Making the Case for 15 Years

RBC enables student learning through case competition

by Mackenzie Ford

It’s a brisk Friday morning in January, and dozens of third-year BCom students flock to the UVic campus with coffee and calculators in hand. Separating into teams and chatting nervously among themselves, the anticipation is tangible as they prepare for three hours of rapid financial calculations, creative marketing analyses and detailed expansion strategies. Once they’ve been ushered into a classroom with no computers, cell phones or external help, an officiator announces, “You have three hours.” The annual RBC Case Competition has begun.

Spearheaded in 2003 by Gustavson professors Chris Graham and David McCutcheon, the competition was created to provide a platform for all third-year BCom students to present a case analysis to a panel of judges composed of faculty, staff and community members.

“The RBC case competition was created in order to give every student the experience of competing in a business case competition,” says Graham. Although the model in most schools is to open case competitions only to a few selected students, the Gustavson approach is different. “We believe schools is to open case competitions only to a few selected students, the Gustavson approach is different. “We believe that the RBC Case Competition has begun.

In 2004/2005 academic year, the competition transformed into its current name and shape: the RBC Case Competition. With this newfound support, the judging panel expanded to include staff from the bank, and additional funding was provided to broaden the scope of the competition. For the first time there was a cash prize on the line, and students could receive invaluable feedback from industry professionals.

Now, 15 years later, “The RBC Case Competition has become a BCom rite of passage that every student must pass through on their way to becoming a business professional,” explains Kate Donovan, director of administration, undergraduate programs at Gustavson. “Without RBC’s contribution to our internal case competition, we simply wouldn’t have been able to run this highly valued event for the students. From purchasing a large number of cases, to providing their staff as judges in every round, RBC’s support is integral to running a competition of this scale.”

RBC’s support for the competition over the years is what Frank Lowe, community manager at RBC and long-time competition judge, calls a “win-win-win for the students, UVic and RBC. It gives [RBC’s staff] a feeling of pride, knowing that RBC is assisting in the academic lives of UVic students. It also gives staff the opportunity to participate directly by volunteering to be a judge and it gives RBC an opportunity to get a preview glimpse at top talent for the future.”

The perspective that comes with years in the work force doesn’t seem to lessen the value of the competition for participants. Alumni often say that the competition is one of their most memorable experiences from their time in the BCom program.

“What you learn in this competition is a real life skill,” says Tara Hack, BCom ‘06, one of the winners of the competition in 2005. “Pitching and selling ideas is a big part of what I do today and getting exposure to that at university is so important. I can still remember the feeling of ‘we totally nailed it’ — and doing it as a team was so exciting. It’s still one of my top five accomplishments.”

For 15 years, the RBC Case Competition has been a cornerstone of the Gustavson BCom program. In order to thrive over time, an undertaking of this scope must have champions from the business community, as well as stalwart internal supporters. Simply put, “RBC’s support is the thing that makes it all possible,” says Graham.