School of Business and Public Management
MBA External Review—External Examiner Report

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Overview

The role of external examiner for a program review is a balancing act. The past and present work associated with the program – in this case the MBA program in the College of Business and Public Management at the University of LaVerne – has to be understood and acknowledged. More importantly, the future potential of the program, as outlined in the program review document, has to be carefully considered in offering questions to be addressed and recommendations to be contemplated. The entire process from writing the review, conducting the external review, and then implementing changes should be focused primarily on enhancing the student experience.

My visit and the individuals I had the pleasure of meeting produced the following insights. [See Appendix 1 for my itinerary on January 31.] The CBPM:

- enjoys palpable goodwill among the faculty and staff. The College is blessed with a faculty and staff that work hard to provide the best possible student experience.[1] The faculty members are truly interested in learning from others, external to the University, about what could be done better. The faculty members believe that quality and convenience *are not* mutually exclusive.
- operates in a highly competitive environment, and the College is intent on finding a unique niche for the MBA program.
- wants to work toward AACSB accreditation.
- has a good foundation with respect to an assurance of learning process. Note: It is easy to beat up on an assessment process for what could have been done without appreciating what has been done.

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[1]This was one of my favorite stories from my visit. When the College decided to design a new MBA curriculum, 10 faculty (out of 18) in the MBA program stepped forward. As the new design started to take shape, four more faculty were willing to add their discipline experience.

- exhibits a pervasive humility with respect to touting the hard work and success associated with the MBA program.
- must operate within the current constraints and expectations of the University administration – notably, with respect to the monetary contribution the College must generate to fund University operations.

Challenges and Questions

Of course, there are challenges in delivering high-quality MBA programs. Specific to the CBPM, these challenges include:

- the complexity of the MBA program.
  - Two distinct degrees – MBAX and CMBA – that serve very distinct populations.[2]
  - An MBAX program that is delivered at the main campus, eight regional campuses, *and* in an online format.
  - A program design that has both foundation and core courses.
  - Nine concentrations offered in the MBA program.
- only 18 dedicated full-time faculty.
- little coordination and sharing of information between the faculty and staff. There is a heavy burden placed on administration as it serves as the conduit between the faculty and staff, and both groups share responsibility for the quality of the student experience.

These insights and challenges generate questions that provide greater context for the review and the recommendations that follow. It is my belief the questions are as important as the recommendations, as the questions can generate a dynamic dialogue within the College (i.e., among the full-time time faculty, adjunct faculty, and staff) as well as between the College and other groups (e.g., alumni, University administration, etc.).

- What is the educational niche (or niches) the College wants to pursue? Has the College chosen the best comparable programs?[3]
- How well does the College address the demographic/educational needs of the Southern California region? Or, has the College identified a population – the international student market – that it can best address their educational needs even though there are potential risks (based on many factors) associated with recruiting international students annually.
- Can a College of this size truly deliver comparable, high-quality programs (including instruction and support to delivery that instruction) in face-to-face and online formats at multiple locations? Is there true *equivalency* across *all* campuses with respect to the curriculum and student services offered?
- Is there potential to create hybrid program offerings (i.e., offering both face-to-face and online courses) at the regional campuses?
- How can the College improve quality, implement a new curriculum (which could change the student populations served), invest in the faculty based on a 5-to-10 year strategic plan to achieve AACSB accreditation *and* meet the financial contributions expected by the University in the short term? Will the College need to generate additional revenues in order

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[2]I visited a CMBA class that was almost entirely Asian students. There was one Caucasian, female student.
[3]During several meetings, I raised the issue whether Pepperdine and Seattle University are true representations of comparable institutions beyond being examples of what the CBPM does not want to be. For example, Seattle University does not offer a full-time, day MBA program.

to make the changes, or is the University Administration willing to invest in these changes upfront to ensure a long-term payoff?

Recommendations

There are several ways in which recommendations can be provided. I have chosen to provide the recommendations based on my experience with the recently completed AACSB-reaccreditation process at my institution. AACSB pays particular attention to a school's strategic plan, its assurance of learning process, and the academic qualifications of its faculty. While there are differences between the expectations of WASC re-accreditation and AACSB accreditation, both seek to ensure the best educational experiences for students.

The self-study lacked key information. Before outlining the recommendations, I provide here a list of information that should be included in future self-study reports. While not a complete list of needed information, providing more information would provide greater context with respect to the operations of the entire College.

- General information about the College. Total number of programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. Total number of faculty (both full-time and adjunct). Total number of staff members. Total number of students.
- How the school is structured (via an organizational chart, including departments and committees).
- At the graduate level, the relationship between the CMBA and MBAX in relation to the MSLM.
- Full-time faculty (brief) profiles, including courses taught and programs assigned to.
- How learning outcomes were developed. How learning outcomes have changed over time.
- How curriculum is developed and approved. Whether the course syllabi across cohorts, locations and delivery formats are similar. Whether adjunct faculty are involved – and how they are involved – in the development of curriculum and syllabi.
- How are adjunct faculty hired and trained.
- Comparison of teaching evaluations between locations, and comparing full-time and part-time faculty aggregate evaluations.
- How students are oriented at the start of their program. What clubs and activities create a richer experience for the students.

The Revised MBA Curriculum

I found the proposed new program laudable. The plan to phase out the CMBA and MBAX, and create a program that could be offered in a part-time and a full-time format appears sensible and defensible. The faculty are behind the proposal with the intended aim to increase quality and move the College toward AACSB accreditation. Increased quality (both through curricular changes and higher admission standards) and accreditation would allow the College to increase the value of the degree and thus set a higher tuition rate.

From a curriculum standpoint, the proposal should allow the school to create a unified and cohesive core. Currently, there are 12 core competencies (as listed in the College's brochure), and seven of those 12 represent what are referred to as the highly desired *soft skills* (based on the feedback from the CBPM Advisory Board). However, those seven (leadership, diversity, ethics & corporate

responsibility, communications, teamwork, problem solving & decision making skills, and change management) are glaringly under-represented in the current foundation and core course offerings of the CMBA and MBAX.

R1:   Focus on developing a set of core courses that integrates what is best about the current foundation and core courses.

R2:   Add courses to the core that directly address communication, diversity, ethics, change management, etc.

R3:   Key foundational topics now taught to those students not as adept in key business disciplines/topics could be offered via a 'boot camp' thus providing the necessary base knowledge and also serving as an on-boarding experience for students into the program.

On paper, the expressed desire to create a program built around 15-20 person cohorts that is immersive, experiential, integrative and seamless is exciting. That it would develop cultural competency with distinctive internships and capstone experiences is also intriguing. What will need to be articulated is how this redesign will truly distinguish the MBA program among its competitors.

Strategic Plan

The self-study report was silent on the existence of a college-wide strategic plan. However, my meetings with faculty, administrators, and staff did create the distinct impression that the College is coalescing around ideas that would be the basis for a strategic plan.

R4:   Develop a strategic plan for the entire College.

R5:   Articulate how the new MBA program design fits within the strategic plan (and mission) of the College.

R6:   Better integrate the faculty, staff and administration. I remain unclear as to how well these three groups actually work together as a whole, especially with respect to sharing pertinent information with respect to the student experience.

R7:   Advisors should provide reports summarizing student issues/complaints that are shared with administration and faculty. Moreover, additional documentation as to how and when the issues/complaints were addressed should be kept.

While there are myriad issues to address in a strategic plan, I will forego providing an exhaustive list here. Yet, there is one particular area – student support and advising – that is critical to the viability of an MBA program: Advising and career-related support must be equivalent and seamless to all students at all locations.

R8:   Ensure that there is adequate and equivalent student advising and career-related support to all students. The workload among the advisors should be equitably distributed across locations based on viable metrics beyond mere student headcount.

R9:   Review the onboarding and orientation of students.

R10:   Better integrate students via College-wide events and clubs.

Assurance of Learning

Both WASC and AACSB focus on a credible assurance of learning process that spells out how and what is assessed and subsequent tangible changes to the curriculum based on assessment. At my institution, we refer to the entire process as 'closing the loop'.

An assessment process must be robust and manageable. The MBA self-report recommends few changes to the program learning goals; however, it may be important to reconsider the number of program learning goals. Less –say 5-6 program learning goals—is just as good. What is important is to link course learning outcomes (again, 6-9 in number) with the appropriate program learning goals.

Both accrediting bodies emphasize direct assessment measures, and it is important to be clear on what constitutes direct assessment measures. Direct measures *do not include* student assessment of teaching and faculty grading/assessment of student performance. Student satisfaction measures are important, and student self-reports can be an element of the entire assessment process. By way of example, direct measures of learning are best captured through panel evaluations of culminating projectors and/or of a sample of student work across multiple sections of a given course.

R11:   Review your assurance of learning process to ensure that it is robust *yet* manageable.
R12:   Include direct measures of student performance with respect to achieving the program learning goals.

Finally, class contact time will be reviewed by WASC, based on the new federal standards (i.e., 3 hours per unit per week over a 15-week term). How that time is distributed and accounted for across class time, readings, group work, and assignments is important.

R13:   Review your MBA curriculum to ensure it adheres to the federal standards. [Note: At my university, the departments are responsible for distributing course time. There is a not a strict policy of every course must have 'x' number of hours of class contact time. Instead, for example, based on sound pedagogical justifications, the department faculty can decide to: (1) allocate less time for face-to-face instruction, (2) include some online instruction, (3) distribute more time to team projects or additional out-of-class readings, assignments, and/or team projects.

Academic Qualifications of Faculty

The self-report is clear that the College faces the herculean task of achieving the 70% academically qualified[4] ratio for the faculty teaching in the MBA program in order to seek AACSB accreditation. This task is 'herculean' because the ratio must be achieved within the MBA program across all locations it is offered at. Note, the remaining (non-AQ) faculty should be deemed professionally qualified.

R14:   Begin developing a research culture as defined by the faculty in line with the expectations of AACSB.

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[4]Academically Qualified (AQ) requires a faculty member to have a relevant terminal degree and be an actively engaged scholar. The College, based on its mission, defines what it means to be an actively engaged scholar (and thus AQ). For example, a minimum target at many non-Research 1 schools is two peer-reviewed articles within a 5-year span.

R15:   Review the hiring (and pay rates) for AQ versus non-AQ (but professionally-qualified) adjunct faculty. [I cannot emphasize enough how important it is to have AQ faculty teaching in a College that offers graduate programs within a distributed campus model prior to seeking AACSB accreditation.]

Concluding Recommendations

The College of Business and Public Management at the University of LaVerne is poised to reinvent itself, at least partially, through its MBA Program. This reinvention is tied to developing a coherent and manageable plan to seek AACSB accreditation. Achieving AACSB accreditation will be arduous, and this achievement will require sustaining the goodwill of the current faculty, staff, and administration. Additional support will be necessary. Tough decisions will have to be made.

In talking to my colleague, Dr. Dayle Smith, who also conducted an undergraduate program external review for CBPM, she and I believe the College may be well served by:

1. Hiring a consultant with extensive AACSB accreditation experience.
2. Exploring the option of accrediting the MBA program and MSLM only. This would likely entail the College being separated into two distinct units, one being a graduate school.

Appendix 1—Meeting Schedule

Time	Individuals
8:00a- 9:00a	Dean Abe Helou (Breakfast with Dr. Dayle Smith)
9:00a-10:00a	Vice Provost Homa Shabahang, Enrollment Management
10:00a-10:30a	Dr. Steve Lesniak and Ms. Carrie Lewis, Enrollment Management
10:30a-11:30a	Dr. Richard Simpson, Director, MBA Programs
11:30a-12:00p	Dr. Aghop Der-Karabetian, Associate Vice Provost, University Assessment
12:00p- 1:30p	Lunch with MBA Faculty
1:30p- 2:30p	Dr. Adham Chehab, Faculty
2:30p- 3:30p	Ms. Randa Jouzi, Ms. Michelle Kechichian and Ms. Susel Robledo, Academic Advisors
3:30p- 4:00p	Visit Dr. Issam Ghazzawi's Class
4:00p- 5:00p	Dean Abe Helou

Appendix 2—External Examiner Bio

Richard W. Stackman (Ph.D.) is an associate professor and chair of the Department of Organization, Leadership & Communication at the University of San Francisco. He also serves as the director of the Organizational Behavior and Leadership degree completion undergraduate program and the Organization Development master's program.

Dr. Stackman earned his doctorate in business administration from the University of British Columbia. His undergraduate degree (cum laude) in business administration is from the University of California, Berkeley. He is a member of Phi Beta Kappa and Beta Gamma Sigma.

His courses at both the undergraduate and graduate levels have focused on such topics as organizational behavior, organization development, organizational change, leadership and management, consulting practices, human resources management, research methods, complexity science, and human capital investments. At the graduate level, he has taught courses in the MBA, EMBA, MSOD, and Organizations & Leadership (School of Education) programs at USF.

His primary scholarly interests include organizational change, organizational sages, complexity science, personal values, and personal networks. Dr. Stackman is the co-author of *Managing Organizational Change (3rd Edition)* and has published articles or chapters in the *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, Project Management Journal, Emergence: Community & Organization, World Futures*, the *Journal of Higher Education*, the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, the *Journal of Management Education*, and the *Handbook of Organizational Climate and Culture*.

Dr. Stackman is the former president of the Western Academy of Management (WAM) is the section editor—*Six Degrees*—for the *Journal of Management Inquiry*. Prior to coming to the University of San Francisco in 2003, Dr. Stackman was on the faculty at the University of Washington-Tacoma and a visiting assistant professor at Georgetown University.

Select service assignments at USF include:

University-wide
- Faculty Budget Review Committee, February 2005-present.
- Task Force for Academic Integrity, October 2006-April 2011.
- WASC Steering Committee, May 2007-October 2009.
- WASC Re-Accreditation Working Group – Educational Effectiveness Review [Theme 1: Academic Excellence], March 2006-October 2009.
- Strategic Enrollment Council, March 2006-September 2007.

College/School
- School of Business and Professional Studies Strategic Planning Committee [and Scholarship Task Force], September 2010-January 2011.
- MBA Core Task Force, April 2010-September 2010.
- College of Professional Studies Strategic Planning Committee [co-chair], January 2004-May 2009.
- Faculty Council [chair], March 2006-August 2007 [co-chair, September 2005-February 2006].
- Program-Based Organization Behavior Evaluation Task Force, February-April 2006.