

## Small Business Institute Employs Real World Learning

A commitment to "reality-based" education with healthy competitiveness among students is the driving force behind the Small Business Institute at UNCW. Established on campus in 1976, SBI teaches students to analyze the problem areas of an existing business or the feasibility of starting a new business.

"We've assisted over 100 businesses within a 60-mile sweep of Wilmington," said Steve Harper, director of the institute and a professor of management in the Cameron School of Business Administration. According to Harper, students participating in SBI learn things they can't learn from a book.

Governed by the U.S. Small Business Administration, SBI is one of many such contracted programs with business schools throughout the country. The institute serves as an extension of the SBA and provides management assistance at the local level.

Clients eligible for assistance from UNCW's program must live in Brunswick, Pender or New Hanover counties. Harper interviews each applicant to determine the extent of their needs and the nature of their business to decide whether the institute can provide assistance. He then assembles case portfolios of the selected businesses.

Teams of students who have been taught the fundamentals of running a business are paired with cases that match their particular interests. The majority of businesses requesting assistance are in the retail, service, or

manufacturing sectors.

The teams meet with their clients and identify several areas of the existing or proposed business to analyze. This often includes marketing strategies, accounting and computer systems, inventory analysis, or research and development. Once a plan is devised, it is forwarded to the Small Business Administration for approval.

The analytical process is a challenging one. The students determine what aspects of the business must be researched and identify where they get the information, said Harper. This method improves their diagnostic skills as well as solution skills. "Part of the intention of the course is having the students teach themselves," he said.

Computers play a major role in this problem solving. Software programs that simulate business situations allow the students to make sensitive analytical decisions about such matters as borrowing money or site location. "The computer simulation is very dynamic and sophisticated. The students learn how changing one component affects the other elements in a business. They're always anxious to see what impact their decisions have," said Harper. "It's all a part of the students' personal development and confidence building."

The students meet with their clients from six to 20 times in a 10-week period. At the end of the semester, they must submit a comprehensive report of their findings to the client, Harper, and the SBA.

The government examines each report to determine if the teams are giving the appropriate level of assistance. The client reviews the team's report to see if it meets with their level of expectation. And Harper grades the reports on accuracy and content.

According to Harper, the clients and the federal government have been impressed with the work of the students. "I definitely think they're one of our best programs," said Eileen Mulroony, SBA business development specialist and coordinator of SBI. "The UNCW students have consistently conducted thorough and in-depth feasibility studies of new businesses and have found practical solutions for problems of existing businesses."

The beauty of the Small Business Institute is that students are able to contribute something to the community. And they learn to apply business theory. "When they see the relevance of what they're doing they get excited," said Harper. "Projects like these make education tangible. The best way to learn, is to learn by doing."



Steve Harper

## Business Students Act as Consultants



Bob Clopper

Student consultants working through SBI offer advice to business owners that could mean the difference between financial ruin or raging success. The students' level of commitment is exceptional. They pride themselves on their accuracy and resourcefulness.

"It was a great experience because we met with a real-life client and represented the university in a certain capacity," said Bob Clopper, a student taking small business management last semester and a participant in SBI.

Clopper and his two teammates worked with a client who wanted to establish a retail business geared towards the teen-age market. The client was interested in targeting the market, analyzing a suitable location for the business, establishing vendor relations, and evaluating the competition. The students researched these areas and presented their client with possible solutions. They also worked up promotions and pricing strategies, capital requirements, and financial projections. The end result was a comprehensive plan that could be presented to a financial institution for loan purposes.

"The client was ecstatic about the results. It far exceeded her expectations," said Clopper.

The project took approximately 150 student hours to complete. "It was helpful working as a group. We each had a certain part," said Clopper. "And reports like this give clients a realistic view of what they're up against."

nology, and supply a real-world business environment for students. We have benefited from the market information supplied by students and we look forward to continuing class projects with UNCW."

Beth Lyng, student intern with Dove

## Students Intern at Computer Corp.

UNCW and Dove Computer Corporation of Wilmington teamed up to conduct a nationwide survey of authorized Apple computer retailers. The recently completed six-month survey helped Dove obtain significant data on the FAX modem market and it offered 55 marketing research students a broader learning environment.

A FAX modem is a device installed in a computer that allows the user to send a document directly to a receiving computer, eliminating the need for a FAX machine. The FAX modem also allows the receiver to review the faxed message on the computer screen to determine whether or not to print it. A major advantage of the Dove FAX modem is that it allows the user to do other tasks while faxed messages are

being transmitted and received. This device also makes it possible to send one message to hundreds of personal computers without having to physically FAX them.

"The study revealed a tremendous market for a low cost, high speed FAX modem that allows users to send and receive high quality text and graphics," said Vincent Howe, assistant professor of marketing research at UNCW. "Previous attempts to penetrate this market have failed because past products have been too costly, too slow, and too unreliable."

Patrick J. Dane, Dove's vice president of sales, noted that over 1,000 Apple retailers were contacted and 564 were extensively interviewed. "We believe that the marketing re-

search students' study is the most extensive one to date of the fax modem market," he said.

As a result of the market survey project, Dove Computer and UNCW have committed to work together to provide students with additional opportunities. Dove has agreed to supply internship opportunities, help direct independent studies, and supply information for class projects. In addition, Dove will provide the Cameron School of Business Administration with one Macintosh computer each semester to assist in developing students' computer skills.

Dane stated that the relationship with UNCW is beneficial to both parties. "Dove is able to provide the university with additional computer tech-