MIDE
REDEFINING UNDERGRADUATE MANAGEMENT EDUCATION
WITH DESIGN AND INNOVATION

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1. OVERVIEW
Over the past few years Bucknell University’s School of Management has come to realize that the traditional undergraduate management education has left many of its students under prepared for an increasingly specialized work force. While we have an incredibly high success rate with job placement, our students often lack the skills needed to thrive in their chosen career path. Like many other professional degrees, a bachelor’s degree in management can be applied broadly. This means it is really up to the student to find the specificity they need through their course electives and in turn requires them to really sell their unique qualities when they head out for their first job interviews.

To address this, the School of Management created four specific programs, three of which are unique among undergraduate liberal arts universities: Accounting and Finance, Global Management, Management for Sustainability, and Markets, Innovation, and Design (MIDE)(Figure 1). The MIDE program is the focus of this paper.

FIGURE 1. Gratuitous Venn diagram of the MIDE Program

2. UNDERGRADUATE LIBERAL ARTS EDUCATION
It should be first understood that Bucknell University is uniquely positioned for MIDE to be effective despite no design school. As one of the largest undergraduate liberal arts universities in the United States, it provides a structure in which students are encouraged, and sometimes forced, to explore beyond their disciplinary bounds. Bucknell has a premier College of Arts and Sciences, a top ten undergraduate College of Engineering, and a highly respected undergraduate School of Management, all of which are accessible to each and every student. Academics combined with a diversity of clubs, student programs, themed housing, and Division I sports create a
culture of excellence that provides the perfect backdrop for a unique interdisciplinary management program in Markets, Innovation, and Design.

3. THE MIDE PROGRAM

At its highest level, the Markets, Innovation, and Design (MIDE) program seeks to change the way a “typical” management student perceives and responds to the world around them. It will foster within students a deep appreciation for the interdisciplinary roots and connections among creative and technical design, marketing, and innovation. Moreover, the program will enhance creative thinking and acting. In addition to gaining a better understanding of how their surroundings are constructed, students will cultivate a habit of trying to envision how their world can be improved. Students will also learn quantitative, empathic, interpretive, and visual methods in order to assess the relationships between consumers/users and their environments, with a particular focus on remediating unmet needs and filling gaps between current and ideal circumstances. As they learn more about the overall design process, students also will have the opportunity to practice techniques such as role playing, sketching, creative narrative, prototyping, and simulation, which will help them to transform ideas into reality.

That said, the MIDE program is not divorced from the goal of educating managers. We are well aware that we are not creating designers, but managers that have a deeper understanding of and appreciation for design. The MIDE program will expose students to the orchestration, design, logic and strategy underlying organizations’ key marketing practices. It will highlight the complex interplay that takes place between market research/analysis of consumer-product relationships and the strategic management of the marketing mix or brands. Students pursuing the MIDE program will augment their core understanding of management functions with an interdisciplinary examination of some of the creative, analytical, and technical processes that combine to generate ideas and transform them into images, products, and services which powerfully shape our culture.

3.1. MENTORSHIP

Unlike many undergraduate programs, students are not given a checklist and told to apply for a diploma in four years after they’ve met all of the requirements. Each student in the MIDE program is individually mentored. Through discussion with the students and individual soul-searching, it is determined what unique set of courses will best prepare the student for their post-graduation goal. In addition to meeting the University’s liberal arts requirements and the core management courses, each student must take four courses within the MIDE program and four more courses outside the School of Management. The intention of these four extra-disciplinary courses is to provide the student with a unique combination of knowledge and experience that will differentiate them from their peers and prepare them for their specific employment goals.

3.2. 300: GATEWAY COURSE

The first course the students take is called, not surprisingly, Markets, Innovation, and Design. While the course is essentially a survey of the relationships among marketing, innovation, and design, students are warned that they will be challenged to practice various approaches to creative and innovation thinking. The real goal of the course is the change the way the students perceive the world around them, to see where problems exist, and to know how to react to those problems. We challenge their ability to deal with ambiguity, which is an especially fun task with students that are so dependent upon analytical thinking and rubric-based assessment. We challenge them to embrace failure (Maxwell, 2007), to understand the true value of collaboration (Toulis, 2011), to reignite their ability to think divergently (Rawlinson, 1981), and to effectively use a design process (Aspelund 2006). When students walk away from this class, their heads have been flipped and they’re ready to tackle the rest of the classes in the program.

3.3. 301: UNDERSTANDING CONSUMERS

Now that the MIDE student has had their thought process adjusted, we give them toolbox of qualitative and quantitative research methods for understanding user behavior with appropriate exposure to philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the various approaches. It is in this course where students learn the effectiveness of appropriate user research and how to dig past the surface data to a richer understanding of their users. While they are taught typical tools like focus groups, interview techniques, ethnography, and survey creation, they are also challenged to look for the reason behind the response and to understand it within a broad context.
3.4. 302: DESIGN REALIZATIONS
Up until this point, MIDE students have had the opportunity to think through unique challenges and problems. But, they still primarily think with their heads. The purpose of this course is to create visual thinkers. This is accomplished by implementing creative techniques for exploring ideas and transforming ideas into appropriate mediums for communication. It leverages creative ideation, sketching, physical and digital modeling to empower them to think through problems and solutions visually, to engage with visual media and allow solutions to present themselves as they work with it, and to not trust what they conjure in their minds until they’ve tested it visually.

3.5. 303: ENTREPRENEURSHIP
Students can take either this course or 304 to wrap up their MIDE specific coursework. These two classes are intended to tie together their learning over their undergraduate education and will most likely be taken in their final semester. Entrepreneurship focuses on how to evolve an idea into an enterprise that generates economic, social, or aesthetic value in society. This class is purposely taught from the perspective that entrepreneurship is not exclusive to start-ups in Silicon Valley. Entrepreneurs are people with a specific mind set and way of approaching the world.

3.6. 304: MARKETING MANAGEMENT
In the other final course option, students have the opportunity to become familiar with the field of marketing and practice decision making within the context of the marketing environment. This is where we expect MIDE students to demonstrate the unique mind set, abilities, and skills they have learned throughout the program.

3.7. FOUR MORE COURSES
As stated earlier, each MIDE student is personally mentored through the program. While they all have to take the courses described above, they also all have to take four additional courses from outside the School of Management. The purpose of these courses is to provide the students with learning experiences that match their specific goals. Again, the students have access to Bucknell University’s full course catalog, minus the School of Management. These courses are selected in consultation with the student and then added as their unique graduation requirements.

For example, maybe a student is interested in design research. We may encourage them to take classes in anthropology, psychology, and sociology. Maybe a student wants to work for a design house, we may point them towards various visual communications classes like cinematography, communication design, drawing fundamentals, or sculpture. The options are endless and can be created expressly for each MIDE student. In the end, each MIDE graduate is not expected to be a designer, but to be a manager that understands, appreciates, and designs.

3.8. CORE MANAGEMENT COURSES
As stated above, for each MIDE student to graduate with a management education, they are still required to take all the same fundamental courses expected of every graduate of the School of Management. Courses in the areas of accounting and finance, operations, marketing, and organizational behavior will prepare them for the business world and open their eyes to the myriad of places that their design education can be applied in new and effective ways.

4. PLACEMENT OF MIDE GRADUATES
Due to the fact that each graduate of the Markets, Innovation, and Design program will be uniquely differentiated, it’s a challenge to imagine where they all will find employment. While we have yet to graduate our first class, students that took our trial courses have landed in positions in marketing research, advertising, public relations, brand analysis, consumer product management, and started their own companies. We expect that as students become strongly associated with the MIDE program and as the program develops a reputation, we will see more students find positions within design firms and design divisions of consumer product companies.
5. CONCLUSIONS
While design practices have become more acceptable by companies and taught within graduate level business courses, Bucknell University’s School of Management has brought design to the undergraduate management students through the Markets, Innovation, and Design program. This unique program will provide our graduates with the design perspective and the tools needed to be successful in our ever dynamic world.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
It should be noted that this program was not developed solely by myself. Most of the initial work was accomplished by my colleagues Doug Allen and Jan Traflet, not to diminish the labor by various committees within the School of Management and Bucknell University that saw the value in this program and ushered it through to approval.

7. REFERENCES