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Spotlights

WALKING THE HIGHWIRE

"The freedom and level of personal responsibility to the group and to the client raise the stakes and, I think, make this course more about an experience than about a grade, and I think students perform better as a result."

Jim Lampros, senior marketing major

In the real world, marketing firms perform a daily balancing act. When successful, business strategies and creative instincts forge that unlikely—and perfect—union known as "brand."

Highwire Brand Studio, launched in 2008 from forerunner program Laws, Hall & Associates, challenges students from marketing, graphic design, and other majors, to enter that same "real world" through a program that is a dynamic hybrid of agency work and academic course.

Each semester, the class splits into teams that compete for the business of a single client company. Following presentations at semester's end, the client determines the winning team by choosing the brand ideas they will adopt.

Jessica Dillree (Marketing '09), a current Highwire student, shares her experience.

"It's great to work in a competitive team setting that mirrors real-life business situations," says Dillree, "We get to test the skills and concepts we have learned in more traditional classes to find creative and plausible solutions. In our careers we will be collaborating with peers from many fields, so not only is this great experience, but it is also a good way to expand our creative thinking."

For Katie Duxbury, former marketing director of Highwire's spring 2008 winning team, that "real-life" experience translated into a job offer by the client, executive search firm DHR International.

DHR CEO David Hoffman spoke at the spring presentation.

"Changing a brand is fun to talk about in class, but it's serious business," noted Hoffman. "Your standard of excellence is right up there with professional firms. It's been great working with Miami University."

Michael McCarthy (Marketing) co-teaches the Fall, 2008, class with graphic design faculty member Tom Effler. The challenge, from client Total Quality Logistics, is to improve the company's recruitment strategy.

"It's amazing where these students are now, compared to the beginning of the semester," McCarthy notes as he and Effler prepare to hear the first team's presentation. "They're thinking in whole new ways, and they're able to think as a team."

After the presentation, McCarthy and Effler raise questions and point out possible pitfalls in strategy, but ultimately, they explain, the final decisions are in the students' hands.

"They're working without a net," McCarthy adds with a smile.

On their way down the hall to hear the second team, McCarthy relates how the program got its start in early 2008.

"The concept of Highwire flows from a long history of producing branding ideas and campaigns for clients," says McCarthy, "For over thirty years, the marketing and graphic design departments were part of the Laws, Hall & Associates capstone. Highwire is the second generation of that effort, continuing that long partnership."

In teaching Highwire, McCarthy is joined by marketing colleagues Tim Greenlee, who is also the director of the FSB business honors program, and Gillian Oakenfull. The graphic design faculty consists of Effler and Peg Faimon, director of the Miami Design Collaborative. ■



Michael McCarthy teaches the Fall Semester '08 Highwire class with Tom Effler.



The new Highwire Brand Studio charges its student teams to challenge assumptions, generate new ideas for real clients.

Matthew Gambatese (Marketing '09)

"The best thing I've gotten out of Highwire is the valuable, real world experience, allowing us to use knowledge that we've gained during the past four years. I also think it is a great opportunity to collaborate with folks from different majors and perspectives."

Bradley Frederick (Marketing '09)

"This project has given me a great deal of experience in collecting and analyzing data. I feel much more confident about my abilities to construct surveys and questionnaires, conduct in-depth interviews, and analyze this information."

Kristina Clementi (Marketing '09) "It's been a great eye-opening experience working with a team for a real client. It gives us a sense of what the real world will be like."

Jim Lampros (Marketing '09)

"For me, The Highwire program has been a terrific capstone experience because, more than any other FSB course I have taken, it has asked us to apply all of the marketing knowledge we have gathered to this point. Working with design students adds another level to this application because both 'groups' of students expect each other to be experts in their respective fields. This builds a level of trust among group members that is sometimes missing from the typical group project. The freedom and level of personal responsibility to the group and to the client raise the stakes and, I think, make this course more about an experience than about a grade, and I think students perform better as a result." ■

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