FCBE Assurance of Learning "Closing the Loop" Committee Report

MBA Degree Program

Summary of Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

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Introduction: Closing the Loop on the MBA

This report consists of a summary of the evaluation by the FCBE Assessment "Close the Loop" Committee of the program performance metrics for the Fogelman College MBA program as of Academic Year 2015, with recommendations for future improvement for assessment in the coming evaluation period. The data used in the evaluative process by this committee is found on the FCBE Assessment website (http://www.fcbeassessment.net). The committee consisted of Tom Stafford (chair), Frances Fabian, Albert Okunade, Christine Jiang and Ron Spahr. The committee was given the charge to:

> *Review data analysis and graphic representation for each objective in the assessment of the MBA program to determine the degree that the recently increased performance standard of at least 75% of students meeting an Exceptional level of performance was met on all program assessment goals.*

Overview of Findings

In this assessment cycle, the college increased its standard for performance from 70% of students performing at the "Exemplary" level[1] for each pertinent program goal, to 75% of students performing at the Exemplary level. Evaluation metrics under the rubric were Fair, Good and Exemplary, with operational specifications for the levels being: Fair (Did Not Meet Expectations, with Limited Accomplishment), Good (Met Expectations, with Some Problems or Needs Improvement), and Exemplary (Met Expectations, with Considerable Expertise Shown).

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[1] In this case, "Exemplary" is an assessment term used by our accreditation body, and carries a specific operational meaning of "met expectations, considerable expertise shown." It should not be construed in the more familiar and general bell-curve basis for issuing limited instances in an evaluation group of superior grades such as A for academic work. In this operational sense, quite some few of a group could achieve Exemplary assessment status without disturbing grade-based performance norms.

Following a cycle of rigorous evaluation and redesign in the 2012 Assessment cycle, the program appears to be meeting its increased performance requirements (75% Exemplary) with only minor exceptions. These exceptions are in the areas of ethics/culture/social responsibility and leadership communications processes, and it bears noting that the assessment results for leadership-based performance goals related to communication would have passed the mark for the evaluative criteria used in the prior cycle of assessment, and are, even in this case, very close to meeting requirements under the new and more strenuous evaluative criteria.

Anecdotally, it seems clear that the MBA program is experiencing the same general weaknesses found in the undergraduate program, specific to small improvements required in areas of ethics and culture, and also improvements in managerial communications skills (as specific to executing the leadership role). Some improvement is called for, but performance is still quite good and it seems reasonable to expect that performance will meet expectations in the coming cycle of assessment with only minor program modifications. Our specific recommendations in brief overview are:

- Increase training and measurement of managerial motivation topics in MGMT 7135
- Increase training and measurement of managerial communication topics in MGMT 7135
- Move MGMT 7160 to an early stage in the source sequencing, instead of its traditional position as the last course in the sequence.
- Discontinue reliance on the training and assessment of social, ethical and cultural impacts on strategic organizational decision making in courses such as MKTG 7140, ECON 7100 and MIS 7650 in favor of a case pedagogy focus to both train and assess on the topics in the strategic management capstone MGMT 7160.

Goals Assessed

FCBE monitors and measures 5 global goals for assessment purposes in the MBA:

- Goal 1: Graduates will be leaders

    1) Understands how leaders can be positive role models
    2) Understands how leaders motivate and inspire groups and individuals
    3) Understands how leaders communicate a vision

- Goal 2: Gradates will be technologically competent

    1) Demonstrates proficiency in the use of business application software packages for financial analysis of data
    2) Demonstrates proficiency in utilizing the Internet to collect relevant business research data
    3) Demonstrates proficient use of current communication technologies to gather, organize, transmit, and present information in a manner that enhances businesses and productivity
    4) Demonstrates proficiency in the use of analytical tools and their applications

- Goal 3: Graduates will be knowledgeable of social and ethical issues and trends affecting business.

    1) Understands how social, ethical and cultural trends affect business
    2) Understands differences across markets and customers
    3) Understands how social and ethical issues affect organizational strategies, structures and systems.

- Goal 4: Graduate will be knowledgeable in functional areas of business and their integration

    1) Understands and uses disciplinary knowledge and skills
    2) Integrates disciplinary expertise across functional areas

- Goal 5: Graduates will be critical thinkers and problem solvers

    1) Proficient in identifying and framing common organizational problems

    2) Determines the relevant decision criteria for solving the problem

    3) Given the decision criteria, identifies and analyzes relevant alternatives

Benchmark for Goals

In each instance, above, sufficient performance on each objective of a goal would reach a level of 75% of students achieving Exemplary category ratings. Performance of less than a 75% Exemplary level would be cause for identification and recommendation of improvements, going forward.

Performance Metrics for the 2015 Assessment Year

Rubrics were developed and promulgated for evaluating faculty to assess student performance in accordance with each goal and objective set. Possible evaluations faculty could make for student performance included "Fair," which indicated operationally that the student "did not meet expectations, limited accomplishment (numerical ratings of 1, 2 or 3); "Good," which indicated "met expectations, some problems, needs improvement (numerical ratings of 4, 5 or 6); and, "Exemplary," which indicated "met expectations, considerable expertise shown" (numerical ratings of 7, 8 or 9). The benchmark for assessment specified a level of performance that extended beyond the benchmark utilized in the previous cycle of assessment, raising the performance goal from 70% to at least 75% of students rated at the "Exemplary" level for the respective goal-based objective.

2015 Performance Results

For each of the 5 goals and their respective objectives, evaluations for the 2105 cycle were as follows (with shortfalls noted using bracketed comments):

- Goal 1: Graduates will be leaders

  1) Understands how leaders can be positive role models (avg. rating 7.20; 1% Fair, 16% Good, 83% Exemplary)

  2) Understands how leaders motivate and inspire groups and individuals (avg. rating 6.54; 70% Exemplary) [Short of goal]

  3) Understands how leaders communicate a vision (avg. rating 6.47; 2% Fair, 28% Good, 70% Exemplary) [Short of goal]

- Goal 2: Gradates will be technologically competent

  1) Demonstrates proficiency in the use of business application software packages for financial analysis of data (avg. rating 7.45; 1% Fair, 9% good, 90% Exemplary)

  2) Demonstrates proficiency in utilizing the Internet to collect relevant business research data (avg. rating 7.41; 11% Good, 89% Exemplary)

  3) Demonstrates proficient use of current communication technologies to gather, organize, transmit, and present information in a manner that enhances businesses and productivity (avg. rating 7.40; 12% Good, 88% Exemplary)

  4) Demonstrates proficiency in the use of analytical tools and their applications (avg. rating 7.00; 83% Exemplary)

- Goal 3: Graduates will be knowledgeable of social and ethical issues and trends affecting business.

  1) Understands how social, ethical and cultural trends affect business (avg. rating 7.28; 3% Fair, 31% Good, 66% Exemplary)

  2) Understands differences across markets and customers (avg. rating 7.67; 7% Good, 93% Exemplary)

3) Understands how social and ethical issues affect organizational strategies, structures and systems (avg. rating 6.34; 3% Fair, 31% Good, 66% Exemplary)

- Goal 4: Graduate will be knowledgeable in functional areas of business and their integration

  1) Understands and uses disciplinary knowledge and skills (avg. rating 7.36; 1% Fair, 12% Good, 87% Exemplary)

  2) Integrates disciplinary expertise across functional areas (avg. rating 7.80; 4% Good, 96% Exemplary)

- Goal 5: Graduates will be critical thinkers and problem solvers

  1) Proficient in identifying and framing common organizational problems (avg. rating 7.23; 1% Fair, 12% Good, 87% Exemplary)

  2) Determines the relevant decision criteria for solving the problem (avg. rating 6.86; 1% Good, 21%Fair, 78% Exemplary)

  3) Given the decision criteria, identifies and analyzes relevant alternatives (avg. rating 7.19; 1% Good, 16% Good, 83% Exemplary)

Specific Areas for Improvement

It is clear that Goal 3 (related to understanding and use of social, ethical and cultural knowledge) is the area for primary concentration in future improvement. With only 66% Exemplary returned for Objective 1 (Understands how social, ethical and cultural trends affect business) and 66% on Objective 3 (Understands how social and ethical issues affect organizational strategies, structures and systems), but with 93% Exemplary returned for the more general Objective 2 (Understands differences across markets and customers), it seems clear that students clearly *understand* ethical, social and cultural issues, but do not understand well how to *apply them* in business decision making.

It is encouraging that students appear well skilled in recognizing key social,

ethical and cultural issues between markets and customers (Objective 2), but work is needed in training them to bridge this understanding into applied decision making regarding deployment of organizational resources and strategies (Objectives 1 and 3).

We suggest that inclusion of target case studies designed to foster recognition and application of social, ethical and cultural issues to business operation and performance be introduced in key courses of the program (likely Management 7160 and/or Accounting 7050). Further, the rational point in which to introduce such case studies on the strategic and operational application of ethical and cultural knowledge and to tutor in their effective analysis and solution appears to be the strategic management "capstone" course (i.e., Management 7160). We consider that the timing of the strategic management course at the end of the program sequence may be out of synch. Perhaps mischaracterized in the traditional archetype of an overarching "capstone," and subsequently held for very last in the program, it may be the case that this course provides critical knowledge that would prove quite useful when understood and applied in other courses in the program. As such, the class should probably be moved to the early phase of the course sequence so that lessons learned might be applied and considered in contexts of other courses that follow.

Goal 1, related to leadership skills, also requires improvement, but only in the sense that continuous improvement precepts require that our benchmark be more rigorous in each successive assessment cycle. The 70% Exemplary level returned from current assessment of Goal 1, objective 2 (Understands how leaders motivate and inspire groups and individuals) and objective 3 (Understands how leaders communicate a vision) would have sufficiently met requirements in the last assessment cycle. In the present cycle, they are indicative of the need for only minor improvement.

In view of the high 83% Exemplary rating for objective 1 (Understands how leaders can be positive role models), it appears that students are very clear on *what* leadership is; they know it when they see it. They just seem to require more training in how to *apply* leadership, which is largely a matter of communicating organizational goals and motivational aspects of reaching them. As this is a skill best gained in the experience of the quality, it may well be that the classroom is not the best setting for

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developing applied leadership skills. Yet, to the extent that both applied leadership objectives imply the effective communication of the leader's vision to followers, it seems reasonable that additional training in managerial communication might be effective. To that end, we suggest that the present management class focused on leadership (Management 7135) be expanded to include a module on managerial communication as a function of leadership.

Areas of Sufficiency

A number of areas assessed well above the newly increased performance benchmark of 75% Exemplary. These include Goal 2, related to technological competence, with objectives of proficiency with business software for financial analysis (90% Exemplary), proficiency with the Internet for collection of business data (89% Exemplary), and proficiency with modern communication technologies for the transmission and presentation of business information (88% Exemplary).

Also, students showed fulsome sufficiency for Goal 4, knowledgeable integration of the functional areas of business, with objectives of understanding and using disciplinary skills and knowledge (87% Exemplary), and the integration of disciplinary expertise across functional areas (96% Exemplary). Moreover, students were quite sufficient with the critical thinking goal (Goal 5). Its objectives measured quite well, including proficiency in identifying and framing problems (87% Exemplary), the determination of relevant decision criteria (78% Exemplary), and the ability to identify and analyze alternatives in problem solving (83% Exemplary).

Concluding Thoughts

As a general sense, it seems to the committee that the MBA program has modest improvement needs that follow the same general pattern found in the undergraduate program: in a broad sense, ethics and communications skills, although the issues for improvement at the MBA level are slightly more granular than that. The point is that it may be useful to consider any remediations that have already been developed for

improving the similar problem areas at the undergraduate level, and determine if they merit adaptation and application in the MBA program. The notable ethics seminar series is one point for discussion.

Consideration of more formalized communications skills training is another. Aspects of the Fogelman Complete Professional Program, while admittedly targeted to the undergraduate population, may be worth considering for further expansion as another alternative.

As noted above, it may be well to consider moving the strategic management seminar to an earlier point in the program. The application and strategic decision skills related to ethics, culture and social issues are more frequently visited in this class, and would form the basis for a program-wide understanding and application in subsequent classes, if not held until the very last.

As a closing and anecdotal point, the committee had a small sense that part of the problem in achieving the desired assessment performance level could also reside in the operationalization of the rubrics for measurement, and the subsequent communication of these unique and special purposes rubrics to the evaluating faculty. There was the sense in our discussion that the term "Exemplary" might be misconstrued in the context of the normal grading scales so frequently used in evaluating our students, and the specialized instruction and training in the specific and specialized nature and meaning of the assessment rubrics would be a useful step. Pragmatically, the sense was that colleagues often feel that only a select portion of any class is truly "exceptional" in keeping with normally distributed grading intervals, and that the semantic nature of the term "Exemplary" may well cause enough confusion to result in unintentionally under-rating students in the assessment task, absent any clear orientation and training in the nature of the specific rubrics used in the assessment evaluation.