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MB 107 presentations (Spring 2010 edition) scheduled Friday



Students in MB 107 prepare to present

At the end of each semester, the students in MB 107, Skidmore's cornerstone course in business and management, eagerly step up to a real-life business challenge like the one they will face this Friday: "As aspiring young executives working for the Gucci Group, your team must formulate a comprehensive strategic plan and a set of action steps that will enable the firm to meet its financial and strategic objectives. Your team of junior executives will present its strategic recommendations at the designated time to representatives of Gucci's senior management at the Courtyard Marriot on Friday, April 30. Your presentation (not to exceed 25 minutes) will be followed by questions from the executives."

Formally pitching an original business project plan to real-life executives is an experience

that many Skidmore students and alumni share, given that the course attracts students from disciplines as varied as history, theater, dance, and environmental studies. Over the years, MB 107 student teams have applied Skidmore's signature creative thought to such major U.S. companies as RIM, Amazon, American Express, and The Gap; this semester, they studied Apple, Nintendo, American Express, KIPP, Singapore Airlines, and IKEA.

Like their predecessors in the 25-year-old course, this semester's 80 MB 107 enrollees have been preparing for the executive presentations ever since class started in January. For starters, it was up to them to define the company's actual issues and challenges, explains Skidmore business professor Timothy Harper, who coordinates the MB 107 presentations. Then the students team-tackled one or more of that company's business problems. They conducted extensive research to discern opportunities, problems, and challenges, and considered various options—expansions, acquisitions, joint ventures, marketing, and brand development—to come up with a business plan that would be sound enough and bold enough to "contribute 90 million Euros in operating income by 2014," as the assignment demands.

This Friday, their work will be put to the test when this semester's MB 107 cohort, neatly turned out in business attire, starts the day with a 7:15 a.m. executive breakfast, in the company of their business-major student "coaches" and the 20 business owners and executives from Saratoga Springs, Skidmore alumni and parents, who volunteer to serve as "representatives of Gucci senior management." Beginning at 8:30 a.m., students will begin to deliver their hour-long team presentations, with contributions from each team member conveyed in PowerPoint and followed by 15 minutes of tough and detailed questions from their judges. The success of each team's number-crunching, brainstorming, and bottom-lining will be immediately apparent—right on the spot, the judges hand out grades (which account for 25 percent of each student's course grade) for each presentation.

A high point of this Friday's presentation will be the luncheon keynote speech, delivered by financial analyst Gail Dudack, founder and managing partner of Dudack Research Group, a New York City-based investment research firm. A Skidmore parent, member of the College's Class of 1970, and an acknowledged expert in investment research, technical analysis, fiscal forecasting, and market strategy, Dudack was a panelist on PBS's long-running *Wall Street Week*; her opinions have appeared in *Barrons*, *The New York Times*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. The day will end with a reception for all participants.

As an exercise aimed at teaching students how to think strategically from a business standpoint, the Gucci Group case also provides students "the opportunity to consider the definition of luxury; how companies create luxury; how consumers perceive luxury;" it also "allows students to study the luxury market in the context of a global recession," during a post-recession era of wide unemployment and tightened budgets, notes Harper.

And since there's no predicting what possible game-changing ideas the student teams might come up with for the luxury-goods firm, perhaps Gucci executives really should be listening in.

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