

Dean's Response to the Master of Business Administration (MBA) Program Review

June 20, 2018

Overview

The MBA program has a very strong reputation in northern Utah. Like most MBA programs, it has experienced large counter-cyclical enrollment swings, although it currently faces record enrollments that will require meaningful strategic decisions from the college and university regarding resources and enrollment growth.

I appreciate the work that director Matt Mouritsen has done to develop and lead the MBA program. He and his staff provide significant, personalized contacts for students. I also appreciate the review team's work to understand our unique program and the quality of their report.

My comments follow the organization used in the Faculty Response document.

Faculty Demographics

The MBA program can certainly do better with regard to the percentage of courses taught by women, although with 38% of required courses taught by women, the problem isn't as significant as the overall 24% might imply. Regarding the proposed action plan, however, it seems that rethinking the faculty mix need not wait for either new course development (indeed, it is unlikely that new required courses would be developed) or future faculty turnover to address the goal of more women teaching. I encourage the MBA director to work with the chairs to determine whether faculty (whether female or male) not currently teaching in the MBA program should be integrated into the MBA rotation. The current discussion on whether to increase the number of sections should also include thoughtful consideration of how to use this as an opportunity to increase faculty diversity. Finally, I encourage the director to consider ways to address other demographic deficiencies in the faculty; Latinx representation comes immediately to mind.

Growth

The director has already (this summer) provided the college leadership with a detailed analysis of how additional MBA growth would affect faculty workload demands, the college adjunct/overload budget, etc. I appreciate the quality of the director's analysis and look forward to continuing to work with the college leadership to determine the optimal way forward. Another alternative, of course, would be to cap the MBA enrollment at a level that would not require additional faculty resources. I encourage the director to analyze the pros and cons of that scenario, as well, and present them to the leadership. Ultimately, the college's strategic decision regarding MBA enrollment will depend critically on commitments that the university leadership can make regarding new faculty position in support of higher enrollments.

I would also like to see more data regarding how our MBA course sizes compare to those of our competitors, peers and aspirants. Many MBA programs run courses with 50 students (or more) per section. How do we compare? Of course, demands on faculty at WSU are probably tougher, due to the 8-week format of our courses. In any case, a stronger, data-informed recommendation to how large our required courses should be (at maximum) developed. For example, the Faculty Response cites both "25-30" and "low 30s" as reasonable maximum course size goals. This analysis must also include discussion

of how to balance smaller required course size limits with the need to subsidize low-enrollment elective courses in the MBA.

Analogously, it would be useful for the program to consider what changes to staff support services might need to accompany growth. The program self-study, team report, and faculty response all assume that the same level of service must be maintained. Clearly that service level is high and students value it. The staff do an excellent job.

However, it would be useful to clearly list the activities that currently occur, the total time spent on each activity by staff, the total time spent on each activity for each student, etc., so that it is obvious how much time is devoted to those activities. Then a serious consideration of the cost-benefit of each activity should be undertaken. What other options exist beyond the current, individual-focused service model? What are the positive and negative implications of alternative models for the students and the MBA program's reputation? Although I am open to the analysis, the MBA program has more staff support than any other program or office in the college. Increasing MBA staffing would require a very strong case, in my current view.

Demographic (Students)

I commend the MBA program on accomplishing the dramatic increase in female students to 30%. Maintaining and increasing that percentage will require a continuous effort.

The Faculty Response also sets a goal of "an overall demographic that reflects Utah's population." It would be useful for the program to provide specific numerical goals for demographic groups it plans to target, together with actions, a timeline and the person(s) responsible for reaching each goal. Annual reports should identify progress.

Student Learning Outcomes and Assessments

The MBA leads the college in the quality of its assessment program, largely due to the director's expertise in that arena. It will be interesting to see the effects of the change to the GoVenture simulation for the MFT.

Faculty

I appreciate the MBA program taking responsibility to get chairs all faculty evaluations from the MBA program. I encourage the director to continue to seek a technological solution from WSU. I would be happy to help push that initiative.

Just a note regarding MBA teaching and rank and tenure. It was never the case the faculty were prevented from including their MBA work in their documentation. Rather, the initial template in the e-Portfolio was structured for undergraduate courses; because the MBA uses a different instrument, faculty could not easily fit MBA evaluations into that specific template. The ePortfolio now includes an MBA template, too.

See the first two paragraphs of the section on Growth above for comments regarding class sizes.

Support

See the final two paragraphs in the response to the Growth section above for comments regarding staffing.

Relationship with External Communities

I wholeheartedly support the creation of an external advisory board for the MBA. However, I strongly encourage the director and the graduate faculty to determine the goals they have for the board before putting it together. For example, a board that focuses on creating job opportunities for students and alumni might look very different from one that is oriented toward fundraising. It appears from (2.G.a) that one role of the board will be curriculum advice, specifically related to expanded certificate offerings. I would be happy to help think through this issue.

In addition to a Certificate in Business Analytics, which is likely to generate high student demand, the MBA should consider leveraging the college's strength in Supply Chain Management with a certificate in that area.

I further encourage the director and interested faculty to attend a meeting of the Supply Chain Management program's Partner (i.e., Advisory) Board. Program director Stan Fawcett engages that board exceptionally well. Even the best board cannot function well without good meeting design by the director.

I'm assuming that the "... 3 year terms, with some serving 1 and 2 year terms" is an effort to stagger initial terms so that 1/3 of members are slated to roll off each year, with all new additions moving into 3-year terms. If that is not the intent, then I'm a bit confused regarding why some board members would have different term lengths than others. If that is the intent, then I suggest the initial terms be 2, 3 and 4 years, with 3-year renewals. This provides shortest-term members to learn about the board and add value for the program over a two-year period, rather than being one-and-done.

The collaboration with Hill Air Force Base has been excellent in recent years, in large part due to the director's work in creating personal relationships with the permanent staff there. What other strategic partners could/should the MBA be considering? Are there large firms that might consider an on-site MBA program? Are there others that need more information about the WSU MBA before deciding to become strategic partners? The director, recruiter and faculty should be proactive about seeking such partnerships, since they tend to persist through the lean times that will eventually come. Strategic partners are also more likely to help fund their employees' MBA programs.

Future plans

The Dual Degree Pathways for engineering and computer science are excellent initiatives, as is the Certificate in Data Analytics. The MBA should identify carefully the additional student enrollment that these programs are likely to bring and integrate that into its analysis of future faculty needs, maximum class sizes, etc. Chairs should be brought into this discussion early to discuss faculty workload implications. What is the timeline for these initiatives? Is the intent to have them included in the 2019-2020 catalog?

What is the impetus for the Code of Professional Conduct? Have there been problems in the recent past that such a code can alleviate? Why is it needed and what value does it bring to the program, the faculty and the students?

Other observations

The MBA would benefit from a written five-year strategic plan that considers what should happen when enrollment spikes (in either direction), since we know those will occur. Thinking through those scenarios can help to inform current discussions about whether to grow the program enrollment beyond 300 students. Most of the issues that have arisen in this program review process would fit nicely into such a plan. The director, faculty and staff have had many of these conversations. Putting them into a formal document would add value.

One initiative whose implications are not considered in this review is the creation of our new Minor in MBA Prerequisites. As non-business majors move through this minor, they will become eligible for (almost) the fast-track version of the MBA. Based on historical ratios, how much might we expect the demand for MBA prerequisite courses for non-business majors to fall? Can we expect non-business WSU with this minor to be more likely to enroll in WSU's MBA versus competitors, due to completion of prerequisites? Will the MBA program promote this minor strategically across campus to encourage students to think about WSU as an MBA destination?