

External Review
Masters in Business Administration
College of Business
Florida Atlantic University

Submitted by site visitors:

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The responses to the Review Team's Report are in blue under the section "Specific Questions Posed by College". Overall, the Review Team has provided many good recommendations, all of which should be considered. An accompanying document attempts to highlight the more important recommendations under Strategic Goals and Action Plans. It should be noted that Marci Armstrong from Southern Methodist University is a Marketing Professor. Our assumption is that many of the branding ideas came from her. Otherwise, it goes without saying that we had an excellent Review Team for the MBA program.

Introduction

The Florida Atlantic University (FAU) MBA 7-year review committee was composed of associate deans from two well-recognized Colleges of Business, the Cox School of Business at Southern Methodist University and the Robert H. Smith School of Business at the University of Maryland. Dr. Marci Armstrong is the Associate Dean for Graduate Programs at the Cox School and Dr. Ken White is Associate Dean for MBA and MS Programs at the Smith School. These external reviewers were joined by Dr. Patricia Liehr, Associate Dean for Nursing Research and Scholarship at the Christine E. Lynn College of Nursing at FAU. Each reviewer read the MBA report sent prior to the visit and made notes regarding issues for discussion during the visit.

The review occurred over three days beginning with a planning dinner on April 21 and culminating with a report to Dean Dan Gropper and Associate Dean Paul Hart on April 23, 2014. During the course of the visit, the review team met with faculty, students and alumni from the Executive MBA, Professional MBA and the Flexible MBA programs. In addition, the team met with Associate Provost, Michelle Hawkins and Dean of Graduate Studies, Deborah Floyd.

After meeting with stakeholders on April 21 and 22, the review team met to discuss findings and identify program strengths and opportunities for improvement using a consensus process. In addition, the team discussed questions that had been posed at the end of the MBA report to determine responses based on the evaluation visit.

This report is formatted to address strengths, opportunities for improvement and specific questions posed by the College of Business at FAU.

The team would like to recognize the hospitality extended by Dean Gropper and Associate Dean Hart. As is always the case with opportunities such as this, reviewers completed the experience with new ideas that could be applied to their home settings. This 7-year review was a rigorous but rewarding process, and we, the reviewers, appreciated the opportunity to engage with the College of Business community.

Strengths

The Florida Atlantic University College of Business offers a portfolio of MBA programs for professionals in the Broward - Palm Beach counties area, including the Flexible MBA, the Professional MBA, the MBA - Sport Management and the Executive MBA with plans to launch an online MBA in Fall 2014. The strength of these programs and the college overall provides a solid foundation for continued growth and enhancement of the FAU MBA reputation.

- Dr. Dan Gropper assumed leadership as the Dean of the College of Business in August 2013. Dr. Gropper brings a vision for development of the College which will set new directions for the MBA program. He is insightful with a major goal of serving the students to assure quality education and the intention to attain recognition for quality. His leadership promises movement toward excellence for the MBA program.
- The Executive MBA is highly appreciated by students for its service culture. These students are busy professionals who feel enabled to complete their MBA thanks to the “concierge service” provided by program support staff.
- Executive education programs provide continuing education that generates more than two million dollars annually. This revenue stream relies on outstanding corporate connections to enhance the fiscal stability of the MBA program. It is an innovative approach to generating revenue.
- FAU allows courses to be run three times in a “special topics” category, thereby allowing for refining of new courses before having them endorsed as components of the curriculum. This is a strength that is particularly valuable as program changes are being made.
- Students commented on the excellence of faculty members, specifically mentioning Ravi Behara, Rainford Knight, Janice Cerveny and Dominique Fuentes. These faculty members were noted for the quality of their teaching as well as their availability to students.
- The MBA program has a strong communication thread that is required for all students. The communication programming extends throughout the MBA program, placing FAU “ahead of the curve” on this important dimension of MBA education.
- The Executive MBA was recognized by *Bloomberg Businessweek* as one of the “Best Schools of 2013” and one of only three Florida schools on the list; the MBA in Sports Management has been cited as one of the ten best in the country and the only recognized program in Florida.
- South Florida is an area of economic growth and is a desirable place to live, positioning the MBA program at FAU to successfully market itself as a desirable program for continuing education.
- The plans for a “live case” requirement as a culminating experience for the MBA program will strengthen the synthesis experience and position students to move more smoothly into the job market.
- Students repeatedly noted proximity as one of the markers for deciding where to pursue their MBA. There are very few MBA programs in the area to compete with the FAU MBA program. In addition, the program is a “great value” when the quality of education is considered in relation to the cost for education. This composite of location and quality/cost offer opportunities for

marketing that could extend the current reach of the program beyond Florida and to international markets.

- The recent approval of a “Market Rate” program by the Board of Governors creates potential for increasing recruitment of “out of state” and “out of country” MBA students.

Opportunities for Improvement

The opportunities for improvement and recommendations discussed below are provided in the spirit of taking the FAU MBA programs to the next level.

- A Collaborative Culture appears to be lacking in the MBA programs. Getting the community “on board” is highly recommended. An on-going internal communication and marketing campaign is recommended to generate a sense of pride among the internal community.
- Currently, especially in FAU’s region, there are outstanding branding and marketing opportunities. It is recommended the school determine its qualities, differentiators and target audience, and then launch a marketing campaign to set itself apart from its competitors. Other MBA programs are running occasional ads in the region, but there does not appear to be a program with an integrated marketing campaign. Campaigns are effective.
- Faculty Engagement, Governance and Oversight appear to be areas that require improvement. In talks with the committee, some faculty leaders referred to the school and MBA programs as “they.” The faculty must take ownership. The Graduate Council and MBA Committee should be more proactive. The incoming associate dean for graduate programs needs to effect change, reshape goals and work with the faculty so they see the program as their own.
- Creating a Career Services Team should be considered. Most students pursue an MBA to improve their position at their current place of employment or to seek a better position outside their organization. A Career Services operation can help FAU students reach their goals by providing career coaching and cultivating relationships with recruiters and companies.
- Alumni Relations is an area of potential improvement. An active alumni base can bring research partnerships, executive education leads and clients, jobs and internships, mentoring opportunities, financial gifts and more to the school. It is recommended that an Alumni Relations position or initiative be combined, perhaps, with Career Services.
- Several steps can be taken to improve the overall quality of the Flex MBA program.
 - Creating and implementing a multi-year master schedule of classes is recommended. This would enable students and academic departments to plan their course work accordingly while eliminating the possibility of course conflicts in the schedule.
 - The committee recommends offering Academic Advising assistance to students in the Flex program. The advising would eliminate some of the confusion students currently experience in terms of course selection.
 - The school should consider creating an Office of Student Affairs which can be charged with important initiatives and services such as academic advising, student counseling, student satisfaction and engagement and oversight of student clubs and organizations.
 - The committee witnessed a culture of haves (EMBA) and have nots (Flex MBA). We recommend school leadership give serious consideration to having the Flex program report to EMBA leadership. While we do not know the full context of operations at the FAU College of Business, we do know that at many business schools, both programs are under the direction of the same leader.

- As MBA students' age and years of experience decline, providing students with hands-on learning opportunities is critically important today. It is recommended that an Experiential Learning Strategy be generated to determine how and when experiential learning should be included in the program. In addition, further study should be conducted regarding the effectiveness of the use of live cases or simulations as a capstone.
- Growth in MBA enrollment and programs is excellent. However, growth produces issues and hurdles. The committee recommends school leadership take a very strategic approach regarding its growth, staff support, staffing of classes, space issues and enrollment targets.
- The committee recommends the EMBA program include a class in Negotiations. Since most MBA students pursue the degree in an effort to obtain a better job, a Negotiations class will be helpful.
- MBA students reported inconsistency in teaching quality. The committee recommends the school develop and implement a uniform standard for all faculty in terms of screening, hiring, mentoring and evaluating. While this can be a real hot button with faculty, business schools across the country have developed non-threatening teaching effectiveness programs that focus on improvement.
- Finally, the school can benefit greatly by cultivating and creating Collaborative Partnerships with external organizations. It is recommended the schools examine potential opportunities with the state colleges which could funnel high quality students to the MBA programs. In addition, school leaders could consider domestic partnerships and exchanges with other business schools and corporate entities. Finally, the school's location can be extremely attractive to potential international partners. Business schools and MBA programs that create partnerships will be the schools and programs thriving in the future. Potential partners will realize the FAU College of Business has a location few can match.

Specific Questions Posed by College

The following questions were posed to the review team in advance of the on-campus review. Though answers to most of these are implied in the opportunities and recommendations above, here are summaries and additional thoughts addressing each question specifically.

- How should the college brand the MBA program? How can we capitalize on our location to do so?

To differentiate the FAU MBA programs from others in the region, we recommend branding that leverages existing strengths:

- Exceptional Value -- affordable tuition for exceptional benefits received (above the rest for thousands less)
- Exceptional Location – emphasizing the growth and vitality of business in the Broward - Palm Beach counties area as well as the great natural beauty of this location (a great place and a great place to study business)

The college has an opportunity not only to brand the MBA programs, but also to more broadly strengthen the marketing, positioning and strategy for each of the MBA programs – the Flexible MBA, the Professional MBA, the MBA - Sport Management, the Executive MBA and the new online MBA.

- Build a real sense of identity for each of the MBA programs – what each program stands for -- by implementing the following recommendations.
- Review the purpose of each program, who each program serves, the competitive markets for each, the business model of each (market rate or not).
- Determine what differentiates each program from the others and from competitors.
- Develop strong program-specific value propositions with strong competitive differentiation.
- Promote each program's value proposition to internal and external constituencies.

The net result will be the ability to attract more and stronger students across the MBA programs, to place them successfully at graduation, and to better engage and motivate faculty and business community engagement with the programs.

The Exceptional Value / Exceptional Location branding suggestion is great. We have had numerous discussions about how to brand our MBA. Sometimes it just takes someone from the outside to come in and say the obvious. We will jump on this one. It's also a great branding strategy for the entire University.

The recommendations for building a sense of branding for each MBA program are also well taken. One important recent change that has been made is centralize all admissions request to the same office, so that program coordinators in Executive Program can help students understand which MBA program to apply for. The Review Team's recommendations provide direction for taking the interaction with prospective students (as well as marketing opportunities) to the next level.

- How can the college better engage (or refocus) the MBA faculty to not only be invested in teaching their courses but in the program as a whole? How can we execute this building on the inherent synergies between this goal and the goal of creating a more assessment-oriented culture among MBA faculty?

Changing the FAU culture to one where faculty actively engage in MBA teaching and program direction is achievable.

- Share a new vision for the college and for the MBA programs. The appointments of Dean Gropper in 2013 and a new associate dean for graduate programs in 2014 offer the perfect opportunity to do this.
- Lead the faculty to understand how the strategic direction of the college (new vision) is inextricably linked to the success of the MBA programs, and equally important, how the commitment and engagement of faculty is essential to achieving the success of the MBA programs.
- To turn a new vision into reality, issues of program leadership, governance, and incentive alignment must be addressed.
 - Empower the new associate dean for graduate programs to provide strategic direction and operational oversight of the MBA programs in addition to building strong ties with all department chairs and faculty that teach in each MBA program.
 - Also have the associate dean provide leadership in learning outcomes assessment.
 - Clarify and strengthen the charge and structure of the Graduate Council in determining the future of each MBA program by making curriculum decisions and setting policy.
 - Have equal representation from all academic departments on the Council and have the Council actively involved in all programs.
 - Rotate Council chairmanship regularly between departments, perhaps changing leadership every three years. Have Dean Gropper appoint the Chair and Council members.
 - Have the Council seek input from all faculty teaching in each program when considering the future of the MBA programs.
 - Have the Council be actively involved in determining, achieving and assessing learning outcomes across the MBA programs.
 - Set expectations for faculty involvement in community building for the MBA programs in which they teach.
 - Set faculty expectations to include serving on the Graduate Council, attending occasional meetings for the faculty teaching in a specific program, speaking at student/prospective student events such as information sessions and orientation, and attending program social events and graduation.

- Share these community-building activities across MBA program faculty so that they are not onerous requirements that detract from research.
- Align faculty incentives and awards to support and reward their service to the MBA programs in which they teach.
 - Include faculty incentives for program engagement such as recognition in promotion and tenure reviews, formal teaching awards, awards for service to a specific program, merit compensation, and funding for research or travel.

When faculty engage in the MBA programs rather than being passive bystanders, they will take ownership and have pride in the success of the programs.

This set of recommendations provides valuable ideas for the incoming Associate Dean for Graduate Programs. Changing the culture among the faculty teaching in the MBA program will be a challenge, but has numerous benefits including more involvement in curriculum development and student assessment. The recommendation regarding a set of expectations for teaching in the MBA program is important, particularly related to teaching quality.

Also, the recommendations regarding the MBA Committee and Graduate Council need serious consideration. Consideration should be given to disbanding the MBA Committee.

- What steps should be taken to enhance the MBA “student experience”?

Enhancing the student experience by developing a sense of community among students who are working professionals is challenging but not impossible. Delivering programs in a cohort system, e.g., for the FAU EMBA and Professional MBA, is the most natural, convenient way for students to bond. For programs like the Flexible MBA, however, the challenge is to balance the non-cohort flexibility that attracts students to the program with activities that bring them together to build community.

Below are some ways to enhance the student experience and create more bonding opportunities for each FAU MBA program without substantially decreasing program flexibility where it is a competitive advantage.

- Institute cohort or partial cohort systems and experiences for all the FAU MBA programs.
 - Institute a partial cohort system for the Flexible MBA program and perhaps the online MBA program where a cohort system may not be viable. For example, in the first semester, require that each student register for a preset pair of courses, ensuring that all students take two courses with the same cohort.
 - Enroll students in a second pair of courses with their cohorts in the second semester, but allow them to opt out.
 - Establish study groups within the cohorts and partial cohorts which students use in all courses taken together.
- Appoint staff members dedicated specifically to each FAU MBA program for both Admissions and Student Services. If programs are small enough, a staff member may be

- appointed to more than one MBA program.
- Emphasize community building and team building activities in two-day (or longer) Orientations for each program.
- Facilitate cohort-based activities during the first semester such as social events and corporate speakers.
- Establish a graduate business student government with elected representatives from each cohort of each program.
 - Offer the student government leaders the opportunity to propose initiatives to the college which program administrators can then facilitate.
- Establish student clubs in major areas of interest that meet at times adjacent to class when students will be on campus. The objective of these clubs should be to stage speakers and activities that enhance their MBA class experience.
- Conduct cohort or partial cohort field trips to local corporate locations. Also, consider planning cohort treks to New York to study the financial markets or to Washington, D.C., to study the interaction between business and government.
- Revise international study options to offer them at specific times to specific MBA program cohorts.
- Create FAU College of Business traditions for graduate business programs.
 - Possibilities include a case competition, a business plan competition, a golf scramble, canned food drive (Thanksgiving), flag football tournament.
 - Allow healthy competition between the MBA programs with prizes offered for the winning program, e.g., pizza for the cohort.
- Communicate, communicate, communicate to students with both college-wide communication and program specific communication via an e-newsletter and/or program-specific Facebook pages and/or program-specific tweets.
 - Allow these communications to help students understand what it means to be part of the FAU College of Business community and what it means to be part of their specific MBA program.

Thoughtful planning for meaningful activities and traditions that bring the community together will create loyalty to the institution and the college of business with the net result of more satisfied students, more engaged and contributing alumni, and more enthusiastic faculty, all with stronger ties to each other and the school.

Some of the ideas presented here are being implemented (e.g., the partial cohort system for the Flexible MBA). Three ideas from the above are particularly noteworthy. A student government organization with representatives from each of the graduate programs in the College. An e-newsletter which might be called MBAdvantage. And, enhancing International study options, not just for MBA students but for all undergraduate and graduate students.

- Are there opportunities for collaborating with other academic institutions to enrich curriculum offerings in a mutually beneficial way for the partner institutions?

The greatest opportunity for collaboration, as discussed in *Opportunities for Improvement*, is to articulate partnerships with the relatively new state colleges in the Broward - Palm Beach counties area.

- Create articulation agreements with select state colleges that specify criteria for state college graduates to enter FAU MBA programs.
 - These criteria may include minimum GMAT/GRE scores, minimum undergraduate GPAs, selected state college majors and programs, and required work experience.
 - Offering graduate business education to well-qualified state college graduates will build a pipeline of FAU MBA students who may not have otherwise considered graduate business education.
- Continue to develop and expand opportunities for collaboration with business schools around the world.
 - Explore relationships for student and faculty exchanges as well as research collaboration.

Developing articulation agreements with Broward College and Palm Beach College is an idea that has been talked about. Negotiations with high level administration and appropriate documentation can be implemented relatively soon. Currently discussion is underway with an institution in Costa Rica. Expansion focused on Latin America seems most reasonable.

- How can we leverage the availability of semi-retired/retired C-level executives who live in South Florida to enrich our program?

The Broward – Palm Beach area is a vibrant, thriving business center located in a beautiful natural environment. The sunshine, pristine beaches and world-class golf courses partnered with a favorable tax environment make this area a retirement and vacation destination of choice for many business executives. Opportunities to build and leverage relationships abound.

- Build (or expand) the FAU College of Business Advisory Board that meets with the dean and his senior team 2-3 times a year to advise on the challenges of the college.
- Create departmental advisory boards for key academic departments composed of senior executives with specific functional expertise.
- Establish an Executive-in-Residence (EIR) program that integrates senior executives into the life of the college. Activities of an EIR who makes a multi-year commitment to the school might include:
 - One-on-one counseling sessions to advise students on their prospective career choices

- Teaching classes, participating in student-run conferences, and organizing informal lunches for groups of students with common interests
- Providing perspectives on faculty research and facilitating the acquisition of company data for research purposes
- Create a mentoring program for executives to meet individually or in small groups to provide career and professional mentoring to FAU MBA students.
- Seek executives to come as classroom guest speakers and lecturers across the departments in the college.
- Solicit executive support and participation in an annual FAU College of Business golf tournament to raise funds for the college. This could become an annual community-building tradition for the school including students, faculty and staff.

The retired and semi-retired business executives in the Broward – Palm Beach area offer the FAU MBA College of Business outstanding opportunities to build corporate connections in a way that business schools located in small college towns cannot.

Activities in the direction of these recommendations are already underway. The required MBA one-credit course called the Executive Forum is a very successful vehicle for interaction between executives and MBA students. Perhaps more could be done to advance and promote this interaction.

Conclusion

Overall, the FAU College of Business has a deservedly strong reputation for business education in the Broward - Palm Beach county area. The reviewers were impressed with the business growth and vitality in this region and the opportunities for building and leveraging relationships to strengthen the MBA programs.

With concerted effort, led by Dean Gropper's vision for the future of the College of Business, the FAU MBA programs – the Flexible MBA, the Professional MBA, the MBA - Sport Management, the Executive MBA, and the soon-to-launch online MBA – have the potential to grow and enhance the College of Business and the university's reputation.

The challenge ahead is to build a strong identity for each of the MBA programs and to build a real sense of community where students and faculty are actively engaged and understand what it means to be part of the FAU College of Business. Creating meaningful activities and traditions that bring the community together will create loyalty to the College of Business with the net result of more satisfied students, more engaged and contributing alumni, and more enthusiastic faculty -- all with stronger ties to each other and the school.

The future for FAU's MBA programs is indeed bright; we hope this report serves you well in your plans to successfully take the FAU MBA programs to the next level.