REENGINEERING THE BUSINESS CURRICULUM
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ABSTRACT
A hot topic the past few years has been the so-called need to re-engineer the business curriculum. Usually, the “drivers” for change in business curricula have been the needs of the students, the needs of prospective employers, accreditation standards/criteria, or response to trendy contemporary business issues and thrusts (eg, globalization, business ethics, etc.)

In response to these constant pressures/challenges, two new initiatives appear to be taking shape among many business programs. They are a review and questioning of needed core or common body of knowledge (CBOK) requirements, plus a drifting to more flexible and integrative business curricula.

A survey of over 30 colleges and universities (including the 14 state institutions) as to core/CBOK requirements is reviewed. Some questions that will be discussed are: Of the approximately 120 credits a student needs to graduate, why do most schools require the same course. Is business such a science that we know exactly what is taught and in what order? Do business programs tend to be incestual as to copying what everyone else is doing? What are some interesting things some institutions are trying? Is there more consistency or chaos ahead?

INTRODUCTION
Over the past number of years there have been calls for change of undergraduate business program. These calls come from the academic sector, accreditation groups, professional organizations and even business and industry must site a main premise that most undergraduate business programs follow a pedagogical model developed decades ago whereby students are taught business concepts through functional areas (accounting, management, marketing, finance, economics, etc.). A large number argue for an integration of traditional courses in the business curriculum to “break down the silo’s” in education in a way parallel to integrative efforts occurring in business today.

The feeling is, as organizations change and adapt in response to changing environmental conditions, there should be a corresponding change and adaptation in institutions of higher learning.

Business schools often have a great deal of difficulty identifying important environmental shifts that will affect them. The academic tendency of the past was towards functional specialties versus a business education based on a strong interdisciplinary approach for a more broadly educated student. A related theme expressed by many executives was the need for students to be able to communicate and work with people from other functional areas.

THE CALL FOR CHANGE
Undergraduate programs today are adapting changes more commonly found with graduate programs in their thinking of getting students to think more broadly on how things come together. An example in the September 22nd 2004 edition of the Wall Street Journal’s “Guide to Business Schools” supplement was Reneselaer Polytechnic Institute in NY – their Lally School of Management and Technology is replacing the core courses in discrete areas such as marketing and human resources with team taught cross functional “stream” courses that combine several disciplines.

The lack of cross-functional integration is especially troublesome at the undergraduate level due to the relative lack of job experience most undergraduates possess. Work experience often helps students to make the necessary integration and cross-discipline linkages themselves, providing a useful framework upon which to incorporate new functional information. To the degree students don’t have this experience, the greater the need for instructors to provide such a framework within the course.

Research that the AICPA (American Institute of Certified Public Accountants) in the Core Competency Framework for Entering into the Accounting Profession – 2000 report probably articulated it best in reflecting other similar calls for change. That report suggests three primary ways business education be revised to improve the professional capabilities of accountants. They are: First, decision modeling, risk analysis, problem solving, and decision-making are key personal
and functional competencies that should be developed. Second, students should be taught to consider both the internal and external business environments and how their interactions determine business success or failure. Third, four broad business competencies are crucial: strategic/critical thinking, industry/service perspective, international/global perspective, and resource management. These competencies are usually not structured around traditional subject/content areas typically found in core business program.

Research has indicated that a number of academic institutions have undertaken a review of their core programs, driven by efforts to either reform to improve students’ skills or reform to integrate curriculum content. This integration, mind you, can be by integrating study within a discipline and/or integrating across a discipline. The purpose of integration is to demonstrate the interrelatedness of the various business functions and how they work together within the firm.

It is thought by many that today’s undergraduate business programs must prepare students with skills in communications, teamwork, technology, and problem solving within an ethical framework and global perspective.

Another strong impetus for change has been accreditation guidelines. In an effort to address industry’s concern that business graduates are too narrowly focused, the AACSB guidelines recommend that business curricula have a least half or more of the required undergraduate degree credits outside the business school. Under the “traditional” AACSB guidelines, many business programs include the common body of knowledge (CBK) courses (marketing, finance, management, information systems, international business, production/operations management, and quantitative methods), in addition to the accounting, economics, business law, and ethics requirements. Very little cross-functional integration is evident in this curriculum, since most CBK courses are taught as independent courses.

THE RESPONSE TO CHANGE

In response to the challenge to change, business schools have recently begun to re-engineer the undergraduate business curriculum with two main objectives: (1) to provide a more cross-functional, integrative business curriculum, and (2) to provide a more flexible curriculum that includes a strong liberal arts background. The new, integrative business curricula are designed to foster a cross-disciplinary view of business planning and decision making, build effective cross-functional teamwork skills, and improve communication skills. A stronger liberal arts background also prepares students to become more critical thinkers and to look at business problems in the broader context of the environment.

KUTZTOWN UNIVERSITY’S INITIATIVE

Kutztown University is beginning to seek AACSB accreditation. While this process would inevitably require a detailed examination of all of our course offerings including what we call our “core requirements”, there were other issues at our institution, which was the impetus of a committee being formed to review our core courses (offering, content, what other institutions are doing regionally and around the country, the timing issue (when should these courses be offered, are they all needed before taking upper division courses, etc.) and related issues of criteria (e.g. do students need to have a 2.00 GPA in these and core courses control).

A small committee of four (one from each of the COB departments) of which I was representing marketing noted early on that our core course requisites had not changed (other than perhaps a course title change) in over 20 years. We certainly needed data and our first task was to gather information about core requisites at 25 what I would say regional or similar institutions including SSHE universities.

While we also realized that we wanted to know what others were doing with their core requirements, literature review painted the picture I just gave we discovered that most all of the institutions we surveyed had very similar core requirements as we did. The terminology varied as to what institutions referred to them as core, foundation, common professional, component, common body of knowledge, etc., most all required between 10 to 12 courses. It got a bit convoluted since some institutions included capstone courses as a CBK course, some core courses varied within majors, some offered option course selection within a discipline (principles of economics and either international micro economics or intermediate micro economics) but here is a quick and dirty comparison to glance at – I have copied for distribution at the end.

Some general findings include that most all of SSHEE schools business core and common programs are similar in structure, implied content and timing of the courses. Some minor differences (West Chester requires two statistics courses not one; IUP requires two computer courses, etc.), but in general there was no radical departure.

Most all schools required the usual/typical (financial accounting, managerial accounting, econ. I, econ II,
Business Law, a computer course, a statistics course. Some core requirements also include discipline specific course as principles of management, principles of marketing.

Our committee then decided to gather more information first within the college of business. We did this through a survey (a few copies which I brought along). Second additional information on what other leading business schools/programs are doing around the country. This I am currently doing.

Our internal survey was geared towards getting info on what is wrong or right with our present business core. Why must it be changed? What is the rationale for changing or leaving it as is? Why does it exist? What is the importance of the business core? What should the content of the business core consist of? Timing issues, control and criteria (standard) questions as well.

CONCLUSION

In response to the many challenges they face as they move into the twenty-first century, business schools are in the midst of change. Students, parents, and employers are demanding that curricula be relevant, innovative, and creative. Narrowly focused, compartmentalized curricula perhaps must give way to programs of study that are more inter-disciplinary and cross-functional. Recognition is growing, among both business and academic leadership, that complex business problems cannot be resolved by narrowly focused professionals. The new AACSB guidelines encourage business faculty to reengineer existing business core programs and develop new pedagogical approaches for cross-functional, interdisciplinary curricula. While I believe I will find some new innovative programs out there, so far all I have seen is some attention paid to changing course content (include or integrate perhaps an ethical or international component), some changes in design and delivery (far too few institutions doing any real team teaching), and very few resources given by institutional academic leaders to support integration efforts.

REFERENCES


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Accounting</th>
<th>Business Law</th>
<th>Computers</th>
<th>Economics</th>
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