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Expanding Respite Care Services to Meet Demand and Increase Organizational Competitiveness

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents the results of student efforts in an undergraduate Capstone course at Molloy University's School of Business. During the 14-week Spring 2023 semester, these 12 students worked in small teams to address an opportunity presented by a senior executive of The Viscardi Center, a highly regarded 70-year old nonprofit organization based in Albertson (Long Island), New York. To help executives evaluate whether Viscardi could expand its respite care services, students were asked to conduct: (1) research about competitive respite care services/programs; (2) market research with key stakeholders; and, (3) an analysis of financial viability. Students gave Viscardi the "green light," and delivered their recommendations in three business reports and presentations at the end of the semester. Recommendations were based on industry and organizational research. All recommendations included turn-key implementation plans, projected benefits, potential risks and mitigation efforts, and more. With this collaboration, The Viscardi Center, joins a growing list of repeat Capstone clients which is a testament to the valuable work of our Molloy business students. Capstone is a culminating course required of all Molloy business students in their final year or semester. It involves three mixed methods: the flipped classroom, community engagement, and experiential learning.

Keywords

Capstone, Student Consulting, Flipped Classroom, Community-Engaged Learning, Experiential Learning, Respite Care

1 INTRODUCTION

The Molloy University School of Business Capstone Program reached an important milestone during the 2022-2023 academic year when it celebrated its 10th Anniversary. This was a testament to Capstone's value and continued relevance. Capstone provides undergraduate (BS) and MBA students with the opportunity to participate in a required course that includes economics, finance, management, and marketing majors. It is a culminating course taken in the final semester or year of a student's degree program and fully supports the mission of Molloy's School of Business: blending transformative education, executive-based learning, and the Dominican ideals of study, service, spirituality, and community in preparing students for a meaningful professional and personal life. In Capstone, students work in small self-selected teams throughout the semester to help nonprofit organizations (NPOs) address problems, challenges, and/or opportunities. In Spring 2023, this undergraduate Capstone class worked with The Viscardi Center. Viscardi is a well-known and award-winning 70-year old organization based in Albertson (Long Island), New York. Viscardi's Vice President of Program Development, Dawn Nolan, was the client and engagement sponsor. With this collaboration, The Viscardi Center, joins a growing list of repeat Capstone clients, which is a testament to the valuable work of our Molloy business students. This paper reports on the student efforts.

2 METHODOLOGY

Work on Capstone begins well before the start of the semester when Capstone professors reach into the community to find a nonprofit with needs that are a good match for the class. The professor and an organization executive first discuss the organization's current situation and any problems, challenges, and/or opportunities the NPO faces. Next, they work together to create projects for students to work on during an academic semester. These projects not only address specific issues, but also guide the experiential learning. While working in small teams, students are tasked with developing realistic solutions to help the

NPO and client. This 14-week Capstone course had 12 students who divided themselves into three project teams as per the client's needs and their interests, majors, and abilities. The students' majors were economics, finance, management, and marketing. Four of the 12 students were part of Molloy's five-year dual degree program which means they will earn their MBA in the next academic year, 2023-2024. Solutions include three or four recommendations by each team and all recommendations include implementation plans, projected benefits, potential risks and mitigation efforts, and more.

The small teams-based structure that allows students to tackle the projects is the main focus of Capstone. Various small and large assignments are required throughout the semester. Each new assignment builds on and/or leverages a previous assignment leading to two final client deliverables: (1) a detailed business report, and (2) an in-person presentation to the client and invited guests that includes a question and answer session with the audience. Capstones courses use a mixed methods approach that combines the flipped classroom with community engagement to provide students with a unique experiential learning opportunity.

3 ABOUT THE CLIENT AND PROJECTS

The Spring 2023 undergraduate Capstone client was The Viscardi Center, a mature and highly-regarded 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization (NPO) headquartered in Albertson (Long Island), New York. Viscardi educates, employs, and empowers children, adults, and veterans with disabilities or similar needs, so we can all discover the love of learning, the power of work, the freedom of independent living, and the self-confidence to fulfill our dreams. The organization was founded in 1951 by Dr. Henry Viscardi, Jr., who was born without legs and wore prosthetics. Dr. Viscardi became a leading advocate for people with disabilities and served as an advisor to eight U.S. presidents. The organization has won numerous awards for its efforts and innovative programs delivered through the Henry Viscardi School (for children, adolescents, and adults with disabilities), vocational job training and employment placement, consulting services, digital accessibility services, its Disability Entrepreneurship Institute, and more. To learn more about The Viscardi Center, visit <https://www.viscardicenter.org/>

Nonprofits often seek to add services for current program beneficiaries and to attract others. The focus of this Capstone was to support Viscardi executives as they explored new/expanded opportunities in the respite care space. Respite care provides short-term relief for primary caregivers. It can be arranged for just a few hours (e.g., an afternoon) or for several days or weeks. Care can be provided at home, in a healthcare facility, or day center. Respite programs provide planned short-term breaks for families and other unpaid caregivers of children and adults with developmental delays, behavioral problems, intellectual disabilities, cognitive loss, and more in order to support and maintain the primary caregiving relationship. Respite also provides a positive experience for the person receiving care. The term "short break" is used in some countries to describe respite care. Respite care costs vary. Service providers charge by the hour or by the number of days or weeks that services are provided. Most insurance plans do not cover these costs. Therefore, you must pay all costs not covered by insurance or other funding sources. Medicare will cover most of the cost of up to five (5) days in a row of respite care in a hospital or skilled nursing facility for a person receiving hospice care. Medicaid also may offer assistance.

Several questions needed to be answered to inform Viscardi's decision-making. What respite care services or programs do Viscardi competitors offer? Would the families of current Viscardi program participants be interested in new/expanded respite care services or programs? How will Viscardi differentiate itself? Would new/expanded efforts be financially viable? Discussions around these and other questions led to three Capstone projects with students asked to conduct: (1) research into competitor respite care programs/services; (2) market research with key stakeholders; and, (3) an analysis of financial viability. Overnight respite care programs/services were of no interest to Viscardi at this time and therefore not considered.

4 TEAM RECOMMENDATIONS AND POTENTIAL RISKS

All three Teams collaborated and determined that Viscardi could and should expand its existing respite care services and develop new ones. Teams came to this conclusion for three reasons. First, Viscardi has built-in demand for expanded/new respite care services from existing program participants and their families. Second, Viscardi could fill a void in the marketplace. Third, Viscardi could expand profitably. The Teams then developed recommendations, implementation plans, forecasts of revenue and expenses (with low, medium, and high projections based on participation), and outlined potential risks and mitigation efforts. Recommendations were grounded in organizational and industry research, research about five competitors provided by the client, SWOT analyses, and analyses using Google Trends, social media, Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Form 990 filings, information from the New York State Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (NYS OPWDD), and other sources. The final deliverables were given to the client on Monday, May 1, 2023. Three business reports were emailed to the client by Team leaders in the late afternoon. Final presentations were made in-person on campus, that evening.

Team 1: Respite Care Program Models

This Team of four students studied the respite care offerings of five Viscardi competitors provided by the client. It was led by co-author Kaylee Fernandez, a management major with a minor in finance. Findings were summarized in charts, tables, and narrative comparing and contrasting Viscardi and its five competitors in various ways (e.g., days of week, participant ages, activities, fees, etc.). The Team learned about ChildServe, an award-winning respite care facility based in Johnston, Iowa and

included it as a non-competitive model. The Team also used Google Trends to determine potential demand for respite care programs, in general. After creating a list of keywords and terms to capture every possible search scenario (e.g., weekend respite, summer respite, after school respite, school vacation respite), the Team analyzed the full 2022 calendar year's search results for all terms on their list. With its research and analysis completed, Team 1 made two recommendations. First, Viscardi should introduce a new Sunday group respite care program because it would: (a) offer a seventh day to participants attending existing weekday and/or Saturday programs, (b) potentially attract new participants, and (c) become a competitive advantage since no competitor offers a Sunday program. Second, Viscardi should strengthen its digital marketing efforts by focusing on search engine optimization. This would allow Viscardi to: (a) reach more people online, (b) rank better (meaning higher) in online search results, and (c) improve search engine results with little-to-no cost incurred. The main risk associated with the recommendations was the time and commitment needed to optimize the search engine efforts and see the benefits. Several free and low-cost tools and tactics were presented as mitigation efforts to minimize this risk.

Team 2: Market Research with Key Stakeholders

This Team of four students used primary and secondary research to support its recommendation and implementation plans. It was led by co-author Christopher Mallozzi, a management major. When the semester started, the client shared results of a survey conducted by Viscardi at the end of 2022. The paper-based survey with questions about new/expanded respite care programs was sent to 79 families to gauge interest and potential demand. Thirty-nine (39) surveys were returned, a response rate of 49.4 percent. Although Viscardi staff members calculated and summarized responses for the class, new information and nuances were uncovered when students dug into the raw data themselves. This led to a follow-up survey for the same 79 families looking for additional insights. Twenty-nine (29) surveys were returned, a response rate of 39.7 percent. The lower response rate was attributed, in large part, to timing and semester constraints. Secondary research was also conducted. Team 2 studied offerings of the five competitors, monitored and analyzed the Twitter profiles and engagement of Viscardi and its five competitors, and learned about respite care trends in research published by the NYS OPWDD. Recommendations included updating Viscardi's schedule of respite care program activities (as per survey results), prominently featuring information about respite care programs on the Viscardi website, strengthening all social media efforts with more best practices, and using free tools like ChatGPT to create shorter, more engaging posts. The main risks associated with the recommendations were the cost and accessibility of any off-campus activities (e.g., horseback riding), time it might take to update the website, and constantly changing nature of social media which makes staying proficient difficult. Mitigation efforts to lessen the risks were an activities budget of less than \$50 per week, using free tools such as Canva and ChatGPT to create social media content, and monitoring results using Meta Business Suite Analytics (for Facebook and Instagram), Twitter's analytics tools, and Google Trends.

Team 3. Financial Viability

Team 3 demonstrated that Viscardi could profitably extend its respite care service/programs by offering them for a few more hours each weekday and on Sundays to complement its Saturday program. This team was led by co-author Robert Mongitore, a finance major with an economics minor who is enrolled in Molloy's five-year dual degree program (BS and MBA). Team 3 did an extensive financial review and built various scenarios and models using two sources: (1) confidential Viscardi budget information for existing programs provided by the client; and, (2) the most recent publicly available IRS Form 990 filed by Viscardi and its five competitors. IRS Form 990 is an informational tax form that most tax-exempt organizations, nonexempt charitable trusts, and section 527 political organizations must file annually. It gives the IRS an overview of the organization's activities, governance, and detailed financial information. Team 3 analyzed, summarized, and presented many data points from the 990s in charts, tables, and narrative comparing and contrasting information for all six organizations and created new variables such as averages, ratios, and others as needed. NYS OPWDD reimbursement rates and other information in the 990s were also used. The Team anticipated that the rollout of any new/expanded programs could be straight-forward and "easy" because Viscardi could build on what it was already doing. The biggest risk was related to reimbursement. Since the NYS OPWDD can only reimburse Viscardi for participants who attend, the organization would need to absorb any costs (e.g., payroll) associated with no-shows or absentees. Introducing the new/extended services/programs one at a time versus all at once could mitigate this risk. For example, Viscardi could start by extending respite care hours on the most popular day of the week since attendance is highest.

5 CONCLUSION

The client and invited guests appreciated the innovative work students did to develop their solutions given the complexity of the topic. And students were able to discuss more of their research, analysis, learning, and rationale during the question and answer session. Attendees were most impressed with three things. First, the resourcefulness of students who found the IRS 990 filings and time spent culling through the long complex documents. Second, the creativity of students who used Google Trends, social media analysis, and ChatGPT for research and implementation planning. Third, the quality of research and analysis that led to the recommendations and implementation plans.

Student feedback is collected casually during each class session and formally via reflection papers at the end of the semester. While the semester-end feedback was mostly positive, there were comments about the workload and responsibility to develop solutions that could actually help the client. Positive comments can be summarized as follows. First, all students enjoyed the

flipped classroom, community engagement, and learning by doing real work for a real organization. Second, they all mentioned that their research, analysis, writing, editing, and presentation skills improved considerably throughout the course. Third, students appreciated the strict deadlines, project planning, and strong leadership that helped the teams succeed. Fourth, they learned to accept and incorporate a new type of “real world” constructive criticism from the professor and client. Additionally, they all learned to give more targeted feedback to their teammates, other students/teams, and the professor as well. This will surely help and prepare students as they enter the workforce full-time. Fifth, despite the interdisciplinary nature of Capstone, they valued the ability to join project teams that best matched with their majors, interests, and skills. This gave them the opportunity to apply the totality of their coursework and learning on each project. For example, the Financial Viability Team had three finance majors and one economic major which contributed to its success. On a final note, this Capstone engagement was exceptionally difficult given the topic and nature of the projects. Students enrolled in the course had never heard of “respite care” and did not know anyone who needed it. This caused unease at the start of the semester because the learning curve was steep. However, discomfort quickly turned to enthusiasm after learning more about Viscardi’s important work and discovering the searchable database for tax exempt organizations on the IRS website and other applicable tools/resources. These 12 students are now respite care experts.

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7 REFERENCES

References will be supplied upon request.