

2012 TAU PI PHI CASE COMPETITION

Five seniors, Hillary Monnin, Kimmie Dyer, Aaron Swartz, Jordan Millice and Wade Stacy, travelled to Pittsburgh, PA for the annual Tau Pi Phi case competition. They competed with teams from Mt. Union University, Marietta College, Juniata College and Capital University to see who could best analyze a pair of cases with limited preparation time.

The competition began on Friday with a case involving Levendary Café which is a wholesome-food, quick-casual restaurant franchise. Their new CEO took over from the previous CEO of 32 years, but did not have any international experience. The Company wished to expand into China and hired a native executive who was given free rein to open subsidiaries; however, the new CEO discovered that the Chinese operation was departing from the company's well-established brand identity. A rapidly growing business usually creates one of three types of manager: the go-getter, the local baron, or the professional manager. All three types can be entrepreneurial in spirit, but not all are equally suited for the various stages of business growth. The person in charge of the Chinese operations was clearly a go-getter who had evolved into a local baron. The question posed to the team was whether or not the CEO believed that the Chinese manager could transition to the next step and become a professional manager.

On Saturday the competition continued with a case regarding the LEGO Group and a possible "building strategy." On February 15, 2011, world-famous toy maker the LEGO Group (LEGO) assembled an internal management team to create a strategic report on LEGO's different product lines and business operations. Over the past two years new competition had emerged in the toy industry: the acquisition of Marvel Entertainment by Walt Disney Co. which created major implications for valuable toy license agreements; a major competitor MEGA Brands – maker of MEGA Bloks – won a European Union court decision that removed the LEGO brick trademark; and there was new competition from Hasbro which was producing a rival product line called Kre-O. It was critical for the management team to identify where to expand LEGO's product lines and business operations to develop a competitive strategy to continue their financial success and dominance in the building toy market. Our team had to develop this strategy then present and defend it to the panel of judges.

Then the teams faced an entirely different format from Friday's competition. They faced a panel of judges who were free to ask them any questions they chose about the case and the teams had to answer these questions "on the spot." This required a detailed knowledge of the case and an in-depth analysis which would enable the teams to respond with specific recommendations.

The panel of judges from the Pittsburgh area included an attorney whose specialty is corporate litigation, a marketing executive with Health America, a pension advisor with PNC Bank, an institutional investment advisor with Wilshire Associates and a human resources director with Shroeder Industries. They asked the hard questions and made the final decision about the team's performance. The judges also took the time to provide all the teams with constructive feedback about their performance this year.

The competition ended with the annual Tau Pi Phi banquet catered by the Doubletree Hotel. The results of the competition were announced during the banquet. The Witt two-person team tied for second and the three top teams finished within a point of each other. Witt's three-person team faced tough competition...but we'll be back next year.