

A plea for practical education!

Would you prefer a dish prepared by a skillful chef with five years of experience or by a chef with three fancy diplomas who has, sadly, never seen a stove before? Whether you are a restaurant guest or an employer, you choose the person with real skills.

Slovak students normally absorb a vast amount of theory. No one would dispute that theoretical knowledge is useful. It simplifies our complex world and helps students understand how things work. But we also must be taught how to put theoretical knowledge into practice. Most theoretical knowledge, if not applied to real-life situations, is forgotten days after students pass their last exam. Without practical experience, we inevitably get a labor force with insufficient skills.

To drive change toward a more practical education, students at the Center for North American Studies (CNAS) – part of the University of Economics in Bratislava – created and promoted a case-study oriented model. In particular, students were able to develop their practical skills by promoting a magazine and web portal called “AmeriCan Letters.” It was based on Google’s Online Marketing Challenge – a worldwide competition for students to gain online marketing experience

by promoting real products or services using Google tools.

AmeriCan Letters represents a new concept for university magazines. It’s a lifestyle publication designed specifically for Slovak students, offering a wide range of videos, articles, and interviews with experts. It’s full of stories, blogs and advice about how to study in North America, including information about internships, work opportunities and where to get funding. We believe AmeriCan Letters will become the most popular information channel about the United States and Canada for Slovak students.

One day, students visiting the university’s website found a short announcement about how to join a Google Online Marketing Challenge team that would be supervised by Canadian-Slovak Peter Janeček, a marketing, PR and communications professional at BCP. The announcement caught our attention because it was a rare opportunity to break away from all the theory and do something practical. It didn’t surprise us that the number of students interested in participating greatly exceeded the expectations of the CNAS, its CEO Michal Kovács, and academic guarantor Amb. Martin Bútora.

After sending a CV and a short cover letter, six of us were selected for the Online Marketing Challenge team. We have a mix of Bachelor,

Masters and PhD students, and we come from various faculties. But we all share a passion for online marketing and social media. Above all, we were most excited about this opportunity because we were desperate for practical experience.

We were offered the chance to promote and market AmeriCan Letters magazine with a real budget. It turned out to be a much bigger project than we originally expected. In fact, we were taken aback when we realized the scope of the task ahead of us.

The project forced us to move beyond our safe academic environment and deal with the demands of the real business world. We quickly learned to appreciate the importance of task management, communication and teamwork. We had to devise an online marketing strategy, measure and report online campaign performance, and work on creative solutions based on catchy content and social media excellence. Simply put, we learned how things actually work in the real world. Thankfully, we still had a little leeway for mistakes, which we might not have had if we were regular employees or entrepreneurs.

CNAS has provided an ideal example of a practical education model. The project was critical

in helping us achieve our goal of becoming first-rate students who possess relevant practical experience. It gave us the chance to learn useful skills, come together as a team, and work on our ideas with true passion.

We believe such opportunities should be a more regular part of the educational process. Instead of producing walking encyclopedias with limited skills, this will truly prepare students for their future employment.

We appreciate that our university offered us a different working model than people in the Slovak system are accustomed to, requiring more innovation from teachers and more responsibility and ambition from students. However, if Slovakia wants to stop the brain drain and keep its best students, the educational system must improve by offering better methods to provide a level of education and experience comparable to the world’s highest standards. Theory may prepare us for perfection, but it’s the experience that will make us perfect.

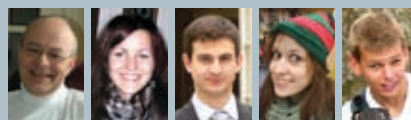


Romana Olexová

Romana Olexová is currently leading the AmeriCan Letters Online Marketing Team. She is an internal PhD student in the Faculty of Commerce at the University of Economics in Bratislava. Romana gained her first experience with business, marketing and online marketing as co-founder and manager of Shockjump, s.r.o., a small business providing skydiving services, mostly tandem jumps. She is planning for a career focused on creative marketing and online marketing solutions. Discover more at www.americanletters.sk and www.euba.sk/cnas/



AmeriCan Letters Online Marketing Team



From left: Peter Janeček, Romana Olexová, Lukáš Fúčela, Alex Michaličová, Peter Šíma