to instructors of co-teaching a course where two fields come together. You and your co-instructor must have the same level of commitment to this enterprise, as this involves a lot of coordination in topic coverage and sequencing, assignment and exam preparation, and grading. But, having a partner to regularly brainstorm new teaching ideas with more than makes up for the time spent in coordination. A course which involves a unique hands-on project like the one described here also implies that some of the time investment in the preparation of course materials (the handicraft items and living conditions of the ethnic minority groups in the north of Vietnam) might not be usable the next time this course is offered with a hands-on project, say in Peru.¹⁶ Lastly, a substantial amount of time is also devoted to coordinating with the NGO partner on the ground in material sourcing, cost-structure determination, quality control, and other microenterprise issues. These time costs can be substantial and irrecoverable, and thus, instructors considering a course encompassing some of the elements described here, must remain content with the potential educational (anticipated and serendipitous) and social impact of their work.

¹⁶ When one is involved in a unique pedagogical approach, expect to speak with various groups on campus (e.g., college advisory board and alumni), so the time investment in course preparation is also spread across these worthwhile activities.

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