

Elaine Zhang

NPI 13.0_Winter/Spring 2024

Irene and Yacanex

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Final Reflection

Section I. Can Experts Solve Poverty?

What kind of expert are you becoming, or aspiring to become?

I aspire to become an expert in solving actual business problems. Perhaps not necessarily in the consulting sense, but I want to be someone whom others could ask for strategies and resources to address particular business problems. This idea also came from an RSO called GetVirtual which I am a project manager in (Ryan is in it too), where we help local small businesses build an online presence through websites or managing social media strategies/accounts. It is similar to my role in NPI, but less holistic since it doesn't cover operations. With that said, it is still a demanding project and we have to communicate constantly with one another to keep everyone on track. Having done a little bit of managing, I think it is incredibly impressive for anyone to manage strategy, expansion, recruitment, funding, and long-term models while having to oversee all the ongoing client work all at the same time, and I aspire to be someone who can do that when I actually enter the workforce.

What boxes is your training teaching you to draw?

In LSB I am an accounting information system and economics major, which teaches us how to do statistical analysis on assessing causal relationships and whether something is a significant factor in producing specific results. As a freshman, I have not taken any accounting courses yet, but I imagine having a great understanding of how businesses function after my four years at SCU. Having a business core as well as our ELSJ requirement has also given me a much better understanding of how factors of society all come together, and as the video mentioned, by learning more cross-field knowledge, I might be more considerate in the realms where I am drawing boxes in.

How are you learning to define problems, and based on that, through what lens, or boxes, do you see poverty and inequality?

I have taken economics, statistics, environmental studies, and history courses up to this point which I think is relevant to addressing poverty and inequality. In addressing problems, my first instinct is to double-check the cause of that particular issue and explore for means we could take to address them. In terms of poverty, I might consider them more in terms of socio-economics, politics, historical and geographical factors. However, I think one thing I learned about addressing problems is really to be out there, see what's happening, and do something to see if it works before making a huge theoretical plan as reality often tends to be different from what we imagine it to be.

How has this experience in BUSN 188 helped you to understand what might be missing from inside the boxes you are learning to draw?

I've realized how much we can learn from simply interacting or being out there with our clients – small business has been something that we discussed as early as in BUSN70 – yet just by knowing the statistics and how big of a portion they occupy in the US economy does not suffice to truly understand and see their challenges. I did not realize how tight of a schedule Irving had to get all of his materials for making tamales, nor did I know about all the permits he had to manage to legally operate.

Looking from the outside, when we first met Irving he already had a pretty legitimate business running pretty well with a stable stream of weekly customers, but it was only post actually working with him over time, especially after the industrial kitchen went bankrupt, that I really acknowledged how difficult it is and how an impressive job Irving is currently doing to manage everything. Perhaps working in a big company only asks for 8 hours of a work day, but being a small business owner has no definite “end time” and there are no specific department experts to tackle particular issues when they do come up. This was something that our courses never taught us, and I really value this particular experience with NPI which allowed me to see that.

What have you learned in this NPI 13.0 experience that might broaden how you see issues of poverty and inequality?

Coming out of high school, I only had a theoretical understanding of what potentially causes poverty and had absolutely zero understanding of what it's like to run a business in reality. We learned how poverty is a structural issue, but I have predominantly thought of it as a political issue on a macroscale and it's something that the government has to take care of. Post joining NPI, I had the opportunity to look at small businesses on a more individual level and get to know the resources available to them, including funding and permit support, etc. I did not know there were programs and communities that support small businesses, but now seeing Excite and NPI as well as Yacanex's community (and even MOBI at SCU) I think these groups really will make a difference and there is definitely something that we could do on the individual level to contribute to more equality.

Section II. NPI Reflection

Assessing the contributions of team members (allocating \$75000 bonus):

If I were to be a manager, I would genuinely allocate \$18750 to each of Team 3's members: Adrian, James, Ryan, and myself (J-RAE). I think the nature of this project predominately being self-defined really adds to the challenge of how we turn an idea into steps that we could take and achieve realistically within 2 quarters (the action officially carried out in the Spring quarter, which is technically about 8 weeks), and I think my team did a great job of this. I remember that on the first day

of class, Irene assured us that “something will ‘go wrong’ in the duration of the project,” and for us, it was the industrial kitchen. Having approximately only two to three weeks left until the presentation, I think our group members handled the additional task well and they were flexible in adapting to changes. Instead of just treating this as a mere project to get done, they had Irving and the business’s best interest in mind. Overall this is probably the best team working experience I have ever had, with members always being very proactive about their tasks and the work being evenly distributed. Having worked with the team.

In addition to the above, I felt that everyone was both passionate and skilled regarding their aspect of the project. Adrian with storytelling and organization, James with permit and finances, Ryan with long-term research, and myself with the marketing and websites. Though there were initially some issues with creating a group chat and method of communication, there was never a point where I felt anyone was free-riding or did not have the same commitment to Irving and we would always try to help one another if one of us couldn’t make it to a meeting or a visit. I also learned so much from each group member as well as their experience, so I’m very happy and grateful to be able to be on this team for 2 quarters.

What are 3-5 takeaways from your experience in NPI 13.0? Please include at least one that relates to what you’ve learned about your own leadership behavior and being a team member.

1. It is best to set the method of communication and shared drive/calendar as early as possible since ease of communication truly plays a big role in whether things are going to get done.
2. In a team, my most comfortable role is being a facilitator. I am good at coming up with ideas about what else we could do, but my focus tends to be more expansion-based. I also need to improve my skills in formalizing the steps to how a specific task gets done, which I learned a lot from NPI in terms of how to set up different versions of Action Plans etc.
3. Do not fear trying new things! But at the end of the day, our goal should be realistic and there are things we have to give up to prioritize those that matter more.
4. Sometimes the best way to learn is to throw yourself into it and work it out / learn as you go. Just like how you can’t learn swimming in a classroom, we need to be out there to learn how to do business.

Tell us about a moment from this experience that you think will stay with you.

One time I went to the Prince Park farmers market to take professional photos for Irving so I stayed inside his stand for a couple of hours. We talked from what it’s like to be a student at SCU to the experience of transitioning into a completely new country, what it was like for me having lived in China for almost my entire life, what the education system was like etc. and Irving told me about his

story of first coming here into the US (when he was about the same age as I am!). It was really relatable since he also came knowing almost no one, and he said now at least I know him, which was genuinely really sweet!! I loved the connections that we are able to build through this project, and I think I would definitely want to visit his stand and ask about how it's going in the future!

To help us improve this experience for students in the future, please share:

What was most valuable or rewarding about this class?

First off I really enjoyed and liked this course! I think we brought in many great speakers who provided insights that were never covered in any of my other courses (especially ones on Excite and how credit unions specifically help small businesses). If there's one thing that I have to call most valuable, I would say it is the opportunity to actually be out there and work with a real client under the support of faculty and having a 3000 budget to practice resource allocation. It's like controlled chaos so we're not super lost yet still have responsibilities to figure out. I also learned a lot from how other teams dealt with different issues, and so the community was valuable to me as well!

(PS I still really miss Irving's corn tamales! It's definitely in my top 5 favorite things to eat.)

What was most frustrating and/or needs to be changed?

I think if anything, maybe we could start the implementation process in the first quarter rather than rushing it through spring? I personally felt that the action plan revision process, though definitely necessary and helped significantly facilitate the workflow afterward, sometimes gets a little bit repetitive in the late winter quarter. There were many issues that we realized only after we had started tackling them (e.g. after creating the accounts we realized that there was more information required to authenticate it so it took longer than I expected), but overall I liked how the course is structured!