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## SCOPEONLINE

### How would you make \$100 million for Smucker's?

For 125 Skidmore students, providing an answer was a top academic priority in the fall term. Divided into 21 teams, they gathered Dec. 2 in business attire at Marriott's Courtyard Saratoga Springs for a day-long series of presentations followed by Q&As. Playing the role of J. M. Smucker's Company executives, they made recommendations such as breaking into the breakfast and lunch markets and extending Smucker's reach into organic foods through acquisitions—all with the goal of increasing the firm's operating income by \$100 million in three to five years.



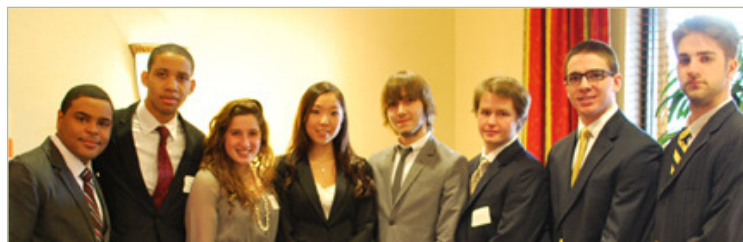
**Team 4, Back row: Robert Miller '15 (left), David Kaplan '12 (coach), Emma Nollman '15, Brad Cray '15, Logan Tsugita '15, Michael Coffel '14. Front: Chloe Chang '12 (left, coach) and Carol Wu '14.**

The assignment was entirely in keeping with the 30-year tradition of MB 107, Skidmore's cornerstone introductory business course. The challenge of conducting a strategic analysis and developing a viable action plan for firms like Smucker's, Netflix, American Express, and Gap is an experience that bonds nearly 7,000 Skidmore alumni over three decades. It's also an experience that has converted many first- and second-year students to management and business majors and successful careers.

**Michael Coffel '14**, a psychology major and business minor from Upper Saddle River, N.J., opened and closed Team 4's presentation. Their idea: Smucker's on the Run, the company's version of breakfast to go. "Our goal is to own breakfast," he told five real-life business executives serving as volunteer judges. The judges asked group members how they arrived at their pricing strategy, why they focused primarily on moms, and how they expected to best McDonald's and Dunkin' Donuts.

Coffel says his main takeaway from the MB 107 experience was "how we all fit together and worked. We didn't talk much at the beginning, but that changed when we did the dry run for our presentation. That's when we pulled together as a team." He credits math major **Carol Wu '14** (Ridgewood, N.J.) with assuming the group's leadership. After the dry run, she says, it was clear that they had a lot of work to do. "I tend to step up when things need to get done," she says. Boston-area first-years **Logan Tsugita, Robert Miller, and Emma Nollman**, along with sophomore North Carolinian **Brad Cray '15**, completed the team.

For Team 10, **Rokk Williams '14**, a sociology major and business minor from Mt. Vernon, N.Y., kicked things off by providing the judges with Santa Cruz Organic beverages and snacks, a nice ice-breaker. Smucker's owns the California-based company, and Rokk's six-member group felt that the time was right to do more with it (like compete with Naked in the smoothie market) and to acquire two more companies—Bare Fruit (100 percent organic dried apples, cherries, etc.) and Galaxy Granola (using apple sauce instead of oil). Judges thought the concept was sound but questioned the purchase prices of the acquisitions and parts of the implementation strategy.



**Team 10: Mike Forbes '12 (left, coach), Rokk Williams '14, Phoebe Allen '15, Jenny Kim '14, Michael Glendening '15, Josh Berger '15, Chris Anderson '15, and Luke Randall '12 (coach).**

Williams's team members were **Phoebe Allen '15** (Brookline, Mass.), **Chris Anderson '15** (Basking Ridge, N.J.), **Josh Berger '15** (Ft. Wayne, Ind.), **Michael Glendening '15** (New York, N.Y.), and **Jenny Kim '14** (Stony Brook, N.Y.).

Williams was struck by the challenge of crafting a viable business plan in a competitive environment. "Business strategy," he says, "is so much about tradeoffs. In order to get X, you have to give up Y. It's such a balancing act." And like many of his peers, he came to understand the significance of team dynamics, especially the benefits of "playing to everyone's strengths."



**Team 14: Bryan Connolly '13 (left, coach), Romeo Makore '15, Mustafa Chaudry '14, Lydia Mozzone '15, Rebecca Shesser '15, Matt Fishman '15, Derek Nunner '15, Lauren Hawkins '14 (coach).**

**Associate Professor of Business Caroline D'Abate**, who coordinates the MB107 program, says the team approach (the group presentations are 25 percent of the course grade) mimics today's business environment. "It is through this real-world experience that students go beyond being accountable to themselves or their professor," she says. "They are also accountable to their peers, i.e., their colleagues. They learn how to navigate personality differences, motivation, cohesion, goal-setting, and conflict. These lessons come with experience, and MB107 is one place where the Management and Business Department combines that practical experience with the theory and research on individual differences and group dynamics from psychology, sociology, and other fields."

Rick Kilbride, senior vice president at ING Investment Management, volunteered as one of the judges.

He has a lot of respect for the challenge: "The students not only have this crushing project, teamed with fellow students they hardly know, but they have to present it to an assorted cast of curmudgeons who often have limited context but a ton of their own business biases (all gained the hard way). I really feel for the students. They have so much to cover, and across the table are these poker-faced skeptics with seriously accomplished backgrounds.

"However, the end result is something that looks like life. It's uncertain, it's hard, it can be bruising. It's also very real. But what a great environment Skidmore can be to learn crucial lessons, because it's safe and the penalties for stumbling in this labyrinth are not as severe as they are in the outside world."

Certainly Kilbride's take was an accurate reflection of Team 14's experience. They came out strong, with a pitch to break into the "relatively undiscovered" ready-made, box-lunch market currently owned by Kraft Lunchables. Their healthier option: Smucker's Smunchies. Judges agreed that the concept was a good fit for Smucker's family focus, debt issues, and existing retail relationships, but they wondered why so few competitors had entered the box-lunch market. When **Rebecca Shesser '15** (Washington, D.C.) told judges in the postmortem that her team should have looked harder at how many units they could reasonably sell day in and day out, there were a lot of affirmative head nods.

" 'We' is a good word, and I heard you use it a lot," Kilbride told Shesser and **Lydia Mozzone '14** (Rehoboth, Mass.), **Derek Nunner '15** (Santa Fe, N.M.), **Romeo Makore '15** (Zimbabwe), **Matt Fishman '15** (New York, N.Y.), and **Mustafa Chaudry '14** (Pakistan). "But 'feel' and 'hope' are bad words in a business climate, especially when it comes to the numbers." Great advice for introductory-level students with plenty of time left to hone their knowledge and skills.



**MB 107 executive judges: Alvaro de Molina (left), Jennifer Levinson, Stu Danforth, Eugene Quirk, Jeff Bauml**

One area that the student presenters don't need much work on is appearance and demeanor, not unimportant attributes in the professional world. "I was struck by the professional dress and grooming of most of the students," says President of

Adirondack Trust Insurance Agency Eugene Quirk. "Virtually all of them heeded what must have been some very sound advice provided in advance of the presentations. Plus, more than half gave a firm handshake and looked directly into my eyes when greetings were exchanged."

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