

PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOME ASSESSMENT REPORT: 2013-14 ACADEMIC YEAR

Notre Dame de Namur University School of Business and Management
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MASTERS OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION (MBA) PROGRAM

OVERVIEW

This report summarizes our assessment activities in the School of Business and Management's Masters of Business Administration (MBA) graduate program for the academic year 2013-14. The report is based on assessment data gathered during the Fall 2013 and Spring 2014 semesters.

Please note that we have recently modified our assessment processes in all graduate programs in order to make them more rigorous and comprehensive and to optimize the statistical accuracy and representativeness of the findings that emerge from analysis of the assessment data. 2013-14 constitutes our second year of using the new evaluation methodology.

The process we used for the academic years 2011-12, 2010-11 and 2009-10 consisted of evaluating capstone projects assigned within the MBA Capstone courses for achievement of all six Program Learning Outcomes. The process we have switched to as of 2012-13 and which we plan to continue using for the foreseeable future consists of assessing the appropriate and relevant Program Learning Outcomes in each of the "core" Common Professional Component (CPC) classes every time the core course is taught (with occasional exceptions). We feel this approach is superior to the capstone-only method used previously since it provides a greater number of data points using a more diverse set of assessment methods and faculty evaluators as a gauge of our progress toward achieving the PLOs.

GENERAL PROCESS

The process described below was followed in order to assess our achievement of the Program Learning Outcomes in the MBA program:

1. Program Learning Outcomes (PLOs) for each of the graduate programs were created and vetted with faculty and administration within the School of Business and Management. Our PLOs were most recently revamped and renewed in 2010.
2. Instructors teaching core (CPC) courses in the graduate programs are asked to identify the set of Program Learning Outcomes relevant to their course(s).
3. Instructors teaching core (CPC) courses are then asked to identify provisional methods to assess each of the relevant learning outcomes identified in 2.
4. The provisional methods are vetted with the School of Business and Management's Director of Graduate Programs for appropriateness and feasibility. In some cases, instructors are asked to revise their initial assessment methods so that they more closely align to a proper assessment of the relevant Program Learning Outcomes and/or allow for a more feasible and practical assessment and data collection process. In other cases, instructors are advised to modify their

selection of Program Learning Outcomes to assess in order to arrive at the same beneficial outcomes mentioned above.

5. Once approved, instructors are asked to assess according to their approved assessment plans.
6. The Director of Graduate Programs obtains data from each of the assessing instructors, and then compiles and analyzes the data, noting trends and issues (reported here). See “Program Assessment Rubric” for a description of our assessment benchmarks.
7. The Director of Graduate Programs shares the findings with SBM and NDNU faculty, staff and administration at the beginning of the academic year. The group jointly brainstorms how to improve upon any problematic areas demonstrated by the findings and identifies action steps needed “close the loop” on program learning outcome achievement deficiencies. Suitable ideas emerging from the discussions are then implemented as early in the academic year as possible.
8. The next academic year’s results are examined to see if improvement has occurred in the areas of deficiency.

DATA SOURCES

As mentioned above, our assessment data comes from assessments made in the “core” (Common Professional Component or “CPC”) courses within each graduate program. Each time a “core” course is run during the fall or spring semesters, we ask instructors to provide assessment data for that course. New faculty members teaching core courses may initially be exempt from providing assessment data since they are less familiar with the course structures and pedagogy in the courses they are teaching. We compensate for such “CPC” deficiencies by simply collecting more data in other simultaneously running CPC courses.

Data for the assessments are collected in the fall and spring semesters of each academic year. We do not collect assessment data for summer courses given the diminished number and more “elective” nature of the courses taught in this timeframe.

The “core” CPC courses for the MBA program that provide data for our assessments are:

MBA Core Courses
Organization Management & Theory
Enterprise Information Management Systems
Global Operations Management
Marketing Planning & Analysis
Corporate Finance
Management Accounting
Business Policy (MBA Capstone)

PROGRAM LEARNING OUTCOMES

MBA Program Level Learning Outcomes

The Program Learning Outcomes for the MBA Program are as follows: (key word in ***bold blue italics***)

1. Students will be able to understand, analyze and communicate global, economic, legal, and ethical ***aspects*** of business.
2. Students will be able to demonstrate effective ***leadership*** and collaboration skills needed to make business-critical decisions, accomplish functional, organizational and professional goals.
3. Students will be able to demonstrate written and oral ***communication*** and information literacy competencies that support the effectiveness of strategic planning, marketing and operational activities.
4. Students will be able to evaluate and apply the effective use of ***technology*** to optimize business performance.
5. Students will develop comprehensive solutions to business problems by synthesizing and evaluating information using qualitative and quantitative methods of reasoning and ***analysis***.
6. Students apply the NDNU mission and ***hallmarks*** (community engagement and social justice) to course curriculum.

PROGRAM ASSESSMENT RUBRIC

PLO data is coded on a 2-5 scale, with the following point descriptors:

- 5 = Exemplary Achievement of Program Learning Outcomes
- 4 = Satisfactory Achievement of Program Learning Outcomes
- 3 = Questionable Achievement of Program Learning Outcomes – Possible Deficiency
- 2 = Program Learning Outcomes Not Achieved – Definite Deficiency

Data for the PLOs are reported as averages and standard deviations. We generally consider PLO averages of 5 and 4 to be acceptable assessment outcomes and PLO averages of 3 and 2 to be unacceptable outcomes. Standard deviations are used to evaluate the confidence level of the calculated averages (i.e. high SD means we are less confident in the data).

Our assessment goals for the program are to:

1. Maintain all yearly PLO averages above 4.0.
2. Maintain all semesterly PLO averages above 4.0.
3. Reverse and rectify any significant, sustained downward trends in PLO averages, including those having central tendencies in the 4-5 range.

PRIOR ACADEMIC YEAR - FINDINGS AND ACTIONS TAKEN

The two outcomes that were not achieved to our satisfaction during the last measurement cycle (2012-13) were: (1) Leadership and (2) Communication. It should be noted that such findings are based on only one academic cycle's worth of data and therefore are somewhat tentative in nature. Data from another 2-3 cycles (including the current cycle) are needed to confirm the presence of deficiencies in

these two PLO areas. In the meantime, however, we will assume that the two areas are deficient and take actions consistent with generating performance improvements in these areas.

A brainstorming session was held in October 2013 with faculty and the Dean to discuss the findings from the 2012-13 PLO assessment analysis.

The following suggestions were made by faculty relative to the 'Leadership' Outcome:

1. Have students get more involved in leading class activities such as lectures, discussions and case studies. *
2. Take a closer look at group work dynamics and pinpoint why groupwork is often dysfunctional and lacks proper leadership.
3. Have students conduct peer evaluations of their classmates. *
4. Establish learning contracts that set guideline for dealing with conflict and its resolution.

It should be noted that the starred (*) items #1 and #3 above are already being implemented in several areas throughout the graduate programs. Item #2 is discussed at graduate curriculum task force meetings, program director meetings and SBM meetings.

One suggestion was made by faculty relative to the 'Communication' outcome was that we make greater use of Kate Mills (a writing tutor) and the Writing Center. Kate received a grant to investigate the causes of students' writing weaknesses. Faculty have repeatedly cited students' struggles with composing well-written, scholarly term papers that adhere to APA-style conventions.

According to our prior year academic report, the following actions were planned for the 2013-14 assessment cycle relative to the '**Leadership**' outcome. Below, we list the planned action and the accompanying action taken (or not taken) relative to the plan.

Planned Action resulting from 2012-13 Assessment	Action Taken
We currently offer a 'Leadership Concepts' course as part of our Masters in Public Administration (MPA) program. Our Graduate Curriculum and Admissions Task Force will look at the possibility of requiring this course in the MBA curriculum as well. The committee will also discuss how content from this course can be embedded in other MBA courses throughout the curriculum.	Course is still not required in the MBA, however the task force has focused specifically on the issue of group work and how to structure teams so that a bona-fide leadership structure is in place. Faculty that have not been using peer evaluation systems for group work have been encouraged to use peer evaluation systems.
Faculty will be asked to brainstorm and implement ways to improve their teaching of 'Leadership' skills for each of their classes. Best practices will be documented and shared amongst faculty.	Brainstorming session held with faculty in October 2013. See above for results.
Our ACBSP and WASC assessment processes for Program Learning Outcomes and Institutional	In process.

Learning Outcomes assessment will serve to focus our efforts on continually assessing and improving students 'Leadership' skills.	
Our "MBA of the Future" will directly address the concern of embedding more leadership content into our MBA curriculum. Right now, we believe there might be an opportunity to leverage students' work in groups as a Leadership learning tool. We will explore this option further.	We are in the midst of formulating a "Project-Based MBA" that will include a distinct 'Leadership' component.

According to our prior year academic report, the following actions were planned for the 2013-14 assessment cycle relative to the '**Communication**' outcome. Below, we list the planned action and the accompanying action taken (or not taken) relative to the plan.

Planned Action Resulting from 2012-13 Assessment Cycle	Action Taken
Our Graduate Curriculum and Admissions Task Force will look at the possibility of adding a 'Business Communication' course into the MBA curriculum. The committee will also discuss the possibility of screening students prior to admission for writing ability so that we can better understand which students will likely need extra communication training if admitted.	Course is still not required in the MBA, however Our PLO and ILO assessment activities hold students and faculty accountable for oral/written communication outcomes. We continue to screen international students and domestic students whose writing skills are questionable for writing ability and provide the appropriate follow-up support to students in need of writing remediation.
Faculty will be asked to brainstorm and implement ways to improve each of the three aspects of 'Communication' (oral, written and information literacy) for each of their classes. Best practices will be documented and shared amongst faculty.	Brainstorming session held with faculty in October 2013. See above for results.
We will continue to send students needing extra help with their writing to the NDNU Tutoring Center. We will also increase our efforts to liaise with the writing tutors to better understand the causes of our students' writing deficiencies.	This has been implemented as planned and we have also enlisted Kate Mills from the Academic Success Center to conduct an in-depth study of why students struggle with written communication.
Our ACBSP and WASC assessment processes for Program Learning Outcomes and Institutional Learning Outcomes assessment will serve to focus our efforts on continually assessing and improving students 'Communications' skills.	In process.

CURRENT ASSESSMENT DATA

Below are our PLO assessment data summaries for the academic year 2013-14.

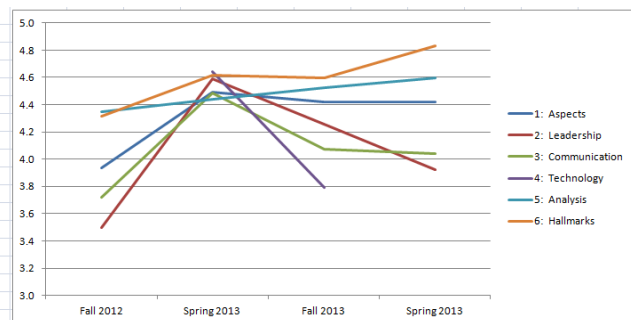
MBA Course PLO Summary Data 2013-14 Academic Year				Program Learning Outcomes Assessments (scale is 2-5)					
Semester	Course	Instructor	Metric	1: Aspects	2: Leadership	3: Communication	4: Technology	5: Analysis	6: Hallmarks
Fall 2013	Marketing Planning & Analysis	Saytes	Average (Mean)	4.3	4.1	3.6	3.2	4.2	3.6
			Standard Deviation	0.9	1.1	1.0	0.8	0.9	1.0
Fall 2013	Business Policy (MBA Capstone)	Cox	Average (Mean)	4.3	4.3	3.7	4.3	4.3	5.0
			Standard Deviation	0.5	0.5	0.8	0.6	0.5	0.0
Fall 2013	Business Policy (MBA Capstone)	Cox	Average (Mean)	4.4	4.4	4.0	4.1	4.4	5.0
			Standard Deviation	0.5	0.5	0.6	0.4	0.5	0.0
Fall 2013	Corporate Finance	Hua	Average (Mean)						4.8
			Standard Deviation						0.5
Fall 2013	Managerial Accounting	Rice	Average (Mean)						4.5
			Standard Deviation						0.6
Fall 2013	Organization Mgmt & Theory	Fogal	Average (Mean)		3.9	4.0			
			Standard Deviation		0.8	0.9			
Fall 2013	Marketing Planning & Analysis	Rhyne	Average (Mean)	4.6	4.7	4.9		4.8	5.0
			Standard Deviation	0.7	0.6	0.3		0.4	0.0
Fall 2013	FALL 2013 OVERALL	All Instructors	Average (Mean)	4.4	4.3	4.1	3.8	4.5	4.6
			Standard Deviation (by class avg)	0.1	0.3	0.5	0.6	0.2	0.7
			Standard Deviation (all data)	0.7	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.6	0.8

MBA Course PLO Summary Data 2013-14 Academic Year				Program Learning Outcomes Assessments (scale is 2-5)					
Semester	Course	Instructor	Metric	1: Aspects	2: Leadership	3: Communication	4: Technology	5: Analysis	6: Hallmarks
Spring 2014	Business Policy (MBA Capstone)	Campodonico	Average (Mean)	4.5	4.5	4.5		4.5	
			Standard Deviation	0.4	0.3	0.3		0.3	
Spring 2014	Organization Mgmt & Theory	Fogal	Average (Mean)		3.2	3.0			
			Standard Deviation		1.1	0.9			
Spring 2014	Marketing Planning & Analysis	Holtzman	Average (Mean)	4.3		4.5		4.3	
			Standard Deviation	0.8		0.4		0.6	
Spring 2014	Marketing Planning & Analysis	Rhyne	Average (Mean)	4.3				4.5	4.8
			Standard Deviation	0.8				0.5	0.4
Spring 2014	Corporate Finance	Rice	Average (Mean)					4.9	
			Standard Deviation					0.3	
Spring 2014	Corporate Finance	Hua	Average (Mean)					4.8	
			Standard Deviation					0.4	
Spring 2014	SPRING 2014 OVERALL	All Instructors	Average (Mean)	4.4	3.9	4.0	-	4.6	4.8
			Standard Deviation (by class avg)	0.1	0.9	0.9	-	0.3	-
			Standard Deviation (all data)	0.6	1.0	0.9	-	0.5	0.4

Masters of Business Administration (MBA)							
Course PLO Summary Data							
2013-14 Academic Year							
Semester	Metric	Program Learning Outcomes Assessments (scale is 2-5)					
		1: Aspects	2: Leadership	3: Communication	4: Technology	5: Analysis	6: Hallmarks
Fall 2013	Average (Mean)	4.4	4.3	4.1	3.8	4.5	4.6
	Standard Deviation (by class avg)	0.1	0.3	0.5	0.6	0.2	0.7
	Standard Deviation (all data)	0.7	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.6	0.8
Spring 2014	Average (Mean)	4.4	3.9	4.0	-	4.6	4.8
	Standard Deviation (by class avg)	0.1	0.9	0.9	-	0.3	-
	Standard Deviation (all data)	0.6	1.0	0.9	-	0.5	0.4
OVERALL 2013-14	Average (Mean)	4.4	4.1	4.1	3.8	4.6	4.6
	Standard Deviation (by class avg)	0.1	0.5	0.6	0.6	0.2	0.6
	Standard Deviation (all data)	0.7	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.6	0.8

MBA - Trend Data by Semester

	1: Aspects	2: Leadership	3: Communication	4: Technology	5: Analysis	6: Hallmarks
Fall 2012	3.9	3.5	3.7		4.3	4.3
Spring 2013	4.5	4.6	4.5	4.6	4.4	4.6
Fall 2013	4.4	4.3	4.1	3.8	4.5	4.6
Spring 2013	4.4	3.9	4.0		4.6	4.8



DATA ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The current year and trend PLO assessment data lead us to the following conclusions:

1. All Program Learning Outcomes within the MBA program appear to have been achieved satisfactorily in the academic year 2013-14 (an overall average of 4.3 out of 5 across all PLOs), though students performed better in some outcomes than others.
2. Our highest achievements for the year were in the “Analysis” and “Hallmarks” PLOs.
3. Our lower areas of achievement for the year were in the “Leadership” and “Communication” PLOs. This is consistent with the results we obtained in the prior year assessment cycle. “Leadership” and “Communication” PLO averages have bounced around – at first rising, then falling, though, overall, these two PLOs presented relatively low averages.
4. The “Technology” outcome assessed the lowest of all the PLOs, however it should be noted that this assessment was based on only one semester’s worth of data, whereas all other PLO averages are calculated using two semesters worth of data. In addition, the standard deviation measures for “Technology” are relatively high, indicating a lower level of confidence in the calculated mean.

5. The “Hallmarks” and “Analysis” PLO assessments appear to be trending upwards.
6. The “Aspects” PLO trend appears to be flat (though clearly above 4.0).
7. The trend in “Technology” is inconclusive as we have only been able to observe two semesters worth of data over the last two years.
8. It should be noted that another full-year cycle of data collection and analysis will be beneficial in helping us affirm, revise or negate any conclusions reached within this report. The above conclusions are based on two academic cycles worth of data using a system that was newly established only two years ago.

ACTION STEPS FOR THE 2014-15 ACADEMIC YEAR

Given the list of findings above, we have once again chosen to concentrate on improving what appear to be our two weakest areas within the MBA: ‘Leadership’ and ‘Communication’. We are simultaneously keeping a watchful eye on ‘Technology’ given that it maintained the lowest average of any PLO assessment but also was based on a small sample size of data.

‘Leadership’ Analysis

To reiterate, the ‘Leadership’ outcome is as follows:

Students will be able to demonstrate effective *leadership* and collaboration skills needed to make business-critical decisions, accomplish functional, organizational and professional goals.

In discussing students’ performance on the leadership measure, several faculty comments speak to the general consensus of our efforts to teach and instill ‘Leadership’ in our graduates:

“Clearly our students need more work on building their leadership skills.”

“I feel we teach too much technical material and not enough on the people-skills-building side.”

“We need to teach our students to have the courage to champion good ideas and argue against bad ones. That is what business needs.”

“Leadership can and should be taught and perhaps we could do a better job of teaching it.”

“The best, most successful managers are not managers at all – they are leaders. So if we want to produce outstanding leaders, we should emphasize teaching leadership teaching management.”

Two factors that may help explain the assessment outcome in ‘Leadership’ are as follows:

1. We do not currently offer a ‘Leadership’ course per se as part of our MBA program, though we do weave material on leadership into the required Organization Management and Theory course as well as into several elective courses within the Human Resources Management concentration which some students elect to pursue. In the final analysis, it seems that students

may be lacking an adequate amount of exposure to leadership content under our current curricular structure.

2. Currently our MBA curriculum is structured as a traditional functional approach (i.e. courses in Marketing, Finance, Human Resources, etc.). Our Graduate Curriculum and Admissions Task Force is currently looking at ways to innovate our MBA curriculum to create the “MBA of the Future”. The main idea is to create an MBA program that fosters development of business-critical skills through a cross-functional, holistic approach to management (as opposed to a functional approach which lacks the holistic aspect). Likely to be embedded in this structure is an emphasis on cross-functional leadership skills.

Next Steps – Closing the Loop on ‘Leadership’

1. We currently offer a ‘Leadership Concepts’ course as part of our Masters in Public Administration (MPA) program. Our Graduate Curriculum and Admissions Task Force will look at the possibility of requiring this course in the MBA curriculum as well. The committee will also discuss how content from this course can be embedded in other MBA courses throughout the curriculum.
2. Faculty will be asked to brainstorm and implement ways to improve their teaching of ‘Leadership’ skills for each of their classes. Best practices will be documented and shared amongst faculty. This was done in October 2013 and will be done again in Fall 2014.
3. Our ACBSP and WASC assessment processes for Program Learning Outcomes and Institutional Learning Outcomes assessment will serve to focus our efforts on continually assessing and improving students’ ‘Leadership’ skills.
4. Our “Project Based MBA” (under development) will directly address the concern of embedding more leadership content into our MBA curriculum. Right now, we believe there might be an opportunity to leverage students’ work in groups as a Leadership learning tool. We will explore this option further.

‘Communication’ Analysis

To reiterate, the ‘Communication’ outcome is as follows:

Students will be able to demonstrate written and oral **communication** and information literacy competencies that support the effectiveness of strategic planning, marketing and operational activities.

In discussing students’ performance on the ‘Communication’ measure, several faculty comments speak to the general consensus of our efforts to develop ‘Communication’ skills in our graduates:

Oral Communication feedback:

"In general I find that student presentations could be improved. Often they will suffer from a lack of organization, have not been rehearsed and could be more engaging."

"Students will sometimes give answers that do not directly address the question or issue at hand. We have to constructively criticize students so they get back on track."

"Powerpoint presentations often look good but lack substance. Students need to have substance in what they present."

Written Communication feedback:

"Our students need to learn to write better."

"It is difficult to improve students' writing skills in an MBA program since coursework does not specifically focus on writing and the task of improving any student's writing is a difficult one in and of itself."

"I see students having difficulties expressing their ideas... They need extra help to turn their thoughts into clear and cogent expression."

"Students should spend more time editing and revising their papers to achieve a greater level of clarity."

Information Literacy feedback:

"It amazes me that even students who have gotten as far as the Capstone course are still having trouble with APA format and citations."

"Some students struggle with the APA format and we could probably do a better job of teaching it to them."

"I find that students are weak on knowing where to go to access information and how to interpret it in light of the project's focus."

Some factors that may help explain the assessment outcome in 'Communication' are as follows:

1. We currently do not offer a dedicated course on writing or oral communication in the MBA program, though we do require faculty to embed instruction and assessment on oral/written communication and information literacy into their courses.
2. MBA programs do not typically have a research focus (i.e. accessing the academic literature to help solve business problems or explain business phenomena). Our MBA program does include this component, which may be somewhat contrary to the expectations of students who enroll in the program.

3. It is possible that our current pedagogical structures may not be allowing for enough focus on the critique and development of 'Communication' skills. The need to cover material, perform assessments and perform administrative tasks may be getting in the way of providing the necessary focus on developing 'Communication' skills.

Next Steps – Closing the Loop on 'Communication'

1. Our Graduate Curriculum and Admissions Task Force will look at the possibility of adding a 'Business Communication' course into the MBA curriculum. The committee will also discuss the possibility of screening students prior to admission for writing ability so that we can better understand which students will likely need extra communication training if admitted.
2. Faculty will be asked to brainstorm and implement ways to improve each of the three aspects of 'Communication' (oral, written and information literacy) for each of their classes. Best practices will be documented and shared amongst faculty. This was done in October 2013 and will be done again in Fall 2014.
3. We will continue to send students needing extra help with their writing to the NDNU Academic Success Center. We will also increase our efforts to liaise with the writing tutors to better understand the causes of our students' writing deficiencies. Finally, we will work with Kate Mills who has been given a grant to study the reasons why our students struggle with writing and how we can improve their writing skills.
4. Our ACBSP and WASC assessment processes for Program Learning Outcomes and Institutional Learning Outcomes assessment will serve to focus our efforts on continually assessing and improving students 'Communications' skills.

NEXT STEPS – GENERAL ASSESSMENT PROCESSES

The following next steps will be implemented during our 2014-15 academic year:

1. 2013-14 assessment results will be discussed broadly with faculty as well as SBM and SBM administration. Feedback from faculty and administration will be used to suggest and implement further refinements to our pedagogy and curriculum in order to close the loop on above-mentioned issues.
2. MBA faculty and the Graduate Business Program Director will jointly develop a detailed set of rubrics for each of the six Program Learning Outcomes for the MBA program. Our initial two years of assessment using the multiple-course method purposely kept assessment at a more general level so that faculty could (1) best adapt to the new system, and (2) discover the important elements of assessing each of the learning outcomes which will feed into our development of the more detailed rubrics in 2014-15.
3. We will endeavor to reflect upon and assess our own assessment processes. Faculty will be asked to provide feedback about ease of conducting assessments, whether they believe assessments are helping to improve learning outcomes, whether our rubrics adequately address the PLOs and about the quality and usefulness of the PLOs themselves.