

DEVELOPING AN INTEGRATED MBA PROGRAM

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ABSTRACT

The search for integration in the business school curriculum has been given additional impetus by businesses. In this paper, organizational and pedagogical approaches--designed to integrate functional disciplines, students, faculty, and the business community--are presented. Managerial and educational implications are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, business schools have received sharp criticism of curricula. The 1987 American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) study (Porter & McKibbin, 1988) calling for changes in management education caused numerous universities to re-examine their management programs. The 1990 AACSB guidelines for accreditation reflect the need for change. The Graduate Management Admission Council has sponsored numerous conferences during the past three years exploring curricula change and assessment. Articles in U.S. News and World Report (1993), Business Week (1992), and the Wall Street Journal (1990, 1991a, 1991b) report the sweeping changes taking place in the business school. Jacobson (1993) recently suggests many of the changes are modest or superficial and continual improvement is needed.

In response to these reports, and in response to the changing business environment, significant changes were made in the MBA Program at the school of management. The marketing faculty, along with faculty members in other functional areas, were asked to modify their allegiance to their discipline and teach in a different manner. They were asked to focus on an integrated core of classes and be willing to compromise and work with faculty members from all other business disciplines.

PURPOSE

The primary objectives of our paper are to outline the changes in the graduate management program and to present the preliminary results of these changes. In the next section, we review the salient areas of our

integration program. We then evaluate the changes. We conclude with implications that should be of interest to marketing educators and business practitioners alike.

AN INTEGRATED MBA PROGRAM

In the fall of 1991, an integrated lock-step curriculum was introduced into the first year of the MBA Program. The new core program was the result of 14 months of faculty discussion, work, and analysis. Several significant changes resulted from this program-development work.

The Integrated Core

The first significant change was the reduction in the number of class sessions in each of the functional areas (marketing, finance, operations, organizational behavior, and managerial economics). This change was necessary to make room for new courses in (1) strategy, (2) business, international economics, and government, (3) management of information systems, and (4) integrative exercise. The MBA core program was again modified last year and includes the following offering for 1993-94:

Fall Semester	
Class	Cr. Hrs.
Marketing Management	2.0
Business Finance	2.5
Operations Management	2.0
Organizational Behavior	2.5
Written and Oral Communications	2.0
Management Seminar	1.0
Integrative Exercise	0.5
Total	12.5
Winter Semester	
Class	Cr. Hrs.
Macro Economics & Business Environment	2.0
Integrative Exercise	0.5
Written and Oral Communications	2.0
Management of Technology	2.5
Introduction to Strategy	2.0
Business, Government and International Economy	3.0

Management Seminar	1.0
Data Exploration	1.0
Total	13.5

Students without adequate background in accounting, statistics, and economics are required to take preparatory courses in these areas during both the fall and winter semesters. Students with adequate preparation are allowed to take one elective course along with the core classes each semester. Students speaking a foreign language are also enrolled in specialized language courses outlined later in the paper.

Regular course work is canceled several times during the MBA core in order for the students to participate in an "Integrative Exercise." This exercise typically involves an analysis of a complex integrative case situation and a formal oral presentation to a group of three faculty members, each from a different discipline.

Course schedules are prepared during the summer and the teaching faculty meet to explore areas of integration. All written assignments are evaluated and points of integration sought. Examinations are limited to one final examination.

Classes are scheduled for Monday-Tuesday and Thursday-Friday. Wednesdays are reserved for class preparation and for the management lecture series. Communication courses are also taught (for 90 minutes) on Wednesday mornings.

Student Profile

The profile of the 1995 MBA class is as follows.

Number admitted	122
Average GMAT	587
GMAT over 600	49%
Average GPA	3.1
Bilingual students	84%
International students	36
Countries represented	20

Student Integration

Before entering the program, the first year MBA students (approximately 100 students) are assigned to one of two sections. They participate with that group of students for all of the courses in the first semester core.

One of the objectives of the new MBA core is to encourage group work. Study groups are randomly called on in each class to make group presentations of their case analysis. Other groups are called on to evaluate and critique the presentations. Group evaluations are obtained to measure the functioning of each group. The organizational behavior faculty members focus on group work during their class sessions.

Students are formally assigned to a study group as they enter the program. Study groups are organized first by language skill (homogeneous on this dimension). GMAT scores, GPA, gender, work experience, and undergraduate major are factors used to make minimum differences between groups. In order to facilitate group success, all students participate in a "ropes" experience during the first week of class. Both "high," "low," and "problem solving" events are included in the experience. The experience seems especially useful for the international students in the program.

Integration of International Students

A specialized program was developed to integrate 36 international students into the program. International students are required to arrive two weeks prior to the beginning of the semester for a special program. Activities are designed to introduce the international students to the U.S. culture. They are exposed to the expectations of our educational system, and international students are introduced to the case method in several class sessions.

Integration with Graduate Accounting Students

The evaluation of the integrated core curriculum was positive throughout the first year. Faculty members heavily involved with the program were quick to share their positive reaction with other faculty in the college. It became apparent to many faculty members that the new integrated core was a step in the right direction.

The administrators of the Master of Accountancy (MAcc) Program took note of the benefits from the new MBA core. They proposed that the first semester MBA core be the standard for all graduate students in the school of management. After much discussion and compromise, a decision was reached to include all graduate business students in the first semester of the core program.

In the fall of 1992, the number of sections was increased from two to four sections. The number of MBA students was increased to 120 to achieve better balance with the 150 MAcc students. MBA students were mixed with MAcc and graduate organizational behavior (OB) students. The students were mixed among three sections with one group comprised only of MAcc students. With the exception of language groups, study groups were assigned to make them as heterogeneous as possible within each group.

Language Integration

Because of the unique nature of our university, over 80% of the graduate students speak a second language. In order to take advantage of this situation, study groups are first assigned by language, that is, group members all speak the same foreign language. (As outlined above, the groups were then formed to mix gender, GMAT, GPA, and undergraduate major within each group.) In order to build on the language skills of the students, six new language courses were designed and offered outside of the core. These courses are taught by faculty members from the language departments, but focus on business vocabulary and economic situations. Presently we offer business language classes in German, Spanish, French, Korean, Japanese, and Chinese. Plans are underway to add Italian and Portuguese in 1994.

Integration with the Business Community

The second year of the program is similar to other MBA programs in that students have much more flexibility in the elective courses they pursue. They are required to take courses in Business Policy, Ethics, and a field study course. In order to encourage a generalists environment, students are also required to take courses from three functional areas in addition to their specialization.

The purpose of the field study course is to ensure that all students participate in a consulting or research activity. In our opinion, it is important for the student to have interaction with the business community.

In addition, all students are required to enroll in a management lecture series which features leaders from the business community. This course is offered each Wednesday afternoon. Some of the past speakers have included the CEO of Bankers Trust, the President of the NY Knickerbockers, the Vice-chair of Chevron Oil, the President of W.C. Brown Communications, and the Governor of the state.

Faculty Integration

One of the major challenges in implementing the new core program was to encourage faculty members to engage in integrative activities. Once each week, fairly broad integrative cases are team taught in three-hour sessions. Marketing faculty members team teach with faculty from finance, operations, and organization behavior. For example, the classic case "Pure Drug" (or Puritan Drug) is team taught by marketing and organizational behavior faculty. U.S. Robotics is team taught with faculty from production.

Faculty members are assigned to one of four teaching teams and each team has responsibility for one section of the core. Some faculty teach more than one section so they are involved with two teaching teams. Meetings are held weekly so faculty can discuss common challenges and opportunities in each section. Faculty involved with the integrative cases also meet to discuss the teaching plan for the case. Faculty members from each of the functional groups (across teaching sections) are encouraged to meet weekly to ensure assignments in each section are similar and taught in essentially the same manner. Students in each section, therefore, receive approximately the same educational experience.

The integration effort has been expensive in using additional faculty resources. The cost has been paid for by (1) reducing undergraduate students majoring in business management, (2) requiring few undergraduate business management courses for business management majors, (3) reducing the number of undergraduate elective courses offered and (4) reducing the number of MBA students by approximately one-third.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE INTEGRATED CORE

We have received positive feedback from students, faculty, and recruiters about the benefits of the integrated core. A survey completed at the end of 1992 suggests that MBA and MAcc students view the new core as a major improvement. Likewise, faculty

involved in teaching in the program are positive about the experience.

Members of the school of management's support groups (National Advisory Council, Alumni Council, Accounting Advisory Board) are positive about the new integrated approach. Likewise, firms recruiting

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on campus have responded favorably. The number of national firms recruiting MBA students has increased from 80 to 93 in the past three years (for example, Bankers Trust and Morgan Stanley have begun recruiting efforts). Beginning salaries for the graduates moved from \$39,000 to \$43,500. The placement rate for 1993 was over 90%.

However, there are some disadvantages, which include the following:

1. Faculty involvement and time commitment is heavy.
2. Teaching sessions in the functional areas have been cut to the minimum.
3. It is difficult to develop a "culture" for the MBA students because of the mixing with MAcc students.
4. Likewise, the OB faculty thought it was difficult to develop a "culture" for the first year OB students.
5. MAcc students perceived it was an MBA core, not a graduate core.
6. Some MAcc students thought the emphasis on case work was much too great. They wanted the "right" answer.
7. Some MAcc students held part-time work which interfered with group work (all students were told they should not hold part-time jobs, but some MAcc students elected not to follow this suggestion).

Involvement of the Marketing Faculty

The new integrated core program requires that four marketing faculty members teach in the core. The teaching commitment is heavy because of the extra time required for planning meetings and involvement with the integrated case teaching. In fact, a fifth marketing faculty member is needed during the Thursday integrative case sessions. Thus far, the marketing faculty not involved with the MBA core have been willing to assist.

Team teaching with faculty from other disciplines has been rewarding for the marketing faculty. The

challenges presented in the integrated approach provide variety to the teaching experience.

SUMMARY

In recent years, considerable interest has focused on integration of the business school curriculum. We attempt to address this critical issue by developing

and implementing a strategic change in the MBA core program. Our experience represents efforts to integrate functional disciplines, students, faculty, and the business community. While we believe we have made progress in this area, much work remains to be done.

As is the case with most strategic changes, the implementation of change is much more difficult than the design. Some faculty members believe we have moved away from the traditional approaches too fast. We continue to evaluate our progress. Changes and adjustments result from the new strategic focus. For example, a new five-week intensive experience in data analysis will be included Winter Semester 1994. The majority of the winter semester core classes taught for a full semester last year will be cut to 20 sessions to make room for the new course.

Because of the growing intensity for integration in virtually all spheres of business activity, business schools should examine their curriculum offerings and adapt accordingly. While the type and amount of integration may vary by business school, there is much to be learned by exchanging ideas and approaches. Thus, we encourage a dialogue as we move forward.

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