Connected Learning Series integrates career readiness throughout BSM program

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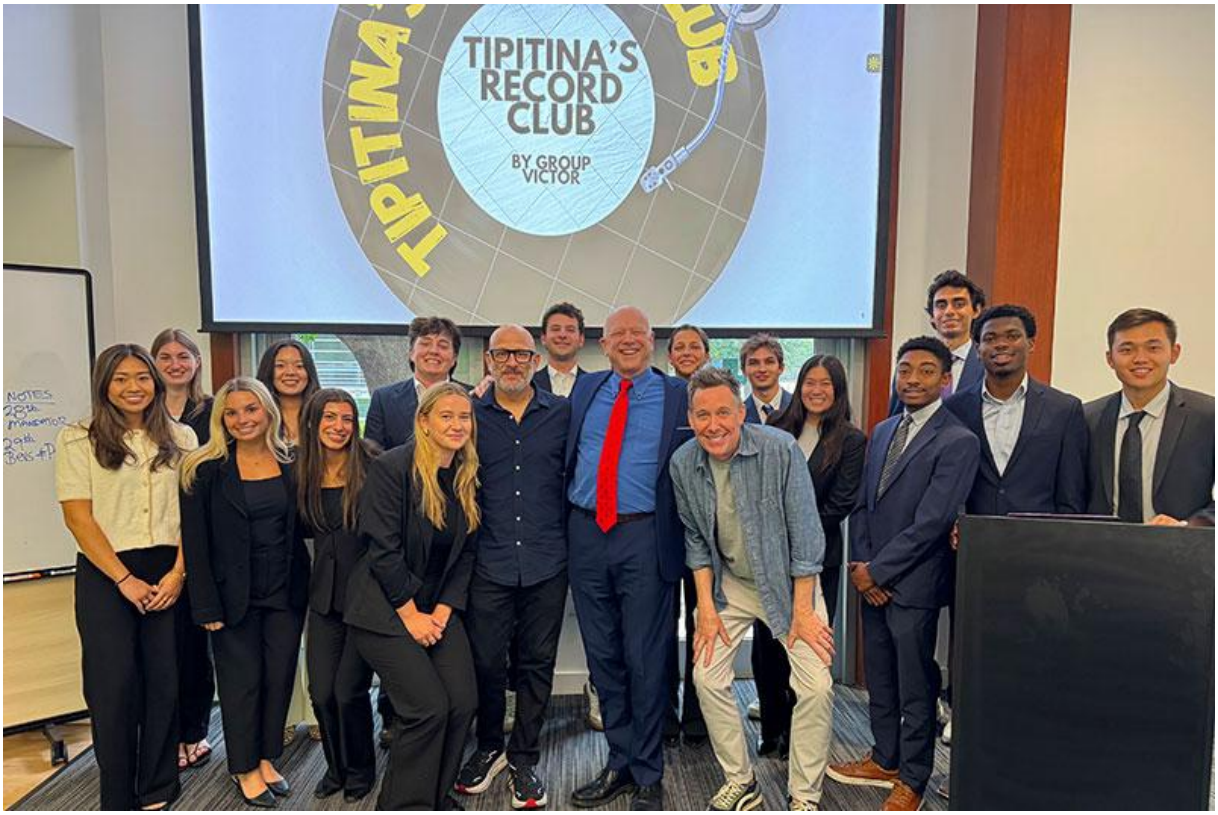

BSM Capstone students pose with instructor Larry Merington and Tipitina's owners Ben Ellman and Rob Mercurio following their presentation of a marketing plan for Tipitina's Record Club. The Capstone is part of the Connected Learning Series, an integrated three-course sequence that enables students to acquire and build professional competencies over their four years in the BSM program.

When Myke Yest became associate dean of undergraduate education in 2023, he noticed a concerning trend: Students were increasingly viewing the BSM curriculum as a collection of individual courses rather than an interconnected whole.

“When you start looking at the program as just a list of classes to check off, you miss out on something,” Yest says. “Professional skills aren’t something that can be taught in a single course. They need to be practiced repeatedly throughout the

curriculum.”

Weaving career readiness and communication skills training throughout the undergraduate program is the idea behind the Connected Learning Series in Professionalism. Launched in 2024, the series links three courses — Career Development and Management (CDMA 2201), Management Communication (MCOM 3200) and the BSM Capstone (MGMT 4920) — into a cohesive sequence that enables students to build professional competencies over their four years at Freeman.

“Our vision for the Connected Learning Series was to move away from viewing the learning of professionalism as a single event or an isolated course,” Yest says. “By intentionally connecting career education, communication, employer engagement and experiential learning over multiple years of study, we’re integrating professional skills development throughout the program – starting during their earliest days as a freshman.”

At its most basic level, the Connected Learning Series integrates the content of the three courses to reinforce and build upon the skills learned in each. Career Development and Management, for example, was moved earlier in the curriculum to enable students to gain experience in career exploration, networking and interviewing as freshmen but also to introduce them to skills they’ll later refine in Management Communication, including professional email communication, elevator pitches, presentation best practices and professional branding. Management Communication, meanwhile, was revamped to incorporate experiential learning activities, such as working with local business leaders to identify problems and then delivering communication strategies that propose solutions. Those skills are further applied in the BSM Capstone, which pulls together everything the students have learned over their four years in the program — networking, communication, research, finance, data analytics, accounting, marketing, strategy, presentation skills and more — as they work with a real client in the community to address a business need and propose solutions.

“Employers aren’t looking for students who can simply tell them they have strong communication, teamwork or problem-solving skills,” said Tori Lane, director of career education and strategy at the Freeman School. “They want to see students demonstrate them. The Connected Learning Series gives students repeated opportunities to practice those competencies, receive feedback and apply them in increasingly complex situations so that, by graduation, they’re prepared to compete

and contribute as professionals.”

Two years into its implementation, the program is yielding results, with faculty reporting measurable improvements in student professionalism, presentation skills, confidence, storytelling and critical thinking. Perhaps most significantly, students are showing a newfound receptiveness to feedback, a trait highly prized by recruiters.

“Our results are a testament to the power of sequenced learning,” says Yest. “Faculty are seeing teams exhibit more innovative approaches in their presentations and a level of creativity well beyond what they were seeing just a few years ago. Our students are graduating with the experience and confidence that truly differentiate them in a competitive job market, and that’s ultimately what a Freeman education is all about.”