Gaining ‘hands on’ experience working with business, and in particular not-for-profit organisations, give students a distinct advantage in a world where there is an increasing crossover between social and business enterprise.

The final course in the Master of Commerce program at the Australian School of Business aims to give students this experience, allowing them to get to grips with real world problems faced by business and not-for-profit organisations.

This semester students are working with two not-for-profit organisations, Aunties & Uncles and Médecins Sans Frontières Australia, as part of the ‘Business Consulting Project’ course.

“We are excited to be benefiting from the focus of some of Australia’s brightest up and coming business minds, said Ms Patricia Gilchrist, Chair of the Board of Aunties & Uncles.

“Aunties & Uncles is very much a grass roots charity, with our service being delivered by dedicated, trained volunteers, supported by a lean management structure. We are looking forward to the students’ fresh insights on how we can develop a more predictable, sustained funding model to service the growing community need,” said Ms Gilchrist.

Working in teams, students from different specialisations including marketing, accounting, economics and finance, apply their knowledge and skills to a range of business problems. They visit the client on site and produce primary and secondary data to support their recommendations.

Program supervisor, Michael Peters, said the course provides a terrific opportunity for students to get out of the classroom and cut their teeth on some complex problems that require real solutions through teamwork and a cross disciplinary approach.

Marketing student Todd Spokes is currently working on the Médecins Sans Frontières Australia project. “Despite being only halfway through the project we are learning valuable skills in project management, problem solving and creative exploration whilst working as a team,” said Mr Spokes.

“We have learned that the marketing research process is a difficult one which needs to be tweaked and fine tuned to achieve our objective. Now that we have the data, the analysis and key findings have been quite positive toward our ideas so we think we are heading in the right direction,” he said.

The teams present their proposals to a panel of reviewers, and the best then go on to present their proposals to the client.

“Past results have been so successful that companies involved have not only taken up solutions devised by students but have also employed students,” said Mr Peters.