This Study Isn’t Part Of Most BBAs
By Daniel Schoonmaker

GRAND RAPIDS — It took nearly a year, but the Grand Rapids Monopoly game will hit the shelves within the next month.

Featuring Alticor as Boardwalk and Meijer as Park Place, with other Grand Rapids businesses and institutions filling the other squares, the game will be manufactured in an initial run of 8,000 by USAopoly and will be available through Grand Valley State University and Grand Rapids-area Meijer stores.

The firm is the only Hasbro-licensed maker of custom Monopoly games.

The game began as a presentation by Daniel Mulka, GVSU graduate adviser, to professor Tom Schwarz' Entrepreneurial Journey class.

Last October Mulka and three members of GVSU's Collegiate Entrepreneur's Organization (CEO) — Daryn Kuijpers, John Dykhous and Jeff Webb — began forming a business plan around the board game concept to finance CEO scholarships.
"One of the purposes of the student organization is to learn about entrepreneurship outside of the classroom setting," said Schwarz, "and to do that in a way that the students themselves design as opposed to a faculty member. The project was created so students could actually go out and do entrepreneurship as opposed to studying it."

Schwarz is also the director of the Seidman College of Business Center for Free Enterprise.

The 20-person CEO worked together to investigate the concept, evaluate the opportunity, develop the business plan and then go about the process of selling the plan, first to the GVSU administration and then to several dozen local businesses and institutions, discovering along the way the real-world difficulties of selling and coordinating a large scale project between many different entities.

Along the way they encountered production delays, miscommunications, barriers to corporate contacts and the reality of working with institutions where all decisions must be passed through a committee.

"You can't learn in a classroom the real-world hurdles you'll experience," Schwarz said. "We wanted them to get excited and practice entrepreneurship. Doing and studying is a fun way to learn, and we tried to do it in a way that failure — and I don't like using that word — that failure has a low cost."

This is the same attitude that GVSU will approach in its newly approved minor in entrepreneurship.

The new minor fills what Schwarz identified as a large gap in the school's curriculum.

A survey of 722 students of varying interests was conducted through e-mail on June 9, 2003, identifying needs that most of GVSU's programs were not able to serve.

Mostly juniors and seniors, 18 percent of respondents had already developed or designed a new product or service. A third of respondents had an idea for a new product or service, and 5 percent were already running their own businesses.

The most telling fact is that 61 percent said they would like to start their own venture and 72 percent would like to work for themselves.

Yet neither the art major who wants to open a gallery, the engineering major who dreams of a design firm, the health science major who doesn't want to work in a hospital, nor the computer science student who hopes to one day run his own software company receives practical information from their educational experience providing them with the skills to launch, sustain or grow a business.

On top of that, additional study in one of the business disciplines may not
be of much help either. Most business programs are organized by functional areas — marketing, accounting, finance, administration — which tend to be specialized and often geared toward employment in large firms.

"Knowing accounting and marketing and so forth will benefit someone that wants to start and run their own business," Schwarz said.

"But it doesn’t really educate them on how to launch a business. We believe that the entrepreneur needs to have a core discipline of knowledge that is the focus of their business, something that they love and they have the desire and motivation to do.

"We want to marry that core knowledge with entrepreneurial skills so that they are able to make a living within that core value of knowledge."

The Entrepreneurial Journey, formerly BUS 380, will become BUS 180 this fall and eventually ENT 150, the introductory class in a six-course program that will walk students from conceptualization and self-analysis to the launching of a new venture. By the conclusion of the minor, students will have developed a fundable business plan, one that they may have already launched.

According to Schwarz, the minor will be equally valuable to business students, as it will address how to draw the areas of the business curriculum together in a manner that will allow them to plan and launch ventures.

Rather than an upper-level course, Entrepreneurial Journey was lowered to a freshman level course to allow students to become immediately engaged in entrepreneurship when they enter GVSU.

The new minor has been fully approved, with the first-year courses to be offered in the coming academic year. Whether or not faculty resources will be available to offer the mid-level courses in 2005 or 2006 is as yet undetermined, but Schwarz said he is 90 percent certain that the courses will be offered in sequence.

"Even if I have to teach them all myself," he added. BJX

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