

Making Lemonade Out of Lemons With A COVID-19 Exploration Course (UNC Chapel Hill, 3/16)

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What is the message? Business schools can respond in real time to provide insights about how to manage sudden shocks in healthcare needs.

What is the evidence? Experience of the Center for the Business of Health at the Kenan-Flagler Business School in replacing an on-site program with an on-line seminar.

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Like every business school across the country, UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School's normal operations have been turned upside down as all classes were flipped to online virtual courses. Fortunately, Kenan-Flagler has the top ranked online MBA program, [MBA@UNC](#), with 800 students currently enrolled. As a result of this program, students, faculty, and staff are familiar with virtual learning, and the infrastructure is in place to deliver high-quality, immersive online education - a capability that all programs in the business school leverage.

Making Lemonade Out of Lemons

To understand the implications of COVID-19, UNC Kenan-Flagler relies on its Center for the Business of Health (CBOH), which has deep expertise, capabilities and networks in the healthcare industry. The CBOH has been convening thought leadership on COVID-19 since the crisis began.

On the weekend of March 13 – 15 the school planned to bring hundreds of online students together for a three-day, in-person Summit in Vancouver, British Columbia. This event was cancelled one week before as a result of the coronavirus. Many students were attending the summit to earn their final credit prior to graduation. By collaborating together, the CBOH and MBA@UNC were able to act swiftly to provide a compelling program.

Under the leadership of Dr. Brad Staats, Professor of Operations, Faculty Director UNC Center for the Business of Health, Associate Dean of MBA Programs the decision was taken to “make lemonade out of lemons.” The in-person course was converted to online with a day-long program focused on the coronavirus entitled ‘COVID-19 Exploration’.

The course included lectures, panels, interviews, and workshops. In addition, asynchronous content was quickly developed – a mix of newly recorded videos by Professor Staats, exploration of current events articles, and questions to reflect on the knowledge. This prepared students to come to the event ready to learn as much as possible.

The agenda for the day-long virtual event included top-level health professionals, professors, and industry executives with deep knowledge and expertise regarding the current crisis. Topics ranged from understanding the current situation from a medical and scientific perspective to looking into development of testing and vaccines to discussing the impact on financial markets and supply chains. Figure 1 reports the agenda.

1. **Delivering Care:** *Dr. Adam Brown, MD, MBA, President, Emergency Medicine – Envision Physician Services.*
2. **Testing Challenges and Opportunities:** *Dr. Brian Caveney, MD, JD, President of Diagnostics & Chief Medical Officer LabCorp*
3. **Communicating in a Crisis:** *Professors Sharon Cannon, Stephanie Mahin and Ed McCraw*
4. **Lessons Learned:** *Professor Brad Staats*
5. **Financial Markets, Global Economies and a Pandemic:** *Professors Jennifer Conrad, Mustafa Gultekin, Andreas Stathopoulos, Dennis Greenway, Franklin Street Partners, Darpan Biswas, Morgan Creek Capital*
6. **Pharmaceuticals and Vaccines:** *Professor Markus Saba and Than Powell, Vice President Strategy, GSK*
7. **Operating in a Pandemic – supply chains and services:** *Professors Saravanan Kesavan, Adam Mersereau, Sandeep Rath*

Figure 1: Agenda

The event was a tremendous success. In a manner that ensured student and faculty safety, we were able to engage students in a meaningful way. Students held workshops in online breakout rooms, panel discussions created interesting debates, and presenters answered questions in real time. The program explored ways in which business executives can effectively lead, manage, and navigate in the current crisis.

Students learned first-hand how a large hospital system is preparing for the current situation, the difficulties and challenges the laboratory sector is having in developing tests as quickly as possible, how best to manage corporate communications during a crisis, what is being done in the industry to develop vaccines and antivirals in a safe and quick manner, and finally how to analyze and assess what is happening in the financial markets, supply chains and various services.

In addition, the course covered important themes such as the importance of public private partnerships; industry collaboration with regulators such as the FDA, CDC, HHS, and NIH; how one-time fierce competitors collaborate in consortia to share information and resources; the importance of transparent communications; and the challenges of managing risk/benefit concerns with regards to safety and speed.

Finally, a key lesson from across each presenter was the need for kindness as we work with

those impacted by the coronavirus.

Students were put into breakout rooms, held workshops, and asked questions. Key lessons learned were shared. The program was timely, relevant, and impactful — and to our knowledge, was the first business school course for credit on the coronavirus. As a result of the partnership between the CBOH and the MBA@UNC program, the business school was able to leverage its healthcare expertise and existing digital solutions to effectively and efficiently provide 150 MBA students with a unique and valuable learning experience.

Looking Forward

The COVID-19 challenge forced us to test a model that can be applied well into the future. We now know how to make lemonade. We will use this model in the future when we face new sudden challenge. In addition, this is now part of our ongoing toolkit for “regular” teaching. We are stronger as a result.