



THE VIRTUOUS ORGANIZATION INITIATIVE

LEARN-DO-BECOME PROPOSAL

BYU | MARRIOTT SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

SUBMITTED JUNE 9, 2020

PROPOSAL FOR LEARN-DO-BECOME DESIGNATION: VIRTUOUS ORGANIZATIONS INITIATIVE

SUBMITTED BY EVA WITESMAN (PRINCIPAL), JILL PIAGITELLI, AND ALYSSA CLARK

Abstract

The purpose of this proposal is to request that the Virtuous Organizations Initiative, housed within BYU Marriott, be granted a Learn-Do-Become designation. This proposal will describe the motivation for the Virtuous Organizations Initiative, its content and methodology, and describe why it is a strong candidate for the Learn-Do-Become designation.

Background: The Evolution of the Roles and Responsibilities of Business

At a conference in December 2019, Dean Madrian said, "it is both timely and important to reevaluate the roles and responsibilities of business in society." As markets have grown and developed over time, the function of business in society has evolved. With recent movements focused on building businesses with purpose, the corporate world has entered into a new phase of values-driven development. This message was amplified by the Business Roundtable's August 2019 revised Statement on the Purpose of the Corporation which moved away from a shareholder primacy model toward a consideration of all stakeholders. In this statement, they declared their commitment to customers, employees, suppliers, their communities, and shareholders. The creation of social value through corporations has taken center-stage in the current conversation around the purpose and sustainability of business.

Because of this shift in the business landscape, a demand for principles and practices in virtuous organizational strategy has emerged. The Virtuous Organizations Initiative at BYU is an outward-facing, student-centered approach to meeting this demand. By focusing on both problem-based and project-based learning activities, the initiative meets learning objectives that center on the potential social benefit of business activities and provides knowledge, consulting, networking experiences, and other deliverables to outside entities.

The Virtuous Organizations Initiative In Brief

The Virtuous Organizations Initiative builds on an already rich set of experiential opportunities within BYU Marriott, with multiple active pedagogies that include outward-facing, project-based learning. The initiative includes paid student staff (who help to manage both the class and the research endeavors of the initiative) and problem-based learning (in a think tank type environment) with an element of external-facing project-based learning through contractual, consultative work similar to other Learn-Do-Become initiatives at BYU Marriott.

The Virtuous Organizations Initiative uses a co-creative teaching pedagogy in which the students and instructor co-design the course at the outset of each new semester. Following an onboarding period (during which students are oriented to the purpose of the initiative, past student work, and the state of knowledge and ideation within the initiative), the students and instructor collaborate on the design of a problem-based contribution to be made by the cohort. In all cases, as a requirement, this problem-based contribution must include an outward-facing component that involves outside stakeholders (generally business leaders). In some cases, this has included contractual project-based work with community partners. We anticipate an increasingly ambitious and diverse set of projects as the initiative continues, including those that may ultimately include fee-based work, services, or products for stakeholders outside the university.

In a deep mentoring environment, paid student staff in the Virtuous Organizations Initiative have functioned as project managers, research assistants with direct faculty mentorship, and teaching assistants to help supervise and train students enrolled in the course. These students have coordinated independent and collective efforts to explore new research avenues and connect the thought and conversations directly to practitioners through events, gatherings, presentations, and individual interviews.

The initiative has also hosted four cohorts of students enrolled in the Creating the Virtuous Organization course over the last two years. The immersive co-creative methodology uses a flat organizational structure within an experientially designed class to maximize the skills, talents, and curiosities of each student. Each semester, we, as instructors and students, co-design the interaction we want to have with the world of practice, as we identify what we want to learn, and the new thought we want to create and bring to the world. The ambiguity and cross-disciplinary nature of the course and corresponding projects has promoted unique creativity from students and instructors. This methodology, intentionally designed as an inspiring learning initiative, has led to hands-on and directly applied projects. As a result, so far our cohorts have produced the following:

Fall 2018 | The pilot class, consisting of MPA and MBA students, worked to identify and articulate nine core principles of a virtuous organization that ultimately served as chapters for a book draft. These chapters were written by the students and then distributed to 50 social impact thought leaders, from companies like Goldman Sachs, Cotopaxi, OC Tanner, Rakuten, and Google Fiber. These practitioners then came to campus for a half day event, where they were able to directly ask questions and give feedback to the students about the content of their chapters and real-world implementation.

Winter 2019 | This second class, a mix of graduate and undergraduate students, consisted of a lecture series and a lab. The lecture series was co-led by Drs. Eva Wiltesman and David Krzyscynski drawing from their respective expertise in evidence-based innovation and business strategy. The class used the lab time to refine understanding of key definitions and then used those definitions to conduct and code interviews with more than 50 local companies regarding their corporate social responsibility practices, and to write analyses of 15 global companies.

Fall 2019 | The third class involved lectures led by four high profile consultants sharing how they frame their work in nonprofit, government, and corporate consulting settings. Students shaped material from those lectures into their own project-based consulting approaches, and worked with employees from three local companies representing branding, personal wellness, and software industries. The students created, developed, and tested assessment and consultation tools while providing active consultation to the partner businesses. The projects focused on internal diversity and inclusion initiatives, aligning corporate social responsibility with signature strengths, and embedding mission consciousness in marketing.

Winter 2020 | The fourth class focused on designing two convenings: one for business leaders and one for students. The first group planned a gathering of Utah leaders to have a conversation on corporations and social change, mixing in academics, business executives, social responsibility leaders, and the Virtuous Organizations team. When COVID19 changed the plans for convening, the group quickly pivoted to creating a database that tracked 600 company responses to the pandemic. The second group of students used human-centered design principles to shape a university-wide conference for future young professionals. Attendees would understand and utilize personal signature strengths to pursue careers that provide a stable income and meet broader societal meaning and purpose. This team moved the conference planning into a future conference toolkit to be utilized by others.

In addition to our major projects each semester, we used problem-centered learning approaches to develop hundreds of pages of shared work product, all of which is being moved into a website to make the content more accessible to the public. This co-creative teaching style requires deep knowledge of each student and a collective mission and vision. We push each other hard, holding one another accountable for deep exploration. It's simultaneously a think tank, a network, and a paradigm.

We would more deeply engage a broader set of faculty by:

- Using their academic work as a basis for interaction with local businesses, mining it for practical application and expert insight.
- Creating opportunities to teach and lead workshops with students and business professionals.
- Developing a panel of businesses that can be used to gather qualitative and quantitative data in real time.

We would benefit BYU Marriott by:

- Drawing businesses to campus that may potentially recruit from BYU Marriott with a Virtuous Organizations lens in mind.
- Enhancing the reputation of BYU Marriott as a champion of socially responsible business practice, particularly to potential students.
- Positioning BYU Marriott as highly involved in training students with not just the skills of modern business, but able to apply values uniquely expected from a school affiliated with the Church of Jesus Christ, to the benefit of a complex modern world.
- Building a network of high trust relationships with deeply engaged Virtuous Organizations alumni, including those from our early cohorts who are now located in businesses such as Amazon, Boeing, Intel, and McKinsey, who want to stay involved as mentors and contributors.

Conclusion

The Virtuous Organizations Initiative works best with engaging regularly and rigorously with outside organizations. We realize that care must be taken to avoid oversaturating the same organizations with requests or conflicting work. Learn-Do-Become would help us ensure awareness within the college at the least, and ideally coordination and cooperation. Working more closely with the other Learn-Do-Become experiences to coordinate outside stakeholder engagement could help in building relationships with key mentors and organizations.

We would be excited to contribute to the development of quality metrics for partners and for students and contribute to the BYU Marriott database of external partners. We would benefit greatly from awareness of existing partners and mentors who may be particularly well-suited for our niche interest. In all cases, it would be helpful to be supported in outreach efforts, using approved college and university terms of engagement, making the best matches with stakeholders, and reporting stakeholder satisfaction to a common body. Our commitment is to create high-quality experiences for students, impactful deliverables for outside organizations, and strong relationships at BYU Marriott. We would hope by receiving the Learn-Do-Become designation, we could elevate the work being done by the current Virtuous Organizations Initiative by both utilizing and contributing to the processes used within BYU Marriott for project-based learning.