

MBA Student Pre-Program And Post-Program Assessments Of Critical Skills: Implications For Outcomes Assessment And Curriculum Design

Joseph G. Glynn (glynn@canisius.edu), Canisius College

ABSTRACT

At the time of matriculation, MBA students were surveyed concerning how important several skills and areas of knowledge were to them. The students were also surveyed immediately after graduation, and asked how successful the program was in developing these skills and areas of knowledge. This work presents results of three recent years of the survey data, and discusses its potential to contribute to the important areas of curriculum design, outcomes assessment, and program promotion.

INTRODUCTION

The surveys of MBA students were conducted at a comprehensive mid-size private college in an urban area of the northeastern United States. The results for two distinct surveys will be presented: (a) survey of new matriculates or entering MBAs, and (b) survey of recently graduated MBAs. Survey results of the newly matriculating MBA students were the subject of a previous work by this author (Glynn, 2004), and portions of that work will be replicated herein. The host college made a serious commitment to several student survey projects around 1990, and these activities have been on-going since that time. Among the motivations for the survey research are: (a) a commitment to providing a quality graduate business education that delivers current material over appropriate topics, (b) the institution operates in a highly competitive environment for attracting MBA students, and (c) maintenance of AACSB accreditation.

The business school engages in an expanding variety of activities to meet these goals. We have a strong and active relationship with our Business Advisory Council which is comprised of about three dozen local business leaders. Faculty and the Dean regularly attend AACSB and other curriculum development conferences, as well as professional skills enhancement conferences. Our Graduate Business Programs Director is extremely active in the local business community. We work hard to develop and maintain close ties with our active MBA Alumni Association. We also conduct extensive surveys of (a) new MBA matriculates, (b) graduating MBAs, and (c) MBA alumni. This work reports on the first two of those survey projects – newly matriculating MBA students, and graduating MBAs. The terms “MBA” and “Graduate Business Program or GBP” will be used interchangeably.

BACKGROUND

The college has had a part-time evening MBA program since about 1970, and it has been accredited by the AACSB since 1982. A full-time one-year MBA program was successfully launched five years ago. This work focuses solely upon the part-time evening MBA program, which is by far the larger program. Average graduate business program enrollment in the evening program has been about 350 over the last ten years. Most of the

students are local, full-time professionally employed people. Many factors affect demand for the MBA degree, but none is more important than the overall job market. Tuition-reimbursement programs of local employers (also affected by economic factors) appear to have an effect upon MBA enrollments.

Enrollment challenges are a very real concern. Over the last decade, demand for the evening MBA degree has vacillated and competition for MBA students has become increasingly intense. The local metropolitan area supports several other MBA programs, two of which are AACSB accredited. Our most serious competition appears to come from two sources: (a) a large public university with both AACSB accredited full-time day and part-time evening MBA programs and a deserved national reputation, and (b) a newer program with a large advertising budget promoting a shorter and highly flexible program that is not AACSB accredited. Since we are a private institution with, except for a few adjunct faculty, nearly 100 percent terminally qualified faculty, our program is more costly to students than either of these programs, or any of the several other MBA programs in the area.

THE TWO SURVEY INSTRUMENTS: NEW MATRICULATES AND RECENT MBA GRADUATES

We have been surveying our newly matriculating MBA students since about 1990 and our graduating MBAs since the mid-1990s. We have learned much about our students and used their inputs and responses to open-end questions to improve the survey instruments. We have also employed small group interviews, focus groups, inputs from MBA class representative committees (comprised of currently enrolled students), and ideas from our MBA alumni to improve the survey instruments. With very few exceptions, these instruments have remained fixed since the fall of 1996. There have been minor additions and deletions to the survey items as conditions warranted – i.e., demand for a new area of concentration or elective, or an influx of new students from the field of telecommunications, and other similar phenomena.

Survey Content: New Matriculates

In general terms, we wished to learn more about our incoming MBA students. We wanted to understand what motivated them to pursue a graduate business degree, what skills they felt were most important to the advancement of their career plans, and what factors influenced the decision to select our program. Demographic and descriptive background characteristics were of interest as well. With respect to all of this information, we deemed it of paramount importance to be able to track any changes or trends in these data over time.

For the purposes of this work, the two most important areas of information collected concern respondent ratings of the importance of skills and areas of knowledge to be developed in their Graduate Business Program. Specifically, the survey items are listed verbatim below.

1. “Concerning your professional goals and expectations with respect to your Graduate Business Programs studies: How important is it to develop your skills in the following areas?”

The nine areas are rated from 1 (Not Important) to 7 (Very Important). The areas are:

- Ability to Work Independently
- Quantitative Skills
- Presentation Skills
- Interpersonal Skills
- Problem-Solving skills
- Team Building Skills
- Writing Skills
- Computer Skills
- Critical Thinking Skills

2. “How important is it to you to expand your knowledge with respect to the following areas?”

The six areas are rated from 1 (Not Important) to 7 (Very Important). The areas are:

- International/Global Issues
- Cultural Diversity Issues
- General Understanding of Business
- Business Ethics, Moral Issues
- Environmental Issues
- Functional Areas of Business [Accounting, Operations, Marketing, Finance, Management]

Though the primary focus of this work is the two sections described above (skills and areas of knowledge), some of the other information contained within the survey results will be of use in constructing profiles of newly matriculating GBP students. Tables 1 and 2 of the Results section below depict these data.

Survey Content: Recent MBA Graduates

The two most important areas of information collected concern respondent ratings of the very same skills and areas of knowledge that they rated at the outset of their studies on the New Matriculates Survey. For the purposes of this work, our primary goals involved the assessment of the degree to which graduating MBAs were satisfied with the development of the skills and areas of knowledge that they had previously rated on the survey for newly enrolled MBAs. These data will allow for descriptive comparisons between the assessed importance of skills at the time of matriculation and the assessed success concerning the development of these skills during GBP studies. Specifically, the survey items on the Recent MBA Graduate Survey are listed verbatim below, and the skills and areas of knowledge are repeated for reader convenience.

1. “Concerning your professional goals and expectations with respect to your Graduate Business Programs studies: How successful was your program of study in the development of your skills in the following areas?”

The nine areas are rated from 1 (Not Successful) to 7 (Very Successful). The areas are:

- Ability to Work Independently
- Quantitative Skills
- Presentation Skills
- Interpersonal Skills
- Problem-Solving skills
- Team Building Skills
- Writing Skills
- Computer Skills
- Critical Thinking Skills

2. “How successful was your program of study in expanding your knowledge with respect to the following areas?”

The six areas are rated from 1 (Not Successful) to 7 (Very Successful). The areas are:

- International/Global Issues
- Cultural Diversity Issues
- General Understanding of Business
- Business Ethics, Moral Issues
- Environmental Issues
- Functional Areas of Business [Accounting, Operations, Marketing, Finance, Management]

RESULTS

Survey results will be reported for the three MBA classes that originally matriculated in the years 1998 – 2000. Recall that the primary goal of this research is to compare ratings of “importance of skills” at the time of matriculation with ratings at graduation time of “how successfully the skills were developed.” Ideally, we would like to know that we have pre- and post-assessments of the same group of respondents, but there are problems. Respondents are guaranteed anonymity, so individual responses at the time of matriculation cannot be matched with responses at the time of graduation. Additionally, since we do not collect any respondent identity characteristics, we cannot even match the pre- and post-groups with certainty. We know that the year of matriculation is accurate, and on the exit survey at the time of graduation, we ask the respondent to report his/her year of matriculation. That is how the groups have been matched in the presentations which follow.

For example, results reported for any year represent data for MBA students who originally matriculated that year. Using 1998 as an example, results from the New Matriculates Survey were collected at the time of matriculation in 1998. With respect to the Recent MBA Graduates Surveys (exit surveys), 1998 results may have been collected at graduations in 2000, 2001, 2002, etc. Recall that the MBA graduates report their year of matriculation on their exit survey immediately after graduation. It is important to understand that 1998 Recent MBA Graduates refers to survey results collected at the time of graduation for students who matriculated in 1998.

New Matriculates – Items Affecting Choice of Our MBA Program

Eight items representing reasons students may have chosen our MBA Program were listed and student respondents were asked to rate the importance of each on a scale from 1 (Not Important) to 7 (Very Important). Each cell of Table 1 contains four statistics: mean or average rating on the seven-point scale, number of respondents *n*, standard deviation of the rating on the seven-point scale, and the percent of respondents who rated the item as the most important reason they chose our MBA Program. The items in Table 1 have been ordered in descending order by total mean value. Thus, on the basis of total average score over the three year period, the items are listed from the highest rated reason to the lowest rated of the eight reasons offered.

Program Reputation was the highest rated attribute with an overall average of 5.90, and was closely followed by Flexibility Taking Courses (5.84). Student respondents were also requested to identify the most important reason they chose our program. These data are reported in Table 1 as “Most Impt. %.” The results are expectedly consistent with the overall average ratings of the attributes. We see that Program Reputation received an overall average of 37.9 percent, meaning that 37.9 percent of student respondents named Program Reputation as the most important reason they chose our MBA Program. Flexibility Taking Courses garnered an overall average of 25.8 percent, and AACSB Accreditation tallied 16.1 percent. On the basis of aggregate average score and total mentions as the most important reason for choice of our program, it is clear that these first three attributes – Program Reputation, Flexibility Taking Courses, and AACSB Accreditation – dominated. Fully 79.8 percent of all respondents identified one of these three attributes as the most important reason for choosing our MBA Program.

New Matriculates – Descriptive Characteristics

It will be of some use to view pertinent data which describe our MBA student population. Selected characteristics with respect to demographics, academic variables, and professional profiles are displayed in Table 2. Only a three-year time horizon is displayed in Table 2 (and other tables in this work), but we are fully cognizant of the value of monitoring any trends that may be developing over time. For example, our GBP student population is getting younger (the ≤ 25 age group is growing) and tuition reimbursement appears to be contracting (note the decline in percents receiving 100% reimbursement).

New Matriculates & Recent MBA Graduates – Ratings Of Skills

Table 3 depicts the average rating for each of the nine skills for each of the three years of matriculation (1998 – 2000) for both new matriculates and recent graduates, and total average ratings for the three year period. The skills are listed in descending order according to aggregate or total average response by the new matriculates

Table 1
New Matriculates: Ratings of Attributes Concerning Choice of Program [1=Not Important ... 7=Very Important]

Attribute		1998	1999	2000	Totals
Program Reputation	Mean	5.61	6.02	6.05	5.90
	n	38	44	42	124
	Std. Dev.	1.33	1.15	1.01	1.17
	Most Impt. %	40.5%	33.3%	40.5%	37.9%
Flexibility Taking Courses	Mean	5.42	5.98	6.07	5.84
	n	38	45	42	125
	Std. Dev.	1.31	1.18	1.05	1.20
	Most Impt. %	32.2%	20.0%	26.2%	25.8%
AACSB Accreditation	Mean	5.50	5.55	5.45	5.50
	n	38	44	42	124
	Std. Dev.	1.52	1.73	1.78	1.68
	Most Impt. %	13.5%	20.0%	14.3%	16.1%
Individual Attention	Mean	4.68	5.45	5.55	5.25
	n	38	44	42	124
	Std. Dev.	1.53	1.19	1.31	1.38
	Most Impt. %	0.0%	4.4%	2.4%	2.4%
Small Class Size	Mean	4.84	5.18	5.36	5.14
	n	38	44	42	124
	Std. Dev.	1.79	1.28	1.27	1.46
	Most Impt. %	5.4%	4.4%	0.0%	3.2%
Diversity Of Course Offerings	Mean	4.89	4.80	5.40	5.03
	n	37	44	42	123
	Std. Dev.	1.37	1.29	1.17	1.29
	Most Impt. %	0.0%	0.0%	4.8%	1.6%
Convenience Of Satellite Campus	Mean	5.03	4.86	4.90	4.93
	n	37	44	42	123
	Std. Dev.	2.12	2.09	2.18	2.11
	Most Impt. %	2.7%	8.9%	2.4%	4.8%
Convenience Of Main Campus	Mean	3.71	4.23	4.52	4.17
	n	38	44	42	124
	Std. Dev.	2.09	1.93	1.99	2.01
	Most Impt. %	0.0%	2.2%	0.0%	0.8%
Other	Mean	7.00	6.63	7.00	6.81
	n	3	8	5	16
	Std. Dev.	0.00	0.74	0.00	0.54
	Most Impt. %	5.4%	6.7%	9.5%	7.3%

(Initial) over the three year time horizon 1998 – 2000. There are clearly three distinct tiers with respect to the skills deemed to be most important by our newly matriculating MBA respondents. Results are also grouped for recent graduates, but not in as clearly defined levels as for the new matriculates.

Tier 1: Critical Thinking earned an average total rating of 6.19 making this skill the highest rated on a scale of importance according to our new MBA students. It is noteworthy that Critical Thinking also had the smallest standard deviation (0.95). The smallest standard deviation depicts relatively little variation, signifying that students were consistent in their high rating of the importance of Critical Thinking. Another way of interpreting this smallest standard deviation is to state that there is less dispersion in responses, less uncertainty or more conviction in the

responses of students with respect to the perceived importance of Critical Thinking. Problem-solving had a total average response of 6.12, and earned the only other spot on tier 1.

Table 2 New Matriculates – Descriptive Student Profiles

Student Characteristic		1998	1999	2000	T
Gender	Female	31.6%	54.8%	52.4%	46.7%
	Male	68.4%	45.2%	47.6%	53.3%
Age	≤ 25	31.6%	34.9%	40.5%	35.8%
	26 – 35	55.3%	55.8%	45.3%	52.0%
	≥36	13.2%	9.3%	14.3%	12.2%
UG Major	Business/Econ	54.0%	65.9%	47.7%	56.1%
	Math/Engr/Comptr/Phys. Sci.	35.1%	9.0%	30.9%	24.4%
	Other	10.9%	25.1%	21.4%	19.5%
Tuition Reimbursement Available From Employer	None	23.3%	18.2%	25.0%	22.1%
	About 25%	0	6.1%	12.5%	6.3%
	About 50%	3.3%	15.2%	0	6.3%
	About 75%	10.0%	9.1%	28.1%	15.8%
	About 100%	63.3%	51.5%	34.4%	49.5%
Employment Status	Full-Time	86.5%	81.8%	78.0%	82.0%
	Part-Time	5.4%	13.6%	2.4%	7.4%
	Unemployed	8.1%	4.5%	19.5%	10.6%
Level In Organization	Upper Management	6.3%	2.9%	7.1%	5.3%
	Middle Management	25.0%	17.1%	25.0%	22.1%
	Supervisory	21.9%	20.0%	14.3%	18.9%
	Non-Management	46.9%	60.0%	53.6%	53.7%

Tier 2: Four skills were identified as very important, and occupy the second tier of Table 2. These skills and their average ratings over the three year period are: Presentation (5.81), Team Building (5.79), Interpersonal (5.73), and Quantitative (5.67). In assessing importance of these skills to our new MBA matriculates, the reader should note that within this tier, Presentation and Team Building had slightly higher average scores than did Interpersonal and Quantitative, but Interpersonal and Quantitative scored significantly higher on the basis of mentions as the most important skill.

Tier 3: Tier 3 is represented by the following three skills: Writing (5.43), Work Independently (5.35), and Computer (5.26). Perhaps most importantly, the lowest average rating in the Initial Totals section of Table 3 is 5.26 for Computer, and this is still on the high or important end of the seven-point scale.

Comparisons between the ratings of importance of skills (made at the time of matriculation) and ratings of how successfully these skills were developed (made at the time of graduation) comprise the heart of the current research. For each year, the averages are reported for “Initial” and “Grad.” The “Initial” designation applies to ratings of importance of the skills made by the students at the time they entered the MBA Program. The “Grad” designation applies to ratings of how successfully the skills were developed. These “Grad” ratings were made at the end of the MBA Program, but the year applies to the year of matriculation. For example, in the upper-left portion of Table 3 we see that students who matriculated in 1998 gave Critical Thinking an average rating of 6.26 (out of a possible 7) on the Importance scale. When the students who matriculated in 1998 graduated, they gave Critical Thinking an average score of 5.43 on the Successfully Developed scale.

Table 3 New Matriculates vs. Graduates: Ratings of Specific Skills as to Importance vs. Most Successfully Developed

Skill		1998		1999		2000		Totals	
		Initial	Grad	Initial	Grad	Initial	Grad	Initial	Grad
Critical Thinking	Mean	6.26	5.43	6.24	5.32	6.07	5.45	6.19	5.40
	n	38	37	45	25	41	22	124	84
	s	0.95	1.02	1.11	1.15	0.91	1.30	0.95	1.12
	Most Imp%	10.8%	37.8%	15.6%	44.0%	16.7%	36.4%	**14.5%	**39.3%
Problem-Solving	Mean	6.05	5.11	6.27	5.36	6.02	5.36	6.12	5.25
	n	38	37	45	25	42	22	125	84
	s	1.18	0.88	1.12	1.15	1.28	1.18	1.19	1.04
	Most Imp%	21.6%	21.6%	15.6%	28.0%	28.6%	22.7%	21.8%	23.8%
Presentation	Mean	5.87	5.22	5.86	4.88	5.71	5.00	5.81	5.06
	n	38	37	44	25	42	22	124	84
	s	1.12	1.23	1.09	1.69	1.22	1.27	1.14	1.38
	Most Imp%	2.7%	5.4%	6.7%	0.0%	11.9%	0.0%	7.3%	2.4%
Team Building	Mean	5.97	5.14	5.84	4.92	5.57	5.00	5.79	5.04
	n	38	37	45	25	42	22	125	84
	s	0.94	1.03	1.17	1.68	1.13	1.35	1.10	1.32
	Most Imp%	13.5%	5.4%	8.9%	0.0%	4.8%	9.1%	8.9%	4.8%
Interpersonal	Mean	5.95	5.19	5.82	4.88	5.43	4.95	5.73	5.04
	n	38	37	45	25	42	22	125	84
	s	0.96	0.91	1.28	1.69	1.15	1.13	1.17	1.24
	Most Imp%	18.9%	13.5%	17.8%	8.0%	11.9%	9.1%	16.1%	10.7%
Quantitative	Mean	5.63	5.22	5.64	4.92	5.74	5.36	5.67	5.17
	n	38	37	45	25	42	22	125	84
	s	1.24	1.03	1.40	1.35	1.13	1.36	1.26	1.22
	Most Imp%	16.2%	5.4%	13.3%	4.0%	11.9%	4.5%	*13.7%	*4.8%
Writing	Mean	5.13	4.81	5.67	4.60	5.44	4.86	5.43	4.76
	n	38	37	45	25	41	22	124	84
	s	1.36	1.41	1.15	1.50	1.32	1.08	1.28	1.35
	Most Imp%	5.4%	0.0%	4.4%	4.0%	4.8%	9.1%	4.8%	3.6%
Work Independently	Mean	5.43	5.22	5.64	5.56	4.95	5.45	5.35	5.38
	n	37	37	45	25	42	22	124	84
	s	1.61	0.95	1.43	1.12	1.48	1.14	1.52	1.05
	Most Imp%	5.4%	10.8%	8.9%	4.0%	4.8%	4.5%	6.5%	7.1%
Computer	Mean	5.21	4.86	5.36	4.68	5.20	4.64	5.26	4.75
	n	38	37	45	25	41	22	124	84
	s	1.82	1.27	1.75	1.75	1.72	1.81	1.75	1.56
	Most Imp%	5.4%	0.0%	8.9%	8.0%	4.8%	4.5%	6.5%	3.6%

**Difference Significant at p < 0.01

*Difference Significant at p < 0.05

Unfortunately, neither independent samples t-tests nor related samples t-tests of significance differences between averages may be used to assess differences between the “Importance” ratings of new MBA matriculates and the “How Successfully Developed” ratings of recent MBA graduates. Though both variables are measured on seven-point scales with higher numbers representing more enthusiasm, the items are not the same. The results are descriptive, and the reader can draw some conclusions by noting patterns in the data. For example, in every cell but one (Work Independently, 2000), the Initial rating is higher than the Grad rating. This means that students consistently rated the skills higher on the importance scale at the time of matriculation than they did on the how successfully developed scale at the time of graduation.

Each cell in Table 3 also displays the count or n, the standard deviation s, and the percent of respondents who rated each skill as most important within that year (Most Imp%). It is seen that for 1998 matriculates, 10.8% initially rated Critical Thinking as the most important skill, while at the time of graduation, 37.8% of the same group thought that Critical Thinking was the most important skill.

It is important to note that these percents refer only to the identification of the corresponding skill as being most important, and have nothing to do with which skills were most successfully developed. The Initial Most Imp% and the Grad Most Imp% are the same variable. That means that the differences between Initial and Grad most important percents may be assessed by traditional statistical significance testing. Tests were run on these potential differences only on the Totals column of Table 3. Significant differences were noted for Critical Thinking where 14.5% of the respondents rated it as the most important skill at the time of matriculation, and 39.3% rated it as most important at the time of graduation. The only other skill that displayed a significant difference was Quantitative where 13.7% originally rated it as the most important skill, and after having completed the program, only 4.8% rated it as the most important skill.

In Table 4, the nine skills are ordered by the overall percent of mentions as the most important skill at the time of matriculation. These data appear in the second to last column of Table 4 and also appear in the Totals/Initial column of Table 3. Table 4 is a table of rankings. For example, in 1998 new matriculates awarded Problem-solving with the most mentions as the most important skill and it is therefore ranked as number 1. Interpersonal received the second most mentions as the most important skill, followed by Quantitative in third position, Team Building in fourth, and so on.

Table 4 New Matriculates vs. Graduates: Rankings of Skills Identified as Most Important

Skill	1998		1999		2000		Overall Rank/Percent	
	Initial	Grad	Initial	Grad	Initial	Grad	Initial	Grad
Problem-solving	1	2	2	2	1	2	1/21.8%	2/23.8%
Interpersonal	2	3	1	3	3	3	2/16.1%	3/10.7%
Critical Thinking	5	1	2	1	2	1	3/14.5%	1/39.3%
Quantitative	3	5	4	5	3	6	4/13.7%	5/4.8%
Team Building	4	5	5	8	6	3	5/8.9%	5/4.8%
Presentation	9	5	8	8	3	9	6/7.3%	9/2.4%
Work Independently	6	4	5	5	6	6	7/6.5%	4/7.1%
Computer	6	8	5	3	6	6	7/6.5%	7/3.6%
Writing	6	8	9	5	6	3	9/4.8%	7/3.6%

Patterns in the rankings may be enlightening, and should motivate the faculty and administration to brainstorm in an effort to explain them. For example, note that the Quantitative skill is always ranked higher by new matriculates than by recent MBA grads. Why do graduating MBAs value the importance of Quantitative skills less than new matriculates? Perhaps quantitative courses contain too much theory and students are seeking more applications-based modeling and problem-solving coursework. An alternative explanation is that there may not be enough emphasis on quantitative material in the curriculum. There are many possible explanations, and it is

suggested that the faculty and administration meet to consider all possibilities and to take corrective action if deemed necessary.

Table 4 also reveals that Presentation skills are declining in importance to graduating MBAs over time. In 1998 Presentation skills were ranked fifth most important. The rankings for 1999 slipped to eighth most important and in 2000 the Presentation skills were ranked as ninth most important among recent graduates. Writing skills have experienced just the opposite – graduating MBAs have ranked Writing skills as eighth, fifth, and third most important over the 1998 – 2000 time frame. There are a host of possible reasons for these differences in rankings.

The likely candidates are:

- Student needs or perceived needs are changing.
- Student skill/competency levels are changing.
- Faculty interest levels and/or teaching methods are changing.
- Exposure to new technologies may alter student perceptions of relative importance of skills.
- Changes in curriculum lead to changes in expectations and outcomes.

Once again, brainstorming discussion sessions would seem to be an effective approach to assigning causes to or providing explanations for these observed changes in student perceptions of importance of skills both between new matriculates and recent graduates and over time.

New Matriculates & Recent MBA Graduates – Ratings Of Areas Of Knowledge

Average ratings for each of six areas of knowledge are displayed in Table 5 over the years of matriculation of 1998 – 2000 for both new matriculates and for recent graduates of the MBA Program. Similar to Table 3, the areas of knowledge are listed in descending order according to the total average rating for new matriculates (Initial column under Totals in Table 5). As Table 3 divulged three distinct groupings of skills, there are three tiers concerning the areas of knowledge considered to be most important by our new matriculates and graduating students. These levels are clearly displayed in Table 5.

Tier 1: Not surprisingly, Specific Functional Areas of Business was clearly identified as the most important area of knowledge both on the basis of highest average score (6.36 for new matriculates and 5.54 for recent graduates) and percent of students who rated it as the most important area (50.4 percent for new matriculates and 63.1 percent for the recent graduates). As would be reasonable to expect, General Understanding of Business came in a strong second and is included in tier 1.

Tier 2: The second tier was occupied by Global/International Issues and Business Ethics, Moral Issues.

Tier 3: Cultural Diversity Issues and Environmental Issues were rated lowest among the six areas of knowledge by both new matriculates and recent graduates.

Note that for every cell in Table 5, the average “Importance” score for new matriculates exceeds the average “How Successfully Developed” score for recent graduates. Once again, these are not the same variables and no statistical significance testing can be done for the differences between averages. Nonetheless, results are similar to those of Table 3 as new matriculates consistently express more enthusiasm or conviction with respect to assessing the importance of these areas of knowledge than they do later at the time of graduation when assessing how successfully the program expanded their knowledge in these areas.

Also, as in Table 3, the Most Imp% entries represent the percents of new matriculates and the percents of recent graduates who identified each of the knowledge areas as being most important. Statistical significance tests may be performed on differences between new matriculates and recent graduates in their reporting of these “most important” areas of knowledge. None were significant at the $p = 0.05$ level of significance, and the three that were significant at the 0.10 level are so reported in Table 5.

Table 5
New Matriculates vs. Graduates: Ratings of Areas of Knowledge as to Importance vs. Most Successfully Developed

Area of Knowledge		1998		1999		2000		Totals	
		Grad	Initial	Grad	Initial	Grad	Initial	Grad	
Specific Functional Areas of Business	Mean	6.21	5.43	6.49	5.48	6.36	5.77	6.36	5.54
	n	38	37	45	25	42	22	125	84
	s	1.07	0.96	0.92	1.30	0.93	0.92	0.97	1.06
	Most Imp%	44.7%	54.1%	51.1%	68.0%	54.8%	72.7%	*50.4%	*63.1%
General Understanding of Business	Mean	5.97	5.27	5.93	5.60	5.95	5.50	5.95	5.43
	n	38	37	45	25	42	22	125	84
	s	1.10	1.05	1.32	1.21	0.99	1.19	1.14	1.12
	Most Imp%	39.5%	29.7%	31.1%	20.0%	26.2%	9.1%	*32.0%	*21.4%
Global/International Issues	Mean	5.11	4.08	5.44	3.40	5.43	3.59	5.34	3.75
	n	38	37	45	25	42	22	125	84
	s	1.49	1.30	1.50	1.38	1.11	1.37	1.37	1.36
	Most Imp%	7.9%	10.8%	13.3%	12.0%	9.5%	9.1%	10.4%	10.7%
Business Ethics, Moral Issues	Mean	5.21	4.86	5.16	4.96	5.52	5.18	5.30	4.98
	n	38	37	45	25	42	22	125	84
	s	1.32	1.06	1.30	1.27	1.22	1.50	1.28	1.24
	Most Imp%	0.0%	5.4%	2.2%	0.0%	2.4%	9.1%	1.6%	4.8%
Cultural Diversity Issues	Mean	4.34	3.84	4.62	2.96	4.81	3.55	4.60	3.50
	n	38	37	45	25	42	22	125	84
	s	1.60	1.39	1.57	1.21	1.33	1.26	1.50	1.34
	Most Imp%	5.3%	0.0%	2.2%	0.0%	4.8%	0.0%	*4.0%	*0.0%
Environmental Issues	Mean	4.58	4.00	4.38	2.92	4.80	3.73	4.58	3.61
	n	38	37	45	25	41	22	124	84
	s	1.61	1.31	1.56	1.35	1.10	1.58	1.44	1.46
	Most Imp%	2.6%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%	0.0%	1.6%	0.0%

* Difference Significant at $p < 0.10$

CONCLUSIONS

With respect to new matriculates and the reasons they chose our program, results in Table 1 show that high standards are more important than comfort issues. Program Reputation and AACSB Accreditation were consistently rated higher than Individual Attention, Small Class Size, Diversity of Course Offerings, and Convenience of either campus. Flexibility Taking Courses is extremely important to our students, most of who work full-time (see Table 2). Flexibility Taking Courses is not a comfort issue to our students – it is a matter of importance, and is the single most important reason that about 25 percent of our students chose our program. It appears that from a promotion perspective, we should be emphasizing almost 25 years of uninterrupted AACSB accreditation, the over 90 percent of faculty with terminal degrees, our excellent academic reputation, a close working relationship with the local business community, flexibility in course selection and sequencing, and the New MBA Program with several concentrations available.

Tables 3 – 5 contain interesting information, but as has been explained in the text, the data do not lend themselves to statistical significance testing for differences between averages. The value and importance of these nine skills and six areas of knowledge are integral to both the design and implementation of an MBA curriculum. Knowledge of how newly matriculating MBA students rate the importance of these skills and areas of knowledge should also provide direction for promotional campaigns and advertisements designed to attract new students.

In the absence of statistical tests of significance, a close monitoring of trends both over time and between assessments of new matriculates and assessments of recent graduates would be of value. Many questions arise from scrutiny of the data. For example, as shown in Table 4, why do MBA students consistently rate the importance of quantitative skills higher at the time of matriculation than they do at the time of graduation? In Table 5, with respect to Global/International Issues, it is seen that the differences between the average ratings of importance (at the time of matriculation) and the average ratings of how successfully the skill was developed (at the time of graduation) are more pronounced than for any other area of knowledge or skill. It is also very noteworthy that in every cell but one in Tables 3 and 5, the initial ratings of skills/areas importance at the time of matriculation are consistently higher than the corresponding ratings of how successfully developed the skills/areas were at the time of graduation. Discussions at departmental levels, at curriculum committee meetings, and faculty planning sessions are recommended.

References

1. AACSB Task Force on Outcome Measurement. (June, 1989). Report of the AACSB Task Force on Outcome Measurement.
2. AACSB International – The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International. (April, 2003, Revised January, 2004). Eligibility Procedures and Standards for Business Accreditation.
3. Joseph G. Glynn. “Expectations of Incoming MBA Students: Implications for Curriculum Development and Program Promotion”. *Journal of Business & Economics Research*: Volume 2, Number 2, February, 2004.
4. Montauk, Richard. (2003). “Should You Invest In an M.B.A.?” *College Journal from the Wall Street Journal*. (www.collegejournal.com/mbacenter/preparemba/20030527-montauk.html).

Notes