

2008 – 2010 CATL Scholar Application
Center for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning

Application due: October 1, 2007 (5 p.m.)

Please submit a paper copy of the signed cover sheet to Peter Felten, Belk Pavilion 101 (CB 2610).

Cover Sheet

| | |
|---|---|
| Your name | Chris Leupold |
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| School/College | Elon College of Arts & Sciences |
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Title of proposed project: **Transformative Learning in Human Resource
Management: A Multi-Unit Experiential Approach to
Teaching Staffing and Selection**

Short abstract of the project (<100 words):

Virtually every organization employs standardized selection systems when evaluating job candidates, typically employing a variety of data sources. As scoring these instruments are complex and the costs of a bad hire are often great, organizations routinely invest tremendous resources in training HR professionals to evaluate and synthesize applicant performance to ensure optimal decisions. This project proposes the development of a multi-stepped experiential exercise for students to take an active role in managing a selection process and evaluating ‘live’ candidate data. Such a program would provide students with real-time, hands-on experience in a manner that even few Fortune 500 companies have.

Five-year history of grants awarded to you by Elon’s FR&D Committee (list date and nature of each grant): **None**

Have you been awarded, or applied for, financial or other support (reassigned time from Elon, external grant funding, etc.) during the time that you would be a CATL Scholar (2008-10 academic years)?

I am currently scheduled to receive a reassigned time course release during the 2009-2010 academic year. However, were I selected to be a CATL Scholar I would switch that

reassigned time with a colleague for one at a later date (I have spoken about this with my Department Chair, who supports this plan).

Department chair's comments on this proposal:

Chair's Signature

Dean's comments on this proposal:

Dean's Signature

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**Transformative Learning in Human Resource Management: A Multi-Unit
Experiential Approach to Teaching Staffing and Selection**

Overview of Project

The ultimate purpose of this proposal is to design a multi-stepped, experientially-based, comprehensive human resources (HR)-based series of simulations that will afford students the opportunity to actively apply the concepts and knowledge they currently learn to a ‘real-life’ setting that they all are likely to encounter – the employment hiring process. Currently, students in my Industrial/Organizational (I/O) Psychology (PSY 363) course cover core modules on selection systems, or the methods which one may use to identify and hire the best candidate from an applicant pool for a given job. At present, we discuss the different techniques and methodologies used, as well how well they meet the standard criteria of cost, validity, and practicality. I typically spend relatively more time on this topic as I believe that it can directly help students as they begin their careers. First, having such knowledge will better prepare them for when they as job candidates go through these processes, in which they will likely all participate in interviews, various tests, and simulations. Second, as I advise many Arts and Sciences majors, the field of HR offers itself as a great career option to a wide array of majors. Because the field is so varied and flexible, HR departments are becoming increasingly more willing to hire individuals with strong liberal arts backgrounds whom they are willing to teach the fundamentals once on the job.

In noting their relevance to teaching students about HR, Adkins (2005) stated, “...applied exercises give students an opportunity to refine their knowledge and skills in a setting where the

costs of an error are lower than in the real world” (p. 226). The reality is that in the real-world the costs of making a poor hiring decision can be tremendous and have serious consequences for the organization as a whole (Muchinsky, 2007; Schippmann, 1999). To combat this, organizations invest literally millions of dollars training supervisors and HR personnel how to effectively navigate through the hiring process in order to ensure the best hiring outcomes. In short, I propose to create such a learning experience that would require students to assume the role of a HR hiring manager and actively manage a pool of candidates and ultimately select the one who is the best fit for a target job.

Briefly, in devising this program I would create roughly 12 ‘candidates,’ one of which each student would ultimately select as the hire for an open position. The position would be one with which students already have a good deal of familiarity, and the candidates would be varied in their demographics, skill sets, work styles, and experiences. For each candidate, I would create a cover letter and resume; the students would receive all of this preliminary information as would be the case in a real hiring situation. From there, each student would be required to identify a pool of candidates (perhaps 5) of his choosing for further assessment. For these candidates, additional applicant information would be provided, such as cognitive ability test scores and personality inventories. While the aforementioned sources of data offer some insight into a candidate, research consistently shows that having observable behavioral data greatly adds to the efficacy of a selection process (Muchinsky, 2007). For this project, I would create a number of videotaped performances of the candidates engaging in different assessment exercises. These would include a behaviorally-based structured interview, a leaderless group discussion, a role-play, and an in-basket; all of which are commonly used by organizations in the hiring process and already discussed in my course. Students would then observe their candidates’ performances and provide ratings on pre-determined competencies using standardized scoring guides, just as they would in a real organization. Students

are currently taught about these techniques and processes in both my PSY 363 course and other BUS courses; however, this project would enable students to actually evaluate and integrate actual candidate information to arrive at a final hiring decision. This project would also require them to demonstrate critical thinking skills (i.e., evaluating alternatives and making determinations about candidate performance and fit with the job); project management skills (i.e., managing and coordinating the sequence of numerous activities and managing a great deal of integrated data); report writing skills (i.e., preparing a summary report of candidates with supporting rationale); and even possibly presentation skills (i.e., presenting and justifying hiring decisions to an audience); exactly as all are done in every Fortune 500 HR department. Of course, students would still receive the same classroom instruction on all facets of the program; this program would simply supplement it and be done primarily outside of class according to a set timeline with various due dates. However, elements of program could be brought in the classroom, such as having students actually engage in the assessment activities before watching the videos so that they might experience what it is like being the applicant; this would be a very valuable experience as student embark on professional employment.

As Epstein (1994) noted, “experientially derived knowledge is often more compelling and more likely to influence behavior than is abstract knowledge” (p. 711). Perhaps this is nowhere truer than when extrapolating discipline-based knowledge to a work setting. However, a relative dearth of such experiences exists for students, particularly the undergraduate level. A review of the literature found only one instance of any program of a similar type geared towards teaching HR. Adkins (2005) created an exercise that afforded students a real-time application of how the staffing process works. However, the current proposal is on a considerably much grander scale than Adkins’ (2005) in that it includes the interpretation and evaluation of more assessment tools and, most importantly, includes actual observable applicant behavior as opposed to just paper data. This would be a truly

cutting edge approach to undergraduate learning, and even for Fortune 500 HR departments who are rarely afforded the depth of hands-on training that this project proposes. The only venue in which I have seen such depth is in consulting firms' training of professional assessors whom they hire out to organizations seeking help in making hiring decisions.

Student Involvement

Students, from psychology as well as from other academic disciplines, will be involved in virtually all phases of the project, as outlined below:

Instrument Design: I anticipate having at least three students (taking PSY 499) work with me initially to develop the background information for the target job (i.e., a strategic performance model, which is by itself a cutting-edge approach in HR to defining jobs and their requirements); create applicants' assessment data on all of the selection tools (including preparing scripts for video-based performance); and generating behavioral anchors and performance standards for scoring guides for each of those tools. These students would already have some initial familiarity with the selection tools and processes (i.e., already taken PSY 363, BUS 303, or BUS 365), and through this phase of the project would have a complete hands-on experience of the front-end work that would rival that of any Fortune 500 HR professional.

Video Production: Next, I would likely involve ten to twelve other students who would serve as the actors in the video simulations. These students would likely come from the Performing Arts department, and would act out the scripts generated in the previous phase. In addition, I would employ a senior-level student(s) from Communications to create and edit the videos to give it a professional look. For these students, this project would provide them with the opportunity to create something that could be highlighted on a resume or professional portfolio.

Web/Data Site Construction: Next, I would likely seek the help of a student(s) from Computing Sciences who could help create a website that stored all of the data (i.e., resumes, videos, etc.) that

students would need to access. HR departments typically have integrated systems to manage all of their employment data. This is a critical aspect of the project, as students' ability to easily retrieve requested data will be a major criterion for success. Again, the student helping in this phase could highlight this work on a resume or professional portfolio.

Data Management: Once I were ready to roll out the program to my PSY 363 course, I would recruit another student to serve as a TA to help manage all of the data around students' activities and ratings. In addition, this student would help design instruments for gathering student feedback on the project itself (i.e., satisfaction with, ease of use, enhancement of learning, etc.) as well as gather and analyze the data. This would provide not only a research opportunity, but also a legitimate human resource data management endeavor that one would have in a real organization.

Publication: I believe that this project would offer multiple presentation and publishing opportunities, and students would be fully involved (depending on which piece of the project they worked on) in preparing and presenting manuscripts at conferences and in journals.

Assessment of Proposed Project Outcomes:

This program would be assessed in a number of ways to ensure that it met the four criteria ideally used in any training program:

Reaction Criteria – Student Feedback: At the end of the semester, surveys and focus groups would be conducted to gather reactionary information on 1) their satisfaction with program; 2) its ease of use; and 3) how it could be improved. While this particular type of data is more reactionary rather than indicative of learning, I believe that it is still important to get this feedback from students as would be done with any client organization.

Knowledge Criteria – Student Mastery of Terms and Concepts: Currently this type of information is already being assessed through exams (i.e., definitions, short answer applications, etc.). However,

the knowledge and learnings around the actual *management* of the process would be valuable to assess. In addition, simply going through the process itself would likely increase conceptual understanding of the various elements (i.e., the advantages and disadvantages of each selection tool, likely problems in data collection, etc.). All such data could be gathered through surveys or reflective papers.

Performance Criteria – Student Ability to Perform a Thorough and Accurate Assessment: This would be the most important measurable – after the program, how well can students observe, code, and integrate various data points to arrive at an optimal hiring decisions? This could be determined in a couple of ways. First, a component of a final exam could require students to interpret and assess another candidate’s data (perhaps I would have information for an extra candidate generated, and essentially save it for the final exam; I could rotate this candidate among the set of candidates each year). I could establish ‘expert ratings’ on the various elements and overall assessment on the basis of scores provided by me and/or faculty from the LSB (or possibly even Human Resources). Also, I could perhaps create mini performance assessments during the first or second year (didn’t go through the program), and compare that data with that collected from students who did go through it. Finally, I could do a pre- and post-test with the students before and after going through the program. However, in all of these assessment models, data that is strictly performance-based would be gathered.

Personal Impact and Broader Implications of Project:

Of all the fields within psychology, I/O psychology is perhaps the most applied in nature. Prior to my arrival at Elon, my entire career had been spent working in and consulting to corporations’ HR departments. From those standpoints, I have a clear understanding of how important are the theoretical understandings of selection systems and awareness of tools. However,

more importantly, I have had an opportunity to see first-hand that even the deepest levels of knowledge in these areas mean little if an organization is not able to effectively and appropriately implement them. As a consultant, one of the most personally rewarding engagements for me was not just developing a selection system, but training and helping the organization become proficient in employing it in order to yield the maximum benefits of it. This personal passion, in addition to having experience and expertise in both developing and implementing selection, for me serves as a unique opportunity for how I can offer students the best and most comprehensive learning experience. My personal goal is to be recognized as one of the most innovative professors within my field – I believe I have the academic and applied background that can be leveraged in this endeavor. What is lacking right now is simply the time and resources to build such a program. In short, being a CATL scholar would enable me achieve something that I have not seen anyone else in my field do for undergraduate education.

From a scholarship perspective, this project would be very appealing to a variety of publication outlets. The journal *Teaching of Psychology* routinely publishes articles on new approaches to teaching I/O. However, most all of them focus on only a single exercise that focuses on a single selection tool (e.g., a single exercise employee ethics, Carkenord, 1996; a single exercise on scoring an in-basket, Kottke, 1988). Last year my colleagues (including two student authors) and I published a lead article in a trade journal that recounted a two-year applied project we conducted at Elon to develop a strategic performance model and behaviorally-based interview guide, that is currently used by Elon Admissions to hire tour guides. The proposed project is on a much grander scale, both in terms of practical outcomes and integrated teaching/learning opportunities. As such, I believe it would receive interest from both professional research and applied journals, as well as teaching ones in both psychology and business arenas.

Outside of the PSY 363 class for which it would be initially designed, elements of the final product could be used in other courses on campus. Certain components (i.e., leaderless group discussion, personality profiles, interviews) would be directly applicable to Psychology of Leadership (PSY 368), and virtually all of it would be applicable to Introduction to Managing (BUS 303) and Human Resource Management (BUS 365), both of which have content similar to PSY 363. A group of Elon students are currently trying to establish a student chapter of the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) on campus, and there has been some informal discussion of perhaps creating a HR Management minor. This project could potentially offer students from both constituencies an opportunity to gain applied experience. Furthermore, this project could also potentially serve another non-academic function on campus – Elon’s Department of Human Resources. HR personnel were typically my target audience in this type of consulting endeavor, as they are usually the front line of an organization’s hiring practices. They, or even other hiring committees on campus could potentially use these tools for training and calibration of ratings for any candidate.

Finally, I believe this project would be marketable to other universities, and possibly even employers. From my consulting days, I have never seen an organization let alone university attempt to have training in more than one or two assessment techniques accompanied by actual video-based performance. This program would offer itself as a complete package for selection training. Were I to create a similar program for an organization, I estimate that the cost would be upwards of \$50,000. Much of that cost would come in the form of a consultant’s billing rate; however, given I would be the ‘consultant’ we would have the opportunity to do it in the parameters of a CATL Scholar.

Proposed Project Timeline and Budget

Below is a brief outline of time timing and costs associated with this project:

| | <u>Activity</u> | <u>Budget</u> |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Fall 2008 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create initial performance model for target position (i.e., identify work activities, related competencies, etc.) • Create performance standards and behavioral anchors • Begin creating selection tools (interview guide, resumes) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$500 (initial supplies, i.e., binders, paper, copying, etc.) |
| Spring 2009 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue creating selection tools, including writing scripts for role-play performances) | |
| Fall 2009 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create videos for simulations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$2000 (materials, student stipends to serve as actors and create videos) |
| Spring 2010 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create website to house all documents, materials, and videos | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$500 (student stipend to design and manage web site) |
| Fall 2010 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roll out simulation to PSY 363 class • Submit manuscripts for conference presentations and publications | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • \$1000 (travel) |

References

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- Muchinsky, P.M. (2007). *Psychology applied to work* (8th ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Schippmann, J.S. (1999). *Strategic job modeling*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.