

Enlivening the OM Classroom with Video Tours

by Scott E. Sampson, Brigham Young University

Operations management is a curricular topic that exhibits an interesting dichotomy.

First, it is the general topic that business students perhaps feel like they know the **least** about at the time they enter the core of a degree program. Although I do not have large sample data for this supposition, I do have the anecdotal evidence of starting numerous Introductory OM courses with the question, "Who here can share a description of what operations management is about?" With the exception of a few students who have actual work experience in "operations management," the general response is a poignant blank stare.

I think this response is somewhat unique in the set of traditional core business disciplines. Students know that finance has something to do with money, even before they open the cover of their new finance textbook. They know that marketing has to do with convincing people to buy things. They know that accounting has to do with counting things like money, assets, and receivables. They even know that organizational behavior has something to do with managing people. But how are they to know anything about operations management???

The second part of the dichotomy is that operations management is the general business topic with which incoming students have the **most** general experience. After my new students tell me they do not have practical experience with business operations, I sometimes describe the interesting encounter known as a restaurant. I tell them about how you can actually go to a place that has a process for providing customers with food based on individual product specifications. There are also useful organizations called banks, where you deposit your money and then use a piece of paper or plastic to get the money at various points of purchase. Then there are air-

lines, and theaters, and retailers. All of these are operations! (And very interesting ones at that!) By this time, the students are ready to change their claim of ignorance about operations management.

The point is that the students have a **wealth** of useful and interesting experiences with business operations, particularly in the service sector. That experience comes from daily living. Students also have access to many examples, good and bad, of service operations during the semester. Great benefits come from tying the experiences and examples into the models, theories, and methodologies of operations management. We can not only educate the students but also impress upon them the significance of operations management in all types of businesses.

Learning Experiences

There are a number of ways to make Operations Management a hands-on, experiential course for students. Many of us use various in-class exercises and simulations. For example, I use a Lego exercise that I got from Elliott Weiss at the Darden School. Students manufacture an item known as a "Gazogle" and attempt to apply good operations management to increase throughput, reduce inventories, assure quality, etc. Students enjoy it, and it leads to useful discussion. One weakness is that it is artificial, so I still need to convince students that real production situations would exhibit similar operating challenges and solutions.

What would be nice is to have a class experience that illustrated specific operations management concepts and at the same time emphasized the relevance to real world business situations. A field trip would meet this need. By taking students to an actual factory or service operations facility, they could study first-hand various operations phenomena. By meeting with managers, the students could learn how difficult



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it is to plan and execute effective operations, and how good technique can simplify the problems.

I find two major problems with field trips. First, time. My classes meet for 80 minutes. That is a bit short to get everyone to a business location and back. Individual students' class and work schedules make extending the time nigh unto impossible. The second problem is logistics. My core OM courses have about 50 students, which would require a bus or a lot of cars.

An alternate approach that avoids the time and logistics problems is to bring operations situations into the classroom. I do not mean physically relocate business to the room. I mean bring the business situations in using video recording technology.

Video Tours

Years ago I had studied a little about video editing technology, which I did not do anything with at the time. Then, a few years ago Prentice Hall hired me to help them produce some video segments on Service Operations Management (available with the new Hanna & Newman Operations Management text). That got me thinking about video production again.

I purchased a camcorder and had a student research available editing equipment and software. The student came back with a \$7,000 proposal, a bit much for something I would just be experimenting with. So, we looked further at what was available, and learned that I could get all I needed for about \$1,000, plus a computer. A SVHS-C camcorder with tripod and case cost about \$500. A video capture device with software cost about \$250. (I bought a second, and superior, capture card and software for about \$100.) I subsequently purchased advanced editing software called MediaStudio Pro (from www.ulead.com), at an academic price of a few hundred dollars, as I recall.

With my new equipment I set out to create videos on specific topics. Some of the videos were scripted, and others were impromptu. For example, I popped into our copy center when all of the employees were sitting around and recorded their explanations of why they were not busy copying (which illustrated Simultaneous Production and Consumption and Time-Perishable Capacity). I videotaped a discussion with a doughnut shop employee

who was explaining why they were all out of what I wanted just before the end of the day to illustrate perishable inventory planning. And, I interviewed various employees at the football stadium about their jobs to illustrate labor intensity.

Upon showing my videos in class, I surprisingly found that these unprofessional videos were one of the highlights of the course. They inspired class discussion on given topics while bringing real situations into the classroom. This led me to wonder if I could expand the scope and variety of the videos with student participation in the production.

For years I have assigned student teams to prepare presentations on class topics. Usually I would assign a topic and class session to each team at the start of the semester. I let the teams choose a company to feature in their presentation and have them contact the company for approval and for relevant data. The resulting presentations usually feature PowerPoint slides. I wondered how the presentations could be enhanced with video.

The first semester I tried this, I told the student teams that my video equipment was available if they wanted to use it for their presentations. The first team of the semester studied the pizza production process at a local restaurant. They did such a good job that they somewhat set a standard that the other teams must have felt obligated to meet. Generally, the videos were excellent!

Observations

I will show my appreciation for your having read this far by cutting right to some observations about letting student teams produce videos:

1. **Do not spend a lot of money on equipment.** My SVHS-C camcorder was more than adequate. The current DV camcorders are even better, and the price has come down dramatically. Plus, they can transfer the video to the computer over "firewire," which I understand is lightning fast. Many video capture cards or firewire cards come with basic video editing software—for no more than a few hundred dollars.
2. **Hire a video teaching assistant.** It turns out that the team producing that initial pizza production video included a team

member who (a) was interested in video editing, and (b) was looking for a part time job. The learning curve for the video editing software is very steep—it is frankly not rocket science. However, even a steep learning curve would have been very costly for 10 teams of students over the semester. So, once this video TA learned the software, he met with the subsequent teams to coach them on their projects.

3. **Require teams' script to be approved.** I provided students with some brief instructions about creating a "storyboard" that outlined the various shots and narration of the video. This had to be approved before any video shooting took place. Occasionally, a team will have highly developed creative propensities with little regard for academic content. The storyboard helps me assure that the video will be both creative and lead to the desired class discussion.
4. **Require teams to have written approval from the featured company.** I learned when I did the Prentice-Hall project that video producers get signed permission from **everyone** who is featured directly in a video. This includes the manager responsible for the facility. The permission slip states that the team can shoot video for educational use, and that the company or person will not be remunerated for the video. On a few occasions involving national chains, the students could not get approval without major corporate headaches. In such cases I advise them to pick another company (preferably locally owned and operated).
5. **Have a well-defined student team process.** I found the following effective: Three weeks before a team's presentation they had to meet with my video TA for a brief orientation. Two weeks before they had to turn in a copy of their proposed script. One week before they had to have their raw video shot and meet with the video TA for an initial editing session.
6. **Recognize the student effort and benefits.** My students reported on a survey that they preferred video presentations to standard PowerPoint presentations, but that it

See **INNOVATION AWARD FINALIST**, page 15

need to exert significant effort on improving your communication skills.

When a school wants to hire you, they usually telephone to extend the offer. Ask for the offer in writing. If something appears to be missing from the offer (such as moving expenses), ask for clarifications. Ask about other benefits that are of interest to you, such as health insurance and retirement plans. In addition, ask them when they need to hear your response—one to two weeks is considered reasonable. If you need longer than two weeks, explain why you need that time.

If you get multiple offers, you may want to consider developing specific selection criteria and weighting schemes to aid in your decision. However, a scientific method may not be enough. Prayer and searching your heart may be most helpful. Evaluate your fit with the institutions based on teaching and research philosophies, ability to make tenure, location, and your family "happiness" factor. If your family would be miserable with this decision, you will become miserable. You may also want to check out the cost of living index on Yahoo.com's finance housing market section.

If you aren't sure if you want to accept the position, you may ask for a second campus visit to further explore the opportunities at both the university and within the community. Let the school know some of your issues so that they can attempt to address them.

Don't start the negotiation process unless you are serious about accepting the offer. You are counter-offering when you begin asking for anything more than what was contained in the initial offer. They could say, "Yes, we will meet your needs." At that point, you have technically entered a

verbal contractual agreement. You won't be held in very high esteem if you then choose to back out of the agreement. Get everything in writing. Everything. Computer software and hardware seem to be something that is 'forgotten about' after the negotiation—so, get it in writing.

Some schools do not have much room for negotiation, especially if the faculty are unionized. Understand why they want (need) you. The hiring process is expensive and they would prefer not to go through it again. Who is your competition and how much room do you have for successful negotiation? Do they need a female or minority faculty member to increase their diversity? Are you the best person for the expertise that they want to gain? What will they do about their open position if you say no? (This may give you more leverage—some schools will leave the position open for the following year, some may offer the position to the next candidate if he or she is still on the job market, others may open the search for different levels of faculty.)

This is the time when you are in the strongest position to ask for salary or other special considerations that are important to you. However, on the other hand, be careful with your negotiation. One school rescinded the offer when the candidate asked for an 8 percent higher salary. The school felt that they were no longer in the same ballpark.

Some things to negotiate: (1) salary; (2) time release to complete dissertation; (3) number of courses to teach in years one through six; (4) number of course preparations in years one through six; (5) summer support; (6) travel dollars for conferences; (7) computer hardware and software; (8) hours of assistances for teaching and re-

search; (9) office location and furniture; (10) correspondence expenses; (11) parking (this can be a big issue on urban campuses); and (12) if in another country, permanent resident status. Again, get your negotiated items in writing.

At some point, you must either accept or reject the offer. When you've accepted the offer, congratulations. Contact the schools that you visited and let them know of your changed status and thank them for their consideration. Now finish that dissertation and start packing.

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INNOVATION AWARD FINALIST, from page 5

was more effort to prepare video presentations. Even though required effort did not seem to be prohibitive, it did warrant a sufficient portion of the students' grade to encourage them to do a good job. A typical team may spend three hours producing a script and storyboard, three hours shooting the raw video, and three hours editing the video. A PowerPoint presentation may take half that amount of time to prepare.

Epilogue

I continue to make video an optional format for student team presentations. I have found that some teams produce videos without using my equipment, and that the availability of video editing software and the knowledge of how to use it appears to be increasing. My guess is that the day will

come when including edited video in presentations will be as common as using PowerPoint slides is today. That is further motivation for us as instructors to learn about the technology. ■