

Review of Business Program at University of Washington, Bothell

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1. Background

The Committee for the Review of the Business Program at the University of Washington, Bothell comprised three local members: Robert Bowen, Department of Accounting, Stephen Turnovsky, Department of Economics, both from the UW Seattle Campus; and William Erdly, from the Computing and Software Systems Program from the UW Bothell Campus. There were also two external members, Colette Frayne, Professor of International Management at the California Polytechnic Institute, and U.N. Umesh, Professor of Marketing at WSU, Vancouver. Professor Umesh replaced Patriya Tansuhaj, who had to withdraw at the last moment due to a family tragedy.

On April 18, 2006, the local members of the Review Committee met with representatives from the University administration to discuss the charge of the committee and for general background discussion. The administrative representatives present included the following: Suzanne Ortega and Melissa Austin (Graduate School), Janice DeCosmo (Office of Undergraduate Education). The outside members of the Review Committee (Frayne and Pansuhaj) participated by conference call, as did Thomas Bellamy (Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, UW Bothell). The formal charge letter was received that day. On April 25, the three internal members of the committee met for a working lunch to discuss initial aspects of the review. The site visit took place on April 27 and April 28, 2006. The review committee held working dinner meetings on April 26 and April 27. The site visit involved two full days. On both days, the committee began at 8.30 am, finishing at around 5.30 pm on the first day and a little earlier on the second day. An exit review was held on the afternoon of the second day. From 2.00pm until 3.00 pm the review committee presented a preliminary overview of its findings to members of the Administration, with certain members of the business program present. From 3.00 pm to 3.45 pm the discussion continued without the Departmental representatives present and in the final few minutes only the UW Seattle Administrators were present.

2. Overview and summary recommendation

The University of Washington, Bothell (UWB) was established in 1990 as one of the two branch campuses of the University of Washington. This is the first time since its inception that the Business Program is being reviewed. Currently, the Program can be said to be at something of a crossroad, having lost two faculty and hired four new ones. In a small unit, this represents a substantial personnel change. It is important that the new colleagues are socialized into a positive environment so they, along with their colleagues, can flourish as teachers and scholars.

The University of Washington at Bothell has an important mission with many constituents. As the Self-study notes, the Program has a number of strengths and a number of weaknesses. On the positive side are its location and the local talent on which it can draw, with good faculty and a good, but variable, student body. The Program appears to be actively engaged in curricular review and adjusting to ever-changing student needs and external competition for resources (e.g., private for-profit business programs, on-line degrees, and other business schools/universities).

On the negative side, there are the inefficiencies of being a small unit. By trying to cover a wide range of study areas (five undergraduate concentrations and the MBA), it becomes challenging to establish strong intellectual direction and vision for the Program. Faculty are also involved in many “start-up” and maintenance functions related to service activities (i. e., working with community, Program, other UWB programs and various UWS constituencies), making it difficult to spend time establishing disciplinary strengths/external reputation within the department. Also, the lack of an alumni base of financial support is a further consequence of the Program being new and represents a challenge for the future.

Our overall impression is that the Program seems to be operating quite well, with the various constituent groups generally satisfied. The current leadership is succeeding in providing a good working environment, something that has not always been the case. Building an institution from scratch is not easy and this one is off to a generally good start. A definitive assessment of their performance is not easy, since their identity and goals are not particularly clearly laid out. But they are doing a satisfactory job of catering to their local constituents, which we take to be students and businesses on the East/NE side, although their ties to the community colleges could be strengthened. The general quality of the degree programs and teaching seems to be good, although comparisons with peer institutions is difficult, for reasons noted below.

At this time we recommend that the Program be continued, but subject to further review in five years. While our evaluation is generally positive, there are a number of challenges the Committee feels need to be addressed if the Program is to continue to improve and to reach its potential. These will be discussed below.

3. Identity of the UWB Business Program

The over-riding problem that struck the Committee was the problem of identity. The basic question is: What defines the University of Washington Bothell? This is a fundamental issue that needs to be resolved in a forthright way, since the answer to that question will then determine Program goals and how the Program should evaluate its teaching, research, and service.

The issue of identity surfaced at all levels in our discussions, from undergraduate students through the faculty ranks, as well as those involved in outreach activities, such as the Advisory Board. Undergraduate students identified themselves only as UW students, rather than UWB, although graduate students seemed more prepared to make the distinction.

Establishing an identity for the UWB is critical for measuring success, as well as for differentiating themselves from the UW Seattle campus. The criteria for success are different for a research university than for a liberal arts college. To this purpose, the Program needs to identify a well defined set of peer schools/programs to serve as benchmarks. The self-study identifies a rather odd set of schools, which include a number of local schools, as well as some of the most prestigious Graduate Schools of Business in the nation, such as Harvard and Wharton. The view of the Committee is that the appropriate set of schools is similar

branch campuses of other major state universities. We recommend that the Business Program identify such a set against which it can monitor its performance.

UWB is located approximately 12 miles from the Seattle campus, apparently one of the closest branches to a main campus in the country. This close proximity to UWS presents natural issues of comparison, cooperation and competition with the Business School and programs on the Seattle Campus. On the relationship with UWS we found a diversity of opinions. Some people viewed the missions of the two institutions as clearly distinct, the mission of UWB being to provide a quality education to people located in the East/NE side. However, others argued (including one senior administrator) that the two institutions are one, and should be subject to the same standards. Some argued that UWB is frequently hiring from the same schools as UWS, and hence is comparable in this regard. The Committee does not agree with that view, since job candidates, from even the most prestigious schools, extend over a wide range of abilities.

Indeed, the Committee does not feel that the UWB should attempt to replicate or compete with the Business School at UWS. It does not have the resources to do so, and is unlikely to generate them in the foreseeable future. It should focus on serving its clientele in the Bothell/ East Side area. In focusing on this mission, the Committee was concerned at the apparent drop-off in the quality of new students during recent years. The Committee feels that resources should be devoted to ensuring that this trend does not continue and the Program should devote particular attention to the recruitment of good-quality students. Indeed it is important that standards be maintained, in order that the UW brand name not be diluted. One niche that appears to be developing is that of attracting international students, particularly from Central and Eastern Europe, and the Committee welcomes this development.

Regarding the issue of accreditation, UWB is due to become separate in 2011. We recommend that separate accreditation be moved earlier if possible. Being accredited with UWS perpetuates confusion about UWB's goals and identity.

4. Guidelines for Expectations of the Faculty

A difficult problem for any institution is to set out guidelines for expectations for faculty and in particular for new hires. This problem is more acute for an institution like UWB, which is evolving rapidly, and for which, because of its lack of identity, expectations are not well defined. This is another area where the lack of identity raises a serious issue. In interviewing the faculty, the Review Committee found a divergence of views with respect to expectations. Some individuals (particularly lecturers) whose sole function was teaching seemed more comfortable with regard to the expectations of their performance than did tenure track faculty, whose duties involve the usual mix of research and teaching. This is compounded in a situation of institution building, which has dominated the early years of this Program.

The research records of the faculty are generally quite good, with most of the tenure track faculty publishing in a range of journals. There is some diversity of research productivity which raises a number of questions that the Business Program needs to address:

- (i) Can an individual be promoted on meritorious teaching alone? More generally, what are the tradeoffs between teaching and research for tenure-track faculty?
- (ii) Should teaching load vary with research productivity?
- (iii) Should service load vary with rank?
- (iv) Should service load vary with research productivity?

UWB is facing at least two tenure decisions that will at least indirectly indicate the importance of top-tier research for promotion.

The Committee feels that the Business Program needs to think through these issues and decide on some guidelines that should be articulated to new hires, as well as to current faculty as they progress through the ranks. Some junior faculty seemed to do a lot of service by choice. The view of the Review Committee is that some variation in service and teaching loads across individuals, based on rank and/or research productivity, should be allowed within reasonable limits. In any event, expectations of faculty duties need to be clearly communicated and consistently applied.

Several faculty expressed difficulty with coping with their duties and raised the question of mentoring. Some individuals suggested that some of their past difficulties might have been alleviated had they had a senior colleague to advise them, while some junior faculty mentioned the need for mentoring to help them proceed along the tenure track. It was also suggested that the feedback from annual reviews were not particularly helpful, often being unnecessarily negative, although this was not a unanimous view.

The Committee feels that good mentoring is extremely important and that the Program should devote serious consideration to determining some system whereby senior faculty provide guidance to junior colleagues. Currently there is little or no mentoring, beyond the annual reviews, which tend to be a formal procedure. It would be an improvement if junior faculty could have a more relaxed ongoing relationship with senior colleagues. This is particularly important, with a number of new junior faculty joining the Program. However, with a relatively small number of senior faculty, the Committee recognizes that getting the right mentoring match may not be easy, or even feasible, in some cases.

5. Process/Culture/Governance

The Committee encountered several issues involving process that caused some concern. While the Committee does not have the mandate nor the resources (or inclination) to investigate them in detail, it felt that they were sufficiently credible to merit a good deal of their attention and to note their possible existence. The basic issue appears to be one of decisions being taken without appropriate input being obtained. Several individuals cited

instances where shortcuts in procedure appear to have been taken, in possible violations of the faculty code. The Committee emphasizes the need for transparency and completeness with respect to process, particularly insofar as personnel decisions are made. This is critical for a climate of collegiality and confidence to be maintained.

The issue of gender arose in several instances and, as best as it could tell, the Committee feels that gender discrimination is not a major issue in the Program. Recent faculty departures have involved women, and we conclude that while at least in one case the departure involved unfortunate aspects, and we were told was involuntary, gender discrimination was not the overriding issue.

Many individuals discussed the amount of time devoted to faculty meetings and discussion. Much of it seemed to be devoted to administrative details rather than to discussing strategic issues of substance. Several people commented on the tension between being a good team player versus constructive academic criticism, suggesting that some junior faculty feared retaliation for comments or positions taken at faculty meetings. To the extent that this is the case, the Review Committee urges that the Program Director encourage open debate among faculty at all levels, and that any culture of intimidation, to the extent that it may exist, be eliminated. This is particularly important with four new faculty joining in the Fall. The Committee also urges that discussion of details be delegated to the Administrators, with Faculty meetings being reserved for substantive academic and policy discussions. While faculty governance might be desirable, it should not interfere with more productive teaching and research activities.

As a technical point, a few people, including the Director mentioned the question of title of Director vs. Dean. It was suggested that the title of Director does not carry much weight with the local business community, and that if the director had the title of Dean, he would be more effective at dealing with the Business Community. If that is the case, we see no problem with changing the title, although the University may have some concerns about this. The Committee understands that the individual holding the equivalent position at the UW Tacoma campus has the title of Dean rather than Director.

6. Student Concerns with Curriculum

Both the undergraduate and the MBA students seem very satisfied with the program.

The undergraduate students like the smaller classes and the fact that the program seems to be less theoretical and less competitive than the Seattle Campus. They like the more personal aspect to the program and are generally satisfied with the teaching and responsiveness of instructors, although were not totally satisfied with some of the visitors and adjuncts. They tend to benefit more from classes taught by instructors who have business involvement and experience. They found some lack of coordination in teaching involving quite a bit of redundancy between courses. This may not be a curriculum issue, but rather a preference by individual instructors to deviate from the intended course materials. While we recognize that this is difficult to control, faculty should be made aware of this issue and coordinate with one another, where appropriate. The students also expressed a desire to see

more research opportunities. They are generally happy with the group work, although they identified some mixed experiences. They generally like the material, finding it challenging and up to date, although one individual commented that he/she would like to see more accounting. Further, eight out of ten indicated they would have majored in Accounting if it had been offered. A high proportion of the students have participated in international programs. Overall, they are satisfied with the program and are happy with the fact that it permits them to combine work with education, something that is not possible on the Seattle campus. They did, however, express a desire to see more employers come to campus to recruit students.

The MBA students are also generally happy. In most cases they chose the program because of its location and because it is part of the University of Washington system. Students like the “lock-step” program rather than having electives. They would like to see more economics and international business introduced into the curriculum. Like the undergraduates they were happy with the permanent faculty, but sometimes had problems with visitors. They would like to see more interaction with the UW Seattle Business program, through internships, speakers, social events, or simply being informed of the main campus activities and feeling free to attend.

Given the apparent problem encountered with the teaching by visitors, the Review committee recommends that the Director monitor the teaching performance of visitors and adjuncts more closely.

7. Staff

The Program seems to have a competent team of staff members. Between them they undertake a range of duties, including advising students, coordinating programs, and general administrative duties. They appear to provide a good support service. They are generally satisfied, and feel that they are well treated by the faculty. Their only complaint is the usual one of lack of personnel. Currently, there are 4-5 staff, plus two work studies students, and on balance, they feel that they need one more person.

8. Community and Outreach

The Program is involved in several outreach activities. It has recently established an Advisory Council, comprising local business leaders who provide feedback on curriculum matters and links between students and faculty to the Business Community. They are also engaged in some fundraising activities. Advisory Council members raised questions about identity of the Program and are unclear about what their input might be in the future. The future role of the Advisory Council is something that needs to be addressed. They were unclear as to what is expected of them at this stage, but had some good ideas if the faculty would be willing to work with them on the development of activities.

The mission of the newly created Business Development Center (BDC) is to provide assistance to small business clients with special focus on start-ups in emerging industries,

thus providing a link between the campus and the economic development of the region. Five local community colleges are connected to the BDC, with more to be invited. The Center is funded by communities and civic organizations around the UW Bothell campus and all activities are self-financed. More effort should be put into getting larger commitments from the private sector to further the Center's objectives. Nevertheless, this activity seems to be off to a good start and the Review Committee supports its continuation and the mission of the BDC. One issue of concern, however, is that the BDC appears to be driven by lecturers/senior lecturers and the Committee encourages more active participation by tenured faculty. This would further strengthen the program by creating potential synergies between industry and faculty research, as well as helping enhance the Program's visibility and distinctiveness.

9. Other general recommendations

In addition to the suggestions we have made above, the Committee makes the following general recommendations:

- a. Encourage strong linkages with the new 1st/2nd year students entering UWB. This will assist with improving the student preparation/quality for business pre-requisites.
- b. Based on faculty input, the MBA program needs stronger and more focused electives. Also, the learning goals are too extensive and blurred, with insufficient resources in place to accomplish them.
- c. Further emphasis needs to be placed on marketing and recruiting of students. The Business program -- as with all UWB programs -- must continuously increase their FTE targets. Resources are needed to find and coordinate efforts with community colleges to help improve student quality.

10. Preliminary Comments on Restructuring of the MBA Degree

The Review Committee did not spend much time on the existing MBA program as it is being revised. The revised program seems acceptable. MBA programs differ in emphasis and tend to focus on the comparative advantage of the faculty. Still, we note the following potential issues:

- a. The proposal suggests a shift away from quantitative courses (such as statistics, operations, accounting and finance) toward management courses. The reasons behind this shift are unclear but could include: taking advantage of faculty resources and/or trying to diversify the skills of their students who already tend to have good quantitative backgrounds. The Review Committee believes that there may be 'push-back' from the engineers and scientists who are sometimes less tolerant of more subjective concepts. Some may feel that the substance of the program is being diluted.

- b. The proposal suggests the possibility of taking electives at the UW Seattle Business School in Summer Quarter. In the Committee's view, this could blur the MBA brand of both Schools. These branding issues tie back to the central identity question discussed earlier, e.g., What is a UW Bothell MBA and how is it distinct from the UW Seattle MBA? In the Committee's view, any blurring of the two programs creates potential confusion on the part of prospective students and potential employers. We know that (at least) the undergraduate students contribute to this problem by mislabeling their degree as a UW, not a UWB, degree.
- c. From what we can tell, the proposed curriculum is thin in its coverage of International Business and we encourage further development in this area.
- d. The Committee assumes that the two-quarter, two-credit-per-quarter Integrated Business Practicum is their capstone course.

Since it is difficult to tell how a revised program is going to function based on a short written proposal, the Review Committee suggests that the revised MBA program be reviewed after 3 to 5 years.