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MB107: Skidmore's cornerstone course in business creativity

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What's the future of the Blackberry?



MB107 students respond to questions posed by corporate executives.

For 125 Skidmore students this fall term, providing an answer was a matter of top academic priority. Last Friday, all gathered at the Saratoga Springs Holiday Inn for a day-long series of presentations made back-to-back in a half-dozen conference rooms. Playing the role of Research in Motion (RIM) executives, they invented new features, launched new models, and boldly led the firm into new markets, all with the goal of outwitting their smartphone competitors and generating by 2014 at least \$250 million in new operating income.

The assignment was entirely in keeping with the 25-year tradition of "MB107," Skidmore's cornerstone course in business organization and management. The challenge of conducting a comprehensive strategic analysis and developing a strategic action plan for big U.S. firms like

RIM, Amazon, American Express, and The Gap is an experience that bonds thousands of Skidmore alumni over three decades.

Essential to MB107's reputation for rigor is the participation of nearly 30 business executives who – drawn from the local Saratoga community and from among the Skidmore community of alumni and parents – evaluate the presentations. Among those sitting as jurors in Friday's sessions were Tom Post, managing editor of *Forbes* magazine (and the father of a first-year Skidmore student) and Skidmore alumnae Deborah Monosson, chief executive officer of Boston Financial and Equity, and Gail Dudack, managing partner of the New York-based Dudack Research Group.

Also essential to the course's success is the involvement of 50 upperclass management and business majors, who assist with overall coordination and serve as coaches to those preparing presentations, most of whom are first-year students and sophomores.

By early Friday afternoon, the judges had dispersed just six A's to the 25 student teams. One was a team that argued that RIM should promptly bring to market a new device -- called the "Blackberry Connect" – that would combine the power of cloud computing with advanced editing software and enable users to remotely access files on office and home computers and interact with friends in self-designated groups.

Forbes' Tom Post delivered the good news to the team, which consisted of first-year students Amanda Hill, Garrett Colgan, and Isaac Chansky; sophomores Rachel Wolfson and Sarah Mohrman, and, in the role of coaches, seniors Keith Petrie and Brittany Stevens.

"We were all blown away," Post said. "The idea's great. Your presentation was superb. All of you obviously thought deeply about your particular subjects and managed to harmonize them well. You seem not only to have done your homework but to have gotten into a very start-up-like excitement and intelligence."

But it was Boston Financial's Deborah Monosson who paid them the ultimate compliment.

"I wanted to buy it," she said.

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