“THE ART OF WAR” LEARNING COMMUNITY: The Book that Inspired a Teaching Method

The Master of Business Administration and Master of Science in Management Information Systems (M.B.A./M.S.M.I.S.) programs in Asia were started in response to the economic boom in the early 2000s that created a demand for Western-based business programs to prepare students for the global economy. Benedictine University now has 25 faculty members teaching in China and Vietnam.

Thanks to federal Title VI support, the Teacher Certification for Graduate Business program was created to promote the M.B.A./M.S.M.I.S. learning community in the quest for teaching excellence. The program has four instructional modules based on the top winning factors of “bing fa” (兵法) better known in the Western world as “The Art of War” written by Sun Tzu, a brilliant Chinese military strategist in 500 B.C. In “The Art of War,” Sun Tzu describes five factors to be considered when seeking to determine victory of the battlefield. The five factors are philosophy, climate, timing, leadership and military methods (Wong 0. 2008. “Pivotal Strategies for the Educational Leader: The Importance of Sun Tzu’s ‘The Art of War.’” Rowman and Littlefield Education). In the Teacher Certification for Graduate Business programs for the Asian classrooms, the factors are reconfigured and reinterpreted as the moral purpose, the timing, the location, the professor and the methods executed by the professor.

Here are three of “The Art of War” strategies and their classroom applications. Sun Tzu said, “Know yourself and know your enemy. You will be safe in every battle. You may know yourself but not know the enemy. You will then lose one battle for every one you win. You may not know yourself or the enemy. You will then lose every battle.” Teaching is more than just presenting a subject matter knowledgeably. The effective teacher needs to know his strengths, weaknesses, as well as the learning styles of the students. Sun Tzu said, “You can speak, but you will not be heard. You must use gongs and drums. You cannot really see your forces just by looking. You must use banners and flags. You must master gongs, drums, banners and flags.”

Communication in the classroom is crucial. The teacher teaches, the student learns and that is communication. Interestingly, there are many ways to teach. As teachers, we must use a variety of teaching strategies to get the students engaged. Sun Tzu said, “Place people as a single unit where they can all see and hear. You must unite them as one. Then the brave cannot advance alone. The fearful cannot withdraw alone.” Learning in groups is one effective strategy when we teach students with different learning abilities. Collaborative learning as in class projects, promotes learning as a group, leaving no student behind.

The Teacher Certification for Graduate Business programs with a focus in the Asian classroom is a complex undertaking. It would not have been possible without the collaborative efforts from Benedictine’s own learning community crossing the Business, Education, Core/Language and Literature departments. This program truly represents a learning community model at the University.

—Ovid K. Wong, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Education

$55,000 Grant Trains Students as Election Judges

Benedictine’s Center for Civic Leadership and Public Service (CCLPS) was awarded a $55,385 grant for 2010-2011 from the U.S. Election Assistance Commission to recruit and train college students to become election judges and poll workers.

The grant, made available under the Help America Vote Act program, helps fight the increasing shortage of election judges across the state and country. The CCLPS partnered with the DuPage County Election Commission to recruit, train and certify Benedictine students and other local college students as election judges.

The Political Science department offered a seminar course in the fall for students participating in the program who wanted to receive college credit. The seminar helped students gain a contextual understanding of the election process and good citizenship. In addition, other courses across campus were adapted to include similar content.

Students who were not interested in college credit were still able to become an election judge by completing an online course. The only requirement for this course is that the participant be a registered voter and U.S. citizen. A person only needs to be certified as an election judge once.

Once students completed the online course, they were certified as an election judge and were assigned to a polling precinct for Election Day.