

INTEGRATION OF THE BUSINESS CORE CURRICULUM AND THE ADEQUACY OF SUPPORT PROVIDED

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ABSTRACT

In response to industry demands and accreditation standards, many business schools are developing integrated versions of common body of knowledge (CBOK) courses. Attempts have ranged from intentions to discuss and incorporate these issues into existing independent classes, to aggressive efforts involving multiple team-taught courses. In a few cases, however, integration efforts targeted for all business majors have been scaled back to limited offerings or eliminated all together.

Although content and presentation-related decisions are paramount to the success of these programs, other more subtle issues such as attitudes, infrastructure, and resources are of equal importance. These issues represent the foundation on which the program will be established. This research attempts to document the extent to which U.S. university/college-based business schools are involved in integration efforts, identify the nature of support provided, and the perceived adequacy of that support.

A sample of 240 university/college-based business schools in the United States was drawn from the 1999 AACSB membership directory. Given the relatively small population size (1000), 240 represents a 95/5 sample based on traditional sample methodology. In order to deal with multiple informant concerns, each business school is represented by one administrator (Dean, Associate Dean, or Department Chair) and two full-time, tenure-track faculty.

Approximately 40% of U.S. university/college based schools of business are currently involved in efforts to integrate the core business curriculum. Those involved, however, vary regarding the stage of program development. Thirty three percent of these are in the early planning stages, 13% are testing pilot programs, and 46% have implemented integrated efforts as a regular component of the curriculum. Only one respondent indicated that a program had been discontinued after introduction.

While a large proportion have extensive integrated course offerings, approximately 25% of schools involved rely upon discussions between faculty members to include integrated material in their traditional courses. Beyond this format, the most popular approaches involve a series of integrated courses taught by faculty teams (26%), or a single

integrative course taught by an individual faculty member (22%). Although integrated courses are offered throughout the college curriculum, the majority of business schools deliver integrated material during the Junior and Senior years.

Profiles of the involved and uninvolved schools differ little with regard to observable characteristic such as faculty size, teaching loads, and accreditation status. The major difference between these groups appears to be attitudinal in nature. They differed in their perceptions of faculty and administrator attitudes. Schools involved in integration efforts perceive their faculty, and business school and university administrator attitudes to be much more positive than those from business schools that are not involved in integration efforts. This suggests that sufficient attitudinal support is necessary for starting the integration process as well as developing a successful program.

Support efforts that cost little in terms of time and effort are perceived by both faculty and administrators as sufficient. The integration mandate has become part of the business school mission, hiring priorities, and undergraduate degree requirements. Integration activities have also been incorporated into the Key Performance Indicators of many business schools.

With regard to more substantive support, faculty and administrators are in agreement on a number of issues. Corporate funding is nearly nonexistent, and funding for planning grants and faculty rewards are insufficient. They also agree that many faculty are ill-at-ease with the prospect of teaching in an integrated curriculum, most are perceived as lacking sufficient background to participate, and the academic reward process offers little recognition for contributions to the integration effort.

Faculty and administrators differ, however, in their perceptions of the adequacy of faculty development support, release time for development and delivery of the integrated course offerings, and the results of efforts to hire cross-functionally trained faculty. Faculty perceptions on these issues are significantly less positive than the perceptions of administrators. These discrepancies help to explain the less optimistic faculty perceptions of their school's commitment to integration efforts.