Business students make movie

By Francoise Hultzapple

"I thought I was going to be really nervous and embarrassed having someone 'witness'me on the video screen. But, when I watched our finished project with everyone else, it made me feel so much more at ease." Chris Veltri, along with 19 other students from Dr. Refik Culpan's Behavioral Concepts in Business classes, participated in the production of a video case study to be used for class discussion.

"In organizational behavior courses," said Culpan, "instructors often use the classical approach to case studies. I wanted to try something different," he explained, "by encouraging students to participate in a role-playing situation in which they have · to create their own character and act it out for video taping."

Carolyn R. Dexter, Acting Head of the Business Division, said "active courses" are necessary in education, after she viewed the video earlier this week.

"The teaching profession is responsible for providing a package of teaching techniques to students and we value all the pieces of the package," she said. "This video is another way of providing student participation in the learning process."

Two weeks into the fall semester, Culpan and student, Fran Hultzapple, had modified an existing case study into a video treatment format.

"The skeleton of the case," noted Culpan, "is about a man working in an insurance company who wants to have a sex change operation and is currently dressing as a woman in the office."

Students were quick to sign up for management and employee roles for extra credit. Surprisingly, the man/woman role was one of the first to be cast. Two scenes were even added to accomodate the enthusiasm of the actors.

However, the production meant work for everyone. Despite three planning sessions to coordinate everyone's research on their characters, two rehearsals, 15 hours of video shooting and 19 hours of post production, the students found the experience beneficial.

"From my research," said Mike Turk,a management major, "I learned what legal and illegal questions management is permitted to ask during a job interview. You'd be surprised at some of the questions you can't ask." He also said, "I'll feel more confident when giving a speech; I have a better idea of how to present myself for an in-

terview; and I learned to work with a group of people."

Chris Veltri, an accounting major, played a union attorney. "Working in the production," she said, "I got an understanding of all the concepts in the case study. I know I won't do

some of the mistakes [management made], because I was so close to those mistakes. For example, I won't fire someone without investigating all the circumstances first."

After the preview of the finished production which included a bloopers tape, the rest of Culpan's classes viewed the video for discussion purposes.

"Real life situations aren't

textbook situations," noted Greg Wisloski, an accounting major with 11 years in the work force behind him. "I experienced a situation in real life where a problem occured," he said. "Instead of management dealing with it immediately, when

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"Education has to have active courses."

Carolyn Dexter
Acting Head, Business Division

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it would have been easier to handle; it got to a point where it was an unpleasant situation for all concerned. The lesson is to deal with the problem when it comes up. This video is more like a real-life simulation and that's what makes it interesting and more beneficial," he said.

"Usually, our class is not a very talkative group," said Jan Dougherty, a business management major, who worked for

11 years in an insurance company in personnel and underwriting before coming back to school. "We have four or five main spokespeople. I would judge that we had above average participation in the class discussion compared to non-video days. It was not just using video, but using students from the class to participate in the video that got everyone so interested. It did have a positive effect, even in an early morning class."

"This was my first experiment with a participative case study video and I am extremely pleased with the class reaction," said Culpan. "I was afraid they would take it as a fun thing and miss the educational nature of the video,"he said. "But, the students reacted maturely and rationally; they related the video concepts to the ones we did in class -- group dynamics, communication skills, conflict, managerial problem solving styles, motivation,

and informal organizations," he said.

The video was produced by four students currently enrolled in Behavioral Concepts in Business courses. Three of those students-- Zaihan Mohd Noar, Clinton Lattany and Fran Hultzapple -- have taken video production courses offered by Eton Churchill in the Multi-Media department of the Humanities division. Mohd Noar and Lattany were the cameramen; Jim Stotler performed crew duties; and Fran Hultzapple produced, directed and edited the video project.

Culpan said, "We are conducting a follow-up research to see to what extent this experiment was useful to the students. The only limitation I see is that the experiment might have been even more useful if the classes had been smaller and all could have participated. I have a hunch students will want this kind of experiment done in the future."

College freshmen fear computers

PITTSBURGH (CPS)-Most college freshmen are surprised, confused and frustrated during their first year of computer courses, according to a newly- released study.

The computer anxiety afflicts incoming students in all majors, but may be particulary severe among liberal arts majors, observers add.

Over 80 percent of all incoming freshmen are "surprised" by the subject matter covered in computer courses, the survey reveals.

Moreover, one of every two freshmen are "confused" by computer coursework, while nearly 70 percent say the courses actually make them "frustrated" and "angry."

"When freshmen go away to college they have a lot of new experiences. But the computer science courses turn out to be much different than any of the new students expected," says Lee Sproull, a researcher at Carnegie Mellon University who has surveyed CMU freshmen over the last three years to asses their attitudes toward computer courses there.

Among other things, Sproull says entering students find computer courses "more surprising, more confusing and harder to get a handle on" than their other courses.

And such confusion over computers "is true of liberal arts as well as technical students," she adds.

One of the reasons for the so-called computer anxiety, Sproull says, is that students are

often "thrust into the computer culture" before they learn how computers work and understant the special language used in computer courses.

Like at many schools, "computing at CMU is not simply a question of learning about computers in a classroom setting. Computing is a part of the whole work life at a campus," Sproull notes.

With more traditional subjects like history, math, or physics, she says, student learn in a sheltered, academic environment, and ease their way into the subjects as their ability and understanding increases.

But the "hands-on" experience in computer classes catapaults students directly into the real-life world of computing, frequently without any prior exposure to the subject or the machines.

Thus, "students who are new to computing end up using the campus mainframe right beside advanced users, which often makes the newcomers feel intimidated and even more confused," she says.

"That's a natural reaction for just about anyone who has to use computers in the presence of experienced users," agrees Mark Tucker, director of the Project on Information Technology and Education in Washington, D.C.

"And the confusion and intimidation cycle repeats itself each time you use a different computer or a new piece of software," he adds, "which makes it a lot different from

learning other college subjects."

To ease students' entry into the campus computer culture, reasearcher Sproull suggests colleges offer computer orientation courses so students will learn the basic rules and lingo before taking a computer course.

"Many of the students we surveyed said the computer rooms reminded them of a scene out of '1984' because they

were so cold and sterile. Computer rooms should be more warm and inviting," Sproull adds.

Fortunately, the computer anxiety many freshmen experience decreases as they become more familiar with the subject, Sproull notes.

"Some students become very exhilarated by their new-found knowledge and say 'Wow, I never knew this could be so fun.' "

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