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Teaching and Learning Centre Case Studies

Developing real-world experience



For many students, experience in ‘the real world’ is one of the skills that is hardest to attain. Yet, there is clear evidence that employers find this a very desirable commodity. ST327 Market Research: An Integrated Approach is a third-year elective course popular among Management and Business Mathematics and Statistics students at LSE, and is also taken as an outside option by students on a range of degree programmes.

The course is a mix of applied statistics, as well as aspects of qualitative and quantitative research methods, culminating in a capstone case study exercise and final exam. With students being in their final year and the real world of work looming on the horizon, the course gives participants the opportunity to develop their commercial acumen; teamwork and communication skills; presentation delivery, and report writing. A rather unusual list for a statistics course!

Students are assigned to groups, usually of five, pre-determined to ensure a mix of disciplinary backgrounds. At a briefing session in November groups are told about the case study requirements. Guest teacher in the Department, LSE alumnus and current Analytics Director for Populus Karsten Shaw leads on the case study component, with Dr James Abdey delivering

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the lectures and setting the exam. Karsten's 20+ years of experience in market research brings authentic real-world expertise to the exercise.

Groups act as a market research agency, delivering a 20-minute presentation as if being delivered to the 'client'. This begins with choosing a client and generating a research brief to which the group, as the market research agency, will respond. Throughout there is an emphasis on real-world applicability and relevance, hence each group must think of up to five business, organisational or strategic objectives - for example, market demand for a new product; concerns about reputational damage, or disruption within the industry. In addition, up to five research aims are required. These form specific goals which a market research project would help address.

Groups are free to choose their 'client', although to sustain realism they are asked to select a real company or organisation such as a retailer, manufacturer, media agency, government department, charity or social media company. Recent examples have included companies such as Apple, British Airways, Harrods, Nespresso, Tesla, Transport for London, and even the NHS. To allow maximum flexibility, groups are free to make any assumptions - as long as they are realistic and reasonable!

Having completed the research brief, groups embark on a period of fieldwork in order to collect some primary data as part of a pilot sample. This could be through face-to-face interviews, focus groups, or other relevant techniques. Results from this exploratory research are then fed into their questionnaire design upon which their (hypothetical) large-scale survey will be based, along with proposed multivariate analytical techniques which could then be applied. Throughout all this, students are encouraged to stay aware of the commercial value of any research findings and insights.

The group work concludes over two evenings of presentations late in Lent term where groups present in front of their peers. Each group taking turns to act as the client for a presenting group, leading a five-minute question and answer section following each presentation. As with any group work, free-riding can occur. So, it is recommended that group members clearly demarcate and divide up tasks equally. The effective distribution of responsibilities across the group is one of the transferable skills the task hopes to develop.

Having run for several years now, the case study is a key component of the course, allowing students to put into practice what they learn in lectures. Graduates will certainly have to work in groups in the workplace, so managing different personalities and work ethics is an invaluable soft skill and one the case study seeks to build. Not only is this exciting course valuable in

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developing a useful skill set, students enjoy the learning experience. One student reported that they "found the project amazing" and another felt that the multi-disciplinary approach helped them develop their teamwork skills: "I really like group allocations with a number of degrees making each group."

Developing courses that are relevant, engaging and academic is a real talent but ST327 manages to combine the skills of academia with the drive for employability in a purposeful and supportive way. One 2016 graduate of the course now works in the market research industry, so those taking the course can even have their future careers defined by it!

If you are interested in exploring this kind of student learning, why not [contact the LSE Teaching and Learning Centre and get the initial advice of your departmental adviser?](#) You may also wish [to apply for funding through the Teaching and Learning Development Fund](#).