

Skidmore Students Get Real-World Experience While Consulting City Businesses

by Colette Linton

Saratoga TODAY

SARATOGA SPRINGS — Skidmore-Saratoga Consulting Partnership (SSCP) is an old program with a new name. The ten-year-old course, once called the Skidmore-Saratoga Entrepreneurial Partnership, continues to pose real-world problems and challenges to the students as they partner with local businesses for a 'hands-on' consulting experience.

The course is generally open to juniors and seniors with a 3.6 grade point average, who have been nominated by a professor and have successfully passed the prerequisite business course MB 107. After they stack up to these qualifications, they go through a series of interviews with the course's Professor, Partnership Director and Executive-in-Residence Colleen Burke and with the courses partnership managers – students returning to the course who now manage the consultancy alongside Burke.

"So it's really the crème-al-a-creme students," said Burke. "They're really quite amazing."

Over the course of a semester, the students work to craft actionable business plans and strategies,

which could include a range of areas of focus depending on the desires of the client, Burke said. The consulting services are provided pro bono; however, this is not an internship.

The goal of SSCP students is to apply creative thought through analysis and research to Saratoga's for-profit and nonprofit organizations, she added.

Tony Giacini, a Skidmore College senior and double major in business and economics, is one of two partnership managers this semester. This is his fourth semester with the program having started participating in the course two years ago on a consulting project for Saratoga War Horse with a student team.

Although, this particular course does require a prerequisite and many students are highly involved in their fields, the real-world experience is irreplaceable for some students.

"I was terrified," Giacini said when asked if he felt 'prepared' for the first semester he participated in the course. "Even as I'm in my final semester right now and I'm in my capstone class, which is strategy, and I can tell you after four semesters of experience that there is not enough course work that can prepare you for a real world



Members of the Skidmore Saratoga Consulting Partnership class on a visit to the Saratoga Springs Water Company earlier in the spring semester: Dan Santos '14; Tim Colvin '15; Seth Berger '14; Nick Barra '15; Gabe Steerman '14; Adam Madkour, president, Saratoga Spring Water Company; Romeo Makore '15; Tony Giacini '14; Rebecca McCourt '14; Dan Morelli '14; Minh Uong '14; Kojo Amarteyfio '15; and Ezra Levy '15. (Photo by Eric Jenks)

consultancy because the thing we like to say is that these cases talk back."

During a semester, both sides of the consultancy partnership, the student group and the organization, must agree on a couple of things. The business and students agree that all client information is treated as confidential and a non-disclosure agreement is signed by all students so that the students have access to facts and figures essential to conduct their consultancy research. Also, each party agrees to meet weekly to share information, findings and make suggestions. Clients too are carefully vetted

to assure their commitment to working with the student consultants, as written on SSCP's web page.

At these meetings is where the real learning for both sides takes place. The business comes to the table prepared for questions about the

workings of their company and volley viable and nonviable suggestions from students and explaining and negotiating actionable routes for a business.

"Working with Saratoga Warhorse for the first time you say something like 'oh, what if you guys do this?' and they say back 'no, I don't want to do that.' You can go into it with as much as a business framework or whatever analysis tools you have but the most important piece of this course and what you learn so well through four semesters is you have to also apply personality management and interpersonal relationships," Giacini said.

"That was the thing that shocked me the most with those two semesters was how do you give them the right answers but do it in a way where everybody's happy, you're not offending anyone. How to manage relationship while doing all this, and that's real world," he said. "But that was the most valuable thing for me."

"What we try to do is try to have as comprehensive and thorough

research or strategic recommendation, or strategic plan that we can get them. But the general result I've seen from almost all of our clients is that we just get them to think about their business differently and that really affects the change," Giacini said.

At the time Giacini and his team was working with Saratoga War Horse in 2012, the nonprofit organization was just taking shape.

"What we were looking to do was formalize our business and strategic planning," Founder and Executive Director Bob Nevins said. "They (SSCP) were extremely helpful, and very professional. I was amazed at the depth of knowledge the students were able to bring to the table and it was a very rewarding experience for us."

The nonprofit is still able to apply some of the information the student team brought to the table a few years ago, but helping them to formalize the initial, formal structure of the organization was the most helpful, Nevins said.

"I think the students probably learned from us you need some flexibility and that the plans that you put on paper are good, but you need to be able to be flexible enough as new information becomes available," Nevins said.

Students of the Skidmore-Saratoga Business Consultancy Partnership this semester are wrapping up their projects with Roohan Realty, Saratoga Spring Water Company and Alpine Sport Shop. They will be presenting their results at the Academic Festival on April 30 at noon.

Additional information about the SSCP course can be found at their website at skidmore.edu/sscp.

Skidmore to Soak Up the Sun: Solar Project To Be Finished Early Summer

SARATOGA SPRINGS—Skidmore College's eight-acre solar farm is expected to be completed by early summer and will generate about 12 percent of the college's annual electricity.

Skidmore College will post the real-time amount of energy being

generated in a central campus location for students to see the impact of the project.

In addition to the solar park, Skidmore College has also been developing a micro-hydro project. With the two projects combined, the college could generate 30

percent of its annual electricity bill with sun and water power.

By early June, 6,950 solar panels are to be placed along Denton Road. The field is 800 feet from the roadway and will be surrounded by a six-foot fence. The college plans to plant 150 trees in front of the fence.

The college partnered with Dynamic Energy Solutions, an energy company based in Pennsylvania, to build the solar farm.

The energy collected through the solar panels will go to National Grid, which will then provide credit for the energy received. The college has a 20-year purchasing power agreement and anticipates a cost-savings from the project.

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Saratoga Foundation Announces Pathway to Innovation Fundraiser

SARATOGA SPRINGS—The Saratoga Foundation for Innovative Learning (SFIL) has announced a Pathway to Innovation fundraiser. The fundraiser allows students to purchase a personalized brick to be part of a new pathway leading to the high school.

The Pathway to Innovation will grow brick by brick for years to come to show Saratoga Springs City School District's commitment to an innovative learning environment. A personalized brick can be purchased for a minimum donation of \$50 and 100 percent of the funds go directly to supporting innovative programming opportunities in the school district. Bricks may also be purchased for a student to be

allocated by SFIL that may not be able to purchase one.

To learn more or print a form to purchase a brick, please visit www.saratogalearning.org/pathway/. Checks can be made out to Saratoga Foundation for Innovative Learning and the completed form may be sent to the Saratoga Springs High School front office care of Stacey Ralston.

SFIL is a nonprofit organization, comprised of community members that share a common goal of fostering forward-thinking and creative opportunities in the Saratoga Springs City School District. The foundation provides grants to implement original and creative programming for Saratoga Springs City School District students.