And the Survey Says...

On the first day back to campus in January, students from the Stillman School of Business led a food drive for the Community FoodBank of New Jersey. Students had connected with the nonprofit the previous semester through a project in the school’s Market Research Center and were driven to replenish a 100,000-pound food loss suffered as a result of Superstorm Sandy.

Each semester, anywhere from 25-75 students participate in market-research projects for a range of clients. Student teams, supervised by professors and the center’s staff, work with business owners, managers and executives to tackle various business challenges. Students conduct market research to uncover key insights, find possible improvements to products or services, and ultimately develop recommendations for the businesses they work with. To learn more about the center and its projects, Seton Hall magazine editor Pegeen Hopkins sat down with the center’s director, Adam Warner.

What clients have students worked with since the Market Research Center launched? In the last 2½ years, we’ve completed about 30 projects. They’ve run the gamut from small startups to large businesses like UPS, Hackensack University Medical Center and Planet Honda.

What kinds of business issues are clients looking to solve? Sometimes the client’s issue is that business is slow and they want to grow. Some want to evaluate their social-media presence and see what customers think about their website. Others want to learn how to attract more Seton Hall students to their business.

Last semester, we worked with Hackensack University Medical Center — a large organization with about 8,000 employees — to determine how to get employees to visit its four gift stores more frequently.

How have students made a clear difference in a client’s business? A great example is Stony’s (a restaurant in downtown South Orange). The owner wanted to attract more Seton Hall students to his restaurant. As a result of the market-research project recommendations, Stony’s increased sales 25 percent overall. On Wednesday nights, business doubled, thanks to a special Seton Hall Night promotion.

Is Planet Honda a repeat customer? Planet Honda has done three projects with us. First they wanted to understand how well their TV commercials resonated with potential customers. They also did a “Buyer” study to see why people bought at Planet Honda and a “Rejecter” study to see why people visited but did not purchase. The CEO said the market research he did at Seton Hall was more valuable than any the business had done before.

What specific skills have students learned? We’ve heard from the Career Center that these project experiences are showing up on our students’ resumes: “I moderated a focus group; I designed a survey; I provided market-research consulting services for XYZ company.” Students are learning critical skills they’ll be able to use in the real world.

How does the Market Research Center fit in with Stillman’s philosophy of a practical business education? At Stillman, we focus on experiential learning. The Market Research Center, Center for Entrepreneurial Studies, Center for Leadership Development, Sports Polling Center and The Trading Room are all opportunities for students to gain invaluable hands-on experience.

The motto we’ve used for the Market Research Center is “University/Business Partnerships.” Students get a lot out of the projects; they get real-world experience serving a business in a consulting capacity. Businesses get excellent customer insights and practical recommendations. A Market Research Center project is a great opportunity for alumni with businesses to re-engage with the school in a “win-win” situation. I hope our alumni will take advantage of the Center, contact us and explore how we can partner together to benefit their business. ■