

Impact of Innovation in Redesigning A Successful Student Centered Survey of Business Course

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Abstract

The ever changing environment of the workplace demands that students' educational experience be more comprehensive, integrated, data driven, and competency based. In response to these challenges selected faculty at the School of Business used an innovative freshman survey of business course to expand students' level of participation, increase their level of knowledge transfer, provide opportunities for students to develop competencies and skills, and involve students in a business/education partnership. This business/education partnership served as a framework for integration of the concepts inherent in an introductory level business course.

This course also satisfied the first year experience requirement. The focus of the ongoing course redesign has been to provide students with an understanding of the integrated nature of business decision making, appreciation of the value of lifelong learning, and development of the skills necessary to succeed both while in school and upon entering the workforce. Competitive pressures on higher education institutions also mandate emphasis on these areas at the freshman level rather than in senior-level capstone courses. This paper provides an explanation of the course design, course revisions, evaluation procedures, four years of quantitative data regarding retention and competencies, and future plans and revisions.

Introduction

The business community has made it clear that the ever changing environment of the workplace demands that students' educational experience be more comprehensive, integrated, data driven, and competency based. (Flanegin & Rudd, 2000; Potter & Maccaro, 2000). In response to these challenges, three areas of the University of South Dakota business school curriculum have been the focus of ongoing course redesign: 1) student understanding of the integrated nature of business decision making, 2) student appreciation of the value of lifelong learning and high levels of productivity, and 3) student development of the skills necessary to succeed both while in school and upon entering the workforce.

Competitive pressures on higher education institutions also mandate emphasis on these areas at the freshman level rather than waiting until the senior-level capstone courses. (Boyer Commission Report, 1998; VanOver & Stover, 2003). In an attempt to meet these challenges, an innovative introduction to business course was designed to expand students' level of participation, increase their level of knowledge transfer, provide opportunities to develop competencies and skills, and provide a real world activity through a business/education partnership.

This paper provides an explanation of the course design; four (4) years of quantitative data regarding retention and students perception of their competencies; the real business/education partnership; and future plans/revisions of this course

Course Design

In 1995, selected faculty from the University of South Dakota (USD) School of Business began to redesign a BADM Introduction to Business course which was offered to both business students and students in other disciplines. Students generally took this course during their freshman or sophomore years of college. Traditionally the course followed the lecture model. Based on input from the Business School Advisory Board, alumni, employers, the AACSB visitation teams, student observations, and a review of the literature, the redesign of the course moved in a more innovative and integrative direction. As the redesign progressed, a conscious decision was made to move to a model more in keeping with the identified workplace competencies/skills determined in 1991 by the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS), with orientation toward application/practice and student directed teaching strategies. (Anderson-Lewis & King, 1996; Chickering & Gamson, 1987, 1999; Maes, et al, 1997; and Mikulecky, 1997)

In response to the SCANS report, many states revised curriculum and set benchmarks which addressed academic, occupational, and employability competencies at both secondary and postsecondary levels (Lankard, 1995). In recent years Business Schools have been accused of failing to help students develop needed competencies for successful competition in the world of work (Kedia & Harveston, 1998; Maes, Weldy & Icenogle, 1997). Moreover, business school advisory boards contended that graduates were not prepared, lacked leadership and communication skills, and often had to be trained by employers (Stinson & Milner, 1996). An October 2006 report released by the Conference Board cited results of a survey of over 400 human resource officials that indicated employers' expectation of basic knowledge and ability to apply skills in the workplace is not being met (Casner-Lotto, & Barrington, 2006).

The focus of the course was the CAVES Model of content, attitudes, values, ethics, and skills related to business and economics which was developed by the course designers. The course was team taught and used a variety of teaching strategies and assessments to determine the students' competencies prior to, during, and upon completion of the course. Strategies included incentive systems, career strategy paper/presentation, extemporaneous speeches, informal discussions, case studies, guest lecturers, and opportunities for personal development outside of class. Students kept a class portfolio and were involved in a mid-semester and end of semester "one-on-one" interview with the instructors. Since most of the students were in the beginning of their program, guest lecturers were encouraged to teach a portion of the class in order for

students to become familiar with Business School faculty from different disciplines. Lectures both formal and informal also reinforced the concept of integration of disciplines.

Representatives from various campus resources (i.e. library, student enrichment center) spoke to the class and provided information regarding the various services and resources available to students. Because of the revised course design, the course satisfied the first year experience institutional requirement and, along with business concepts, gave students several opportunities to enhance their skills and become integrated into the business school and the community.

Each teaching strategy and student activity provided students the opportunity to expand their level of participation and thereby increase their level of knowledge transfer as set out by Bloom and his colleagues (1956). The examinations were structured using Bloom's Taxonomy of comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Students' exam grades were based on the category of questions answered. The more levels of Blooms Taxonomy achieved, the higher the grade. Moreover, using a contemporary view of competency based education, students also had opportunities to develop competencies and skills in four basic areas as set out by Evers, et al (1998): Managing Self; Communicating; Managing People and Tasks; and, Mobilizing Innovation and Change.

Course Modification

Due to the curriculum changes and resource constraints, further modification of BADM 101 Introduction to Business changed the course to BADM 101 Survey of Business and from a team taught format to single instructors working cooperatively with a BADM 101 coordinator and the 101 team. Each faculty member was a volunteer (with workload credit) and each represented a different discipline. During the pilot phase of the single instructor format, a common BADM 101 core curriculum was created to assist the faculty. This package included stated goals and objectives, faculty involvement and training, lesson plans and various projects to provide a real world activity for beginning level students that illustrated the business as an "enterprise". This business/education partnership served as a framework for enhanced integration of the breath of concepts inherent in an introductory level business course.

In cooperation with the design team, the Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE) students, along with the Business School, formed a real 501(c)3 business, EWL, Inc. and the students in BADM 101 were EWL, Inc. employees. In the beginning two businesses were started. One business involved designing and selling University logo items to promote the university and the second involved printing and selling of innovative class schedules. SIFE members served as executive managers and coordinated the business activities with faculty who integrated them into their courses. Faculty used the business activities as "living case studies" and students in those classes received course assignments tied to the business activities. BADM 101 students gained valuable hands-on experience and were able to make a connection between the theories introduced in class and the application of those theories. More often than not, it helped students decide if a business career was truly the career path they wanted.

Weekly meetings of the teaching team were held for formative evaluation and adjustment of course strategies. Collectively, the information spotted challenges early and helped faculty make changes when needed. All faculty involved, no matter what their rank, found the team approach a way to increase and maintain quality instruction.

Additionally, students' class portfolio became an electronic portfolio which was enhanced to be reflective of not only their class assignments, but to also include designated items/experiences which would be updated each year and serve as a record of their achievements. The categories included in the electronic portfolio were: Career Plan Map; Vision & Mission; Communication; Leadership; Teamwork; Integration; Social Responsibility; Educational Accomplishments; Employment Experience; Technology; Student/Professional Organizations & Awards; and Entrepreneurship. These electronic portfolios could then be used as a reflection on their educational achievement as well as a repository of information for prospective employers. In 2007 Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc. interviewed 301 employers whose companies had at least 25% or more of their new hires holding at least a bachelor's degree from a 4 year institution. Fifty-six percent of employers considered an electronic portfolio with relevant faculty assessments "very/fairly" useful for assessing new hires' potential for success.

After researching various electronic portfolio builders, the decision was made to use PowerPoint as the platform for the electronic portfolio. The decision was based on student access to software, ease of use, flexibility of software, and mobility based on accessibility of others to the software (i.e. prospective employers, graduate schools, etc.). The portfolio overview was presented to students in the beginning of the semester and a handout was provided to students outlining the technical information, categories to include, and explanations for each of the categories. Assistance was also available from graduate assistants, work study students, and the Student Enrichment Center director who were familiar with the electronic portfolio components.

As the student focus increased, a required exit exam of all business school students has been added to the program with a passing score required for graduation. Students are required to pass either the ETS exam or a Business School designed exit exam before the degree is conferred.

Course Evaluation

Evaluation of the BADM 101 Survey of Business took place in several areas. Pre/Post surveys were administered to determine students' perceptions of their skills in various areas. The survey contained 38 self evaluation items and the data analyzed covered Fall semesters for 2003 through 2006. The item integrate/synthesize information had a significant positive change at the .001 level of significance for all four years. The items interpersonal communication, participate in class discussions, explain information, form study groups, analyze information, evaluate information, solve problems, take advantage of academic/cultural opportunities, participate in leadership activities, and consider ethics before making a decision had a significant positive change at the .001 or .01 level of significance for all four years. The item prepare for class was the only item not showing a significant positive change all four years. Table 1 reflects these areas of change at all levels for all four years in more detail. Table 2 reflects areas of change at the .001 or .01 level for all 4 years, and Table 3 provides areas of change at the .001 or .01 level for 3 out of 4 years.

Using university records, research was conducted focusing on BADM 101 student retention rates. For freshmen entering in a fall semester and enrolling the following fall semester the retention rates were: Fall 03-79%; Fall 04-85%; Fall 05-88%; and Fall 06-83%. This data shows that BADM 101 students remain at USD at a higher rate than other students since the university retention rate is 72% (USD Institutional Research 2006). The BADM 101 retention rate is also higher than the nationwide retention rate of 73.6% (Education Commission of the States,

2005) and the statewide retention rate for South Dakota of 64% (National Report Card on Higher Education, 2006).

Formative evaluation of the course took place each semester with input from faculty, students and members of the business community. This input, along with the research concerning first year experience (Cohen, 2000; Lifton, et al, 2000; Bobrowski, et al 2004), integrated business curriculum (Flanegin & Rudd, 2000; LeMaster, et al, 2000; Potter & Maccaro, 2000; Carmichael & Caldwell, 2002; Strempek, et al, 2004; Atchison, et al, 2005), and retention (Education Commission of the States, 2005; Lifton, et al, 2004; National Report Card on Higher Education, 2006), has resulted in changes to the original redesigned curriculum and supports the view of continuous improvement. These changes included pre/post surveys regarding content and perceptions of skills/attitudes, use of integrated business systems, involvement of the business community, and request that the course be required of all business school students.

Due to the unique structure of the course and the number of evaluation instruments, only information pertinent to this discussion has been extrapolated. Copies of all instruments and a copy of the electronic portfolio handout can be obtained by contacting lroach@usd.edu.

Future Plans/Revisions

The BADM 101 course is now required of all students. The BADM 101 coordinator and original course designer retired and a new coordinator was appointed. The new coordinator has made significant changes to the course design and delivery. Due to the increased number of students, the use of electronic portfolios has been discontinued. The use of the mid-semester and semester "one-on-one" interviews are now the choice of the individual instructor. The use of the pre-post tests have been discontinued. The business projects developed with the Students In Free Enterprise (SIFE) designed to provide an experiential learning component are no longer a part of the course curriculum. The current BADM 101 model is now more focused on content and communication skills rather than connecting theories and practice. The entire pre-business structural core is under revision with the curriculum revision focusing on integration of the disciplines. An additional course BADM 102 will be included which will focus on Ethics and technology. These changes in focus appear to be in response to both input from the business community and current research integration of functional areas and increased need for both oral and written communication skills (Walker & Black, 2000; Potter & Maccaro, 2000; VanOver & Stover, 2003; Bowers & Metcalf, 2009; Gabriellsson, et al 2010).

The use of podcasts will added to the resources students can access to supplement their readings, lectures, and work experience. Some of the podcasts will be developed and produced by the BADM 101 team using statewide members of the business community. Students will also access online podcasts either from the course podcast resource list or from their own investigation. iPods will be available those students who do not have one through the BADM 101 instructors in the School of Business.

BADM 101 faculty evaluations by BADM 101 students seem on average lower than in other courses. Given that students perceive increased skill levels and express satisfaction with the course, this seems inconsistent and further research in this area is indicated.

In our situation, many things of substance were gained from re-engineering our curriculum using a student (learner) centered model:

- Acceptance of the professor as a coach rather than a fountain of knowledge
- Importance of both formative and summative evaluation using various evaluation models

This experience suggests that reworking curriculum by reflecting on research along with contributions made by members of the business community, students, and faculty pays huge dividends. Often the benefits go far beyond the creation of a revised course. The outcomes can, in fact, be a new and more productive culture for all.

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Table 1: Skill perception t-Test results all levels for all 4 years

Item	Fall 03 Pre/Post	Fall 04 Pre/Post	Fall 05 Pre/Post	Fall 06 Pre/Post
Write clearly	2.76/3.04**	2.84/3.13*	2.88/3.19**	2.89/3.10*
Use the computer	2.76/3.04**	2.84/3.13*	2.88/3.19**	2.89/3.10*
Communicate using e-mail	3.35/3.67***	3.37/3.63	3.49/3.70**	3.39/3.66***
Speak confidently in public	2.45/2.90***	2.47/2.76*	2.56/2.77	2.39/2.86***
Interpersonal communication	2.79/3.19***	2.89/3.24**	2.67/3.19***	2.86/3.16***
Take initiative to get questions answered	2.69/3.10***	2.87/2.89	2.53/3.14***	2.45/2.84***
Participate in class discussions	2.58/2.88**	2.50/2.95**	2.33/3.12***	2.45/2.84***
Explain information	2.77/3.11**	2.61/3.05**	2.64/3.14***	2.64/2.95***
Ask questions in class	2.33/2.82	2.24/2.92***	2.31/2.88***	2.32/2.76***
Seek learning opportunities outside class	2.33/2.79***	2.47/2.76	2.35/3.00***	2.29/2.83***
Form study groups	2.00/2.45**	1.92/2.55***	2.00/2.56***	1.89/2.24***
Collaborate with other students	2.83/3.10**	2.74/3.05	2.47/3.00***	2.74/2.98**
Work and think independently	3.12/3.35*	3.34/3.61	3.16/3.49***	3.37/3.50
Search for info w/library resources	2.57/2.80	3.00/3.24	2.42/2.95***	2.59/2.95***
Search for info using Internet	3.53/3.47	3.50/3.66*	3.37/3.56	3.27/3.53***
Analyze information	2.80/3.20***	2.89/3.26**	2.74/3.24***	2.77/3.21***
Evaluate information	2.85/3.21***	2.87/3.21**	2.70/3.21***	2.69/3.19***
Integrate/synthesize information	2.35/2.88***	2.53/2.97***	2.51/3.05***	2.47/2.91***
Make informed decisions	3.08/3.33**	2.92/3.18*	2.91/3.23**	2.95/3.34***
Study for my courses	3.00/3.10	2.95/3.21	2.81/3.35***	2.92/3.19**
Organize myself	3.22/3.18	3.39/3.24	2.98/3.40***	3.11/3.32
Budget my time efficiently	3.06/3.02	3.08/2.97	2.72/3.09**	2.77/3.00*
Prepare for class	3.08/3.10	3.26/3.29	3.09/3.23	3.06/3.20
Attend class regularly	3.73/3.50**	3.63/3.63	3.77/3.58	3.74/3.65
Solve problems	3.08/3.33***	3.13/3.42**	2.88/3.23***	2.96/3.16**
Make connection between courses/world	2.98/3.17	2.87/2.94	2.50/3.21***	2.73/3.29***
Interact with faculty members	2.56/2.83**	2.66/2.82	2.33/2.86***	2.50/2.83***
Take advantage of USD resources	2.75/2.98	2.79/3.05*	2.44/3.05***	2.60/2.96***
Take advantage of Vermillion resources	2.50/2.65	2.55/2.79	2.23/2.81***	2.33/2.50
Respect different points of view	3.14/3.41**	3.18/3.42**	3.21/3.44*	3.29/3.39
Interact w/ persons from other cultures/backgrounds/beliefs	2.94/3.19*	3.13/3.37*	2.86/3.29***	3.24/3.34
Take advantage academic/cultural opportunities	2.55/2.84**	2.63/3.00**	2.56/3.00***	2.63/3.00***
Identify career objectives	2.77/3.13***	3.00/3.24	2.70/3.23***	2.82/3.22***
Identify academic objectives	2.94/3.29***	3.11/3.32	2.95/3.26***	2.92/3.33***
Participate in leadership activities	2.50/2.90***	2.61/3.03**	2.49/3.05***	2.51/2.90***
Identify and resolve conflict	2.88/3.21**	2.95/3.18*	2.81/3.19**	2.82/3.17***
Consider ethics before making a decision	2.94/3.23**	2.87/3.29**	2.88/3.33**	2.92/3.42***
Identify impact of alternative decisions on other people, business operations, and the environment	2.92/3.25**	2.87/3.16*	2.74/3.33***	2.75/3.21***

*p<.05

**p<.01

***p<.001

Table 2: Skill perception t-Test results @ .001 or .01 level for all 4 years

<u>Item</u>	<u>Fall 03 Pre/Post</u>	<u>Fall 04 Pre/Post</u>	<u>Fall 05 Pre/Post</u>	<u>Fall 06 Pre/Post</u>
Interpersonal communication	2.79/3.19***	2.89/3.24**	2.67/3.19***	2.86/3.16***
Participate in class discussions	2.58/2.88**	2.50/2.95**	2.33/3.12***	2.45/2.84***
Explain information	2.77/3.11**	2.61/3.05**	2.64/3.14***	2.64/2.95***
Form study groups	2.00/2.45**	1.92/2.55***	2.00/2.56***	1.89/2.24***
Analyze information	2.80/3.20***	2.89/3.26**	2.74/3.24***	2.77/3.21***
Evaluate information	2.85/3.21***	2.87/3.21**	2.70/3.21***	2.69/3.19***
Integrate/synthesize information	2.35/2.88***	2.53/2.97***	2.51/3.05***	2.47/2.91***
Solve problems	3.08/3.33***	3.13/3.42**	2.88/3.23***	2.96/3.16**
Take advantage academic/cultural opportunities	2.55/2.84**	2.63/3.00**	2.56/3.00***	2.63/3.00***
Participate in leadership activities	2.50/2.90***	2.61/3.03**	2.49/3.05***	2.51/2.90***
Consider ethics before making a decision	2.94/3.23**	2.87/3.29**	2.88/3.33**	2.92/3.42***

**p<.01

***p<.001

Table 3: Skill perception t-Test results @ .001 or .01 Level for 3 out of 4 years

<u>Item</u>	<u>Fall 03 Pre/Post</u>	<u>Fall 04 Pre/Post</u>	<u>Fall 05 Pre/Post</u>	<u>Fall 06 Pre/Post</u>
Communicate using e-mail	3.35/3.67***	3.37/3.63	3.49/3.70**	3.39/3.66***
Take initiative to get questions answered	2.69/3.10***	2.87/2.89	2.53/3.14***	2.45/2.84***
Ask questions in class	2.33/2.82	2.24/2.92***	2.31/2.88***	2.32/2.76***
Seek learning opportunities outside class	2.33/2.79***	2.47/2.76	2.35/3.00***	2.29/2.83***
Collaborate with other students	2.83/3.10**	2.74/3.05	2.47/3.00***	2.74/2.98**
Make informed decisions	3.08/3.33**	2.92/3.18*	2.91/3.23**	2.95/3.34***
Interact with faculty members	2.56/2.83**	2.66/2.82	2.33/2.86***	2.50/2.83***
Identify career objectives	2.77/3.13***	3.00/3.24	2.70/3.23***	2.82/3.22***
Identify academic objectives	2.94/3.29***	3.11/3.32	2.95/3.26***	2.92/3.33***
Identify and resolve conflict	2.88/3.21**	2.95/3.18*	2.81/3.19**	2.82/3.17***
Identify impact of alternative decisions on other people, business operations, and the environment	2.92/3.25**	2.87/3.16*	2.74/3.33***	2.75/3.21***

**p<.01

***p<.001