I don’t think I’ve ever received more questions per hour than I did last night.”

I’ll never forget hearing those words from Rich Clayton, vice president of Oracle’s Business Analytics Product Group. It was the night before our M.S. Business Analytics cohort and Oracle were launching a collaborative industry project, the capstone experience of our new master’s program in the Orfalea College of Business. We represented its first class, the inquisitive guinea pigs. We all did our best to pretend to know what we were getting into.

The next day, in Redwood Shores, we sat down with Oracle’s team to dig into our task: surveying five years of global sales data from Oracle’s Enterprise Performance Management product offered via its software-as-a-service platform. The goal was to analyze 250 product lines to identify where the company should invest its marketing efforts for maximum growth. It wasn’t a school project — it was a consulting project: Cal Poly (the firm) and Oracle (the client). And our recommendations, although helped along by our classwork, were to be entirely our own production built from our own faculties.

Thankfully, each student didn’t have to go it alone. Our teams provided an incredible learning environment. We brought with us a variety of professional experiences — from a Taiwanese nuclear engineer to a Bakersfield banker. Throughout our undergrad careers, each
Facing Feedback
M.S. Business Analytics students hear direction on their presentations from Oracle’s Ivgen Guner (center).

considering the caliber of work done by our classmates on other teams. Each group took a slightly different approach that Oracle found valuable, reiterating that there can be multiple right answers in a field like analytics.

Our reward was the standard trophy in business — more work. We were granted the opportunity to give an extended presentation to Ivgen Guner, the senior vice president of Oracle Global Business Finance, among other senior executives in marketing and data analytics at Oracle’s headquarters.

We updated our report and walked in not knowing what to expect, and we met the most commanding audience of any presentation. Although we were the focal point of the discussion among Ms. Guner and other Oracle executives, we provided more of an axis for their objectives and understanding. The aggressive and targeted questioning gave us a taste of the nature of internal corporate meetings and proved to us just how well we understood the data and the story we built with it.

Working with Mr. Clayton, Ms. Drozd and the entire Oracle team was far above and beyond any class project thanks to its legitimate impact and review. The mix of joy, surprise, success, all the countless hours of work, the research, the modeling — it all culminated in that presentation to our clients.