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NCR poses real issue to
business students at WLU

It was a week-long struggle for all 200 third-year business students at Wilfrid Laurier University recently as they labored throughout the days, and sometimes most of the nights, to find the answer to a business puzzle dumped into their laps by a major Waterloo firm.

It was a real conundrum, too, one that had engaged the best brains at the Waterloo engineering and manufacturing facility of NCR Canada Ltd.

In brief, as Bob Rushby, director of engineering for the company, explained, a product line had been introduced in 1984 that had failed to meet the company's expectations for it. While NCR finally solved the problem, there was

interest to see what the Laurier business students would make of it, as a guide for future thinking.

So, in an annual exercise that is termed the integrated case, the students, in groups of six or seven, tackled the problem from all angles-- and came up with a variety of solutions. All classes were cancelled for the week.

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Rushby said there were a number of possibilities, including a redesign of the product, a different approach to maintenance, a new marketing system, or a suggestion that the product be scrapped, among others.

"We are looking forward to getting some good ideas from the students," Rushby said, as he arrived on campus with other senior management people from NCR to listen to the best solutions-- selected by an internal board of Laurier faculty members that heard all 30 presentations and selected the best five.

Even though the company had made a decision in this matter, there are many similar matters that could benefit from a fresh look by those from outside the company, the NCR executive said.

Rushby, who had sat in on the case considered by last year's students, said he was impressed with the professionalism and ability of the Laurier students.

"This is an invaluable exercise for the company," he said.

NCR is a major Waterloo employer, and one of the largest research and development centres in Canada for the electronic and computing industry.

Those on the NCR team with Rushby were Thomas Duff, controller; Susan Demeter, manager of personnel resources; Roger King, senior engineering manager for counter top products; and Mike Visser, manager of imaging systems.

At an evening dinner, following a day of presentations, first-place and second-place winners were selected by NCR executives.

The company gave framed Peter Etril Snyder prints to each of the seven members of the winning team, and pocket calculators in brass cases to the seven members of the runners-up. The gifts were engraved with the name of the event and the year: WLU integrated case, 1988.