

MANAGING STUDENT SATISFACTION WITH NON-BUSINESS CURRICULUM ALTERNATIVES: AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENT PERCEPTIONS WITH STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Much has been written examining expectations of the academic and business communities as stakeholders in business education; much less research has probed student perceptions. Given industry's desire for greater breadth and exposure to non-business coursework, this study explores student perceptions from 895 students across 14 universities. The students expressed reluctance to taking some non-business courses, such as history and literature, if they were not required. The results suggest that real business applications in courses improved student perceptions, indicating a value in establishing business relevance of non-business courses. Finally, some suggestions for integrating student expectations into the curricula are provided.

INTRODUCTION

Just over a decade ago, dramatic changes began to occur in curriculum development for Colleges of Business in the United States. After years of fairly specified standards imposed by the AACSB in the form of a common body of knowledge, the new flexibility proposed and later adopted by the accrediting organization gave rise to a flurry of discussion and research. From the late 1980s through the early 1990s, many publications addressed concerns regarding what should be retained or added to curricula for business students under new "mission-driven" standards. With the new freedom to design curricula that would meet the needs of colleges as outlined by their own mission, many began to question the design of business school curricula (Mayes, Heide, and Smith 1993). Some deans speculated that the new standards would reduce the number of business courses in the core and open degree programs up to broader topics, including diversity, culture, and environmental issues (Mayes, Heide, and Smith 1993).

The new freedom to diversify curricula gave rise to the examination of traditional business school programs and stakeholders needs. Universities experienced a shift in public perceptions, and the responses from external sources were not always positive. Curricula and the quality of the student turned out by universities came under attack from industry (Curry 1991). Partly as a result, universities found themselves facing increasing competition for students, grants, alumni donations, and corporate

contributions (Davies, Preston, and Wilson 1992; Ensby and Mahmoodi 1997).

Students, parents, businesses, and public officials all complained about the current degree programs (Denning 1993). Curricula were described as behind societal needs (Grant and Main 1986) and behind educational institutions in other countries (Guiffreda 1990). American students were described as falling behind international standards (Denning 1993). Thus, it became questionable whether current approaches were in fact meeting the needs and expectations of stakeholders (Dufour 1994). Business programs were faced with the challenge of creating innovative programs tied to their constituent-driven missions (Stout and West 2004). Some creative instructors created hybrid courses combining lecture, live case work, and streaming media (Wynne and Filante 2004). Other scholars call for better perception management of key stakeholders, specifically students (Pritchard, Potter, and Saccucci 2004).

To complicate matters further, as so often happens in a changing world, the pendulum has begun to swing back again. While there is still a strong desire to encourage each business program to engage in individualized programs and missions, concerns are now surfacing regarding creative implementation. For example, the newly adopted AACSB standards (AACSB 2004), still embrace diverse points of view and creative implementation, but conceivably from a more rigorous interpretation. For example, as schools have rushed toward the inclusion of online programs and distance delivery techniques, ac-

creditation boards have recognized the need for close scrutiny. Creative implementation is encouraged, but will not be ignored. Branding is embraced, but not at the sacrifice of quality. Little academic research has surfaced to visit the newest changes in accreditation standards. Individualization of curriculum and program missions must be created and justified in light of stakeholder needs and expectations (AACSB 2004).

To assess the needs and expectations of stakeholders to aid in curriculum development, it was first necessary to identify the various stakeholders. There are clearly different perspectives regarding the customer and the customers' needs (Ensby and Mahmoodi 1997). Although the debates continue over the use of the terms "customer" and "product," and while some still argue over who belongs on the list, among those stakeholders that have been mentioned are current students, prospective students, parents, spouses, alumni, employers, prospective employers, industry organizations, faculty, administrators, staff, accrediting boards, and academic foundations (Boyatzis, Cowen, and Kolb 1992; Ensby and Mahmoodi 1997). These stakeholders have been categorized into three subgroups: students and families (including current students, prospective students, parents, spouses, and alumni), businesses (including employers, prospective employers, and industry organizations), and academic constituents (including faculty, administrators, staff, accrediting boards, and academic foundations). As these groups have emerged, it became apparent that successful programs would be those that could balance the diverse demands of academicians, students, and businesses (Gleeson, Schlossman, and Allen 1993).

The purpose of this study is to examine the needs and expectations of the stakeholders. Specifically, a comprehensive review of the literature will identify the needs and expectations of the academic and the business communities. The needs and expectations of these two groups have been widely studied. Utilizing the findings from the review of the literature published on these first two groups, this study then turns to student perceptions of curriculum requirements.

BACKGROUND

Exploring the Needs and Expectations of Academic Constituents

The changes in the AACSB standards gave rise to new internal issues among academicians. Deans saw a reduced need for courses in some topic areas (Mayes, Heide, and Smith 1993), while many others recommended the need for additional courses to focus on specific topic areas. As a result, colleagues were often in direct conflict with each other. Further, the changing priorities came with anticipated changes in resource allocation (Mayes, Heide, and Smith 1993).

Much of the conflict centered on the relative importance of breadth versus depth. Some pushed for greater depth within the business curriculum. For example, Dorfman (1990) called for the inclusion of business courses on insurance and risk management and suggested removing international business courses or moving them to the liberal arts. Engstrom and Wardlow (1991) recommended the inclusion of course work on governmental accounting and auditing. Foggin (1992) discussed the need for students to be well grounded in the fundamentals of a discipline. Courses in total quality management and quality assurance were recommended (Guiffreda 1990; Mayes, Heide, and Smith 1993). Others reported on the need for business cross-functionality (Dufour 1994; Foggin 1992).

Others argued for greater breadth in the business and business-related curriculum. There was external academic pressure to reduce educational specialization and increase the emphasis on arts and humanities (Peterson 1986). Some educators sought more general course work in liberal arts and nontechnical subjects (Brody et al. 1985; Engstrom and Wardlow 1991; Kenworthy 1996; Moore and Neel 1988; Stewart and Brown 1989; Toth 1999). These faculty viewed courses outside the major as a chance for a student to expand his/her horizon of knowledge (Ensby and Mahmoodi 1997).

The call for breadth typically took one of two forms – topics or skills. Many recommended additional course work in specific topic areas. Some of the topics most commonly specified included course work in communications (e.g., Brody et al. 1985; Denning 1993; Engstrom and Wardlow 1991; Gilsdorf 1986; Gross 1993; Krugel 1997; Mayes, Heide, and Smith 1993; Plutsky 1996; Reinsch and Shelby 1996; Rentz and Debs 1987), international, global, and cultural diversity (e.g., Albers-Miller, Prenshaw, and Straughan 1999; Danos and Measelle 1990; Denning 1993; Emmrich 1990; Foggin 1992; Hagen 1990; Hong 1999; Ingulli 1991; Jacob 1993; Mayes, Heide, and Smith 1993; Neubaum, Burden, and Bryan 1997; Toth 1999), foreign language (Emmrich 1990; Hagen 1990; Jacob 1993; Walls 1992, 1993) and technology (Brody et al. 1985; Foggin 1992; Shaw 1994; Toth 1999). In addition, recommended course work included political science (Emmrich 1990); economics (Emmrich 1990; Jacob 1993), and history (Chesser 1990).

Whereas additional topic areas were the focus for some, others recommended that specific skill sets be included within the curriculum. Some of the recommended skill areas were very specific, including interpersonal skills (Foggin 1992) and team work (Denning 1993). Other skills are more esoteric, including flexibility (Denning 1993); social responsibility (Denhardt 1987; Kenworthy 1996); creativity (Denhardt 1987), adaptability (Denning 1993) and a diverse or broad perspective (Danos and Measelle 1990; DeMoss and McCann 1997).

Finally, the academic concerns regarding curriculum

development included concerns regarding faculty/staff resources and related rewards and recognition. Faculty expressed real concerns about increased workloads without increased compensation (e.g., Albers-Miller, Straughan, and Prenshaw 2001; Denning 1993; Straughan and Albers-Miller 2000). Others were concerned about preparing faculty for changes required by significant curriculum reform (Rugman 1992, 1993).

Exploring the Needs and Expectations of Industry

Business and industry representatives expressed strong feelings about the curriculum as well. Some see the educational system as the dominant force that will affect U.S. competitiveness and economic health (White and Griffith 1998). Some business people complained that universities did not teach what industry wanted (Denning 1993); others expressed general contentment with curriculum (VanEynde and Tucker 1997). Although some complained that U.S. business schools were no longer internationally competitive in academics (Denning 1993; Guiffida 1990), American style business curricula were being adopted abroad (Kyj, Kyj, and Marshall 1995). In light of the seeming conflicts, academicians and business people alike recommended a stronger connection between education and industry (Denning 1993; Emmrich 1990; Sexton et al. 1997).

Furthermore, a strong case was made for the need to include industry opinions in curriculum development (Kilzer and Kennedy 1990; *Personnel Management* 1990). Denning (1993) acknowledged that a university that satisfied the needs of business would find it easier to generate new revenue. Dialog between educators and business people indicated that there were potential conflicts between business expectations and traditional academic approaches (Johns and Teare 1995). For example, Sriram and Coppage (1992) found a gap between the amount of communications training desired by practitioners and that offered by academicians. Other gaps were found between professional and academic perceptions regarding the importance of international curriculum, foreign languages and cultural differences (e.g., Albers-Miller, Sigerstad, and Straughan 2000; Lundstrom and White 1997).

Just as the academic stakeholders had differing opinions regarding the courses and skills they thought were necessary for a business education, so did industry. Some of the input was fairly general; businesses wanted a well-rounded curriculum (Kilzer and Kennedy 1990). In other cases, the input was more specific. Specific course material was recommended, including coverage of foreign language (Albers-Miller, Sigerstad, and Straughan 2000; Malkin 1997; Meeks 1992; Skinner 1993) classic literature (Meeks 1992), humanities and liberal arts (Curry 1991), communications (Danos and Measelle 1990; Denning 1993; Gilsdorf 1986; Gross 1993; Kilzer and Kennedy

1990; Meeks 1992), government relations and political science (Kapner 1994; Meeks 1992), and history (Meeks 1992). Sometimes there was disagreement across industries. Some reported the need for additional international and global training (Kapner 1994; Meeks 1992; Skinner 1993), but Albers-Miller, Sigerstad, and Straughan (2000) found mixed demand for such training.

As with the academicians, business people often recommended skills, in addition to courses. Business people indicated a desire for students with a diverse perspective (Dufour 1994). They were also interested in students who were socially responsible (Skinner 1993), with problem solving skills (Engstrom and Wardlow 1991), and with more life skills (Denning 1993).

Additionally, business people want more practical application designed into the curriculum. Executives think that education needs to prepare students for the world (Skinner 1993). Some have complained that real world applications have been under emphasized in traditional business degree plans (Gross 1993), and there is a need for stronger links to reality (Johns and McKechnie 1995; Kenworthy 1996; Schaupp and Lane 1992). It is also thought that students need more activities outside the classroom (Denhardt 1987; Ensby and Mahmoodi 1997). Table 1 provides an overview of the reviewed literature.

Exploring the Needs and Expectations of Students

Despite the diversity of opinions, the previous two sections show significant overlap between what academia and industry desire for the student. Clearly, significant calls for increased curricular diversity have been sounded by both industry and the academy. It would be easy, as is often the practice, to simply implement curriculum programs that fulfill these needs. Business schools could then impose these decisions on students – a “Father Knows Best” approach to curriculum development.

Such a top down approach is not altogether lacking merit. While students do not always agree with faculty on what is best for them (Ensby and Mahmoodi 1997), students do want to be prepared for employment (Johns and Teare 1995). Students want to take courses that will actually help them succeed (Reinsch and Shelby 1996). Unfortunately, students often see non-business courses “as penance to be endured” (Ensby and Mahmoodi 1997). Furthermore, there is a direct relationship between students being allowed to take the courses that they want and satisfaction (Sampson, Freeland, and Weiss 1995). Davies, Preston, and Wilson (1992) make a strong case for maintaining student satisfaction. In at least some documented cases, universities realized dramatic changes when the expectations of students were confirmed. For example, applications from prospective students, enrollments, student involvement, student participation, and the quality of the student (as measured by standardized tests) all in-

TABLE 1
CURRICULAR CHANGE LITERATURE

Concept	Literature References
General historic call for curricular change	Curry 1991; Davies, Preston, and Wilson 1992; Denning 1993; Dufour 1994; Ensby and Mahmoodi 1997; Grant and Main 1986; Guiffrida 1990; Mayes, Heide, and Smith 1993; White and Griffith 1998
Demands varied by stakeholders	Boyatzis, Cowen, and Kolb 1992; Davies, Preston, and Wilson 1992; Ensby and Mahmoodi 1997; Gleeson, Schlossman, and Allen 1993
Academic response of mission driven changes	AACSB 2004; Mayes, Heide, and Smith 1993; Pritchard, Potter, and Saccucci 2004; Stout and West 2004; Wynne and Filante 2004
Specific course change recommendations and calls for new courses	Dorfman 1990; Dufour 1994; Engstrom and Wardlow 1991; Foggin 1992; Guiffrida 1990; Mayes, Heide, and Smith 1993
Specific Courses and Skills	
Call for greater concentration on liberal arts, (including literature, history; nontechnical courses)	Brody et al. 1985; Chesser 1990; Curry 1991; Engstrom and Wardlow 1991; Ensby and Mahmoodi 1997; Kenworthy 1996; Meeks 1992; Moore and Neel 1988; Peterson 1986; Stewart and Brown 1989; Toth 1999
Government, political science, economics	Emmrich 1990; Jacob 1993; Kapner 1994; Meeks 1992
Communication courses and skills	Brody et al. 1985; Danos and Measelle 1990; Denning 1993; Engstrom and Wardlow 1991; Gilsdorf 1986; Gross 1993; Kilzer and Kennedy 1990; Krugel 1997; Mayes, Heide, and Smith 1993; Meeks 1992; Plutsky 1996; Reinsch and Shelby 1996; Rentz and Debs 1987
International, global, cultural, diversity	Albers-Miller, Prenshaw, and Straughan 1999; Albers-Miller, Sigerstad, and Straughan 2000; Danos and Measelle 1990; Denning 1993; DeMoss and McCann 1997; Dufour 1994; Emmrich 1990; Foggin 1992; Hagen 1990; Hong 1999; Ingulli 1991; Jacob 1993; Kapner 1994; Mayes, Heide, and Smith 1993; Meeks 1992; Neubaum, Burden, and Bryan 1997; Skinner 1993; Toth 1999
Foreign language	Albers-Miller, Sigerstad, and Straughan 2000; Emmrich 1990; Hagen 1990; Jacob 1993; Malkin 1997; Meeks 1992; Skinner 1993; Walls 1992/1993
Technical skills	Brody et al. 1985; Foggin 1992; Shaw 1994; Toth 1999
Interpersonal skills	Denning 1993; Foggin 1992
Social responsibility	Denhardt 1987; Kenworthy 1996; Skinner 1993
Problem solving, flexibility and creativity skills	Denhardt 1987; Denning 1993; Engstrom and Wardlow 1991
Applied learning, reality life experiences	Denhardt 1987; Denning 1993; Ensby and Mahmoodi 1997; Johns and McKechnie 1995; Kenworthy 1996; Schaupp and Lane 1992; Skinner 1993

creased as student needs received more attention (Boyatzis, Cowen, and Kolb 1992). Denning (1993) indicated that students are responsive to well designed programs. To design programs that are appealing, it is necessary to understand student needs (Davies, Preston, and Wilson 1992) and get them involved in curriculum design (Dufour 1994).

A great success story comes from ethics training. Both business and academics stated a need for ethics training (e.g., Bok 1988; DeMoss and McCann 1997; Mayes, Heide, and Smith 1993; Moore and Neel 1988; Pizzolatto and Bevil 1996; Rentz and Debs 1987; Toth 1999). In addition, students also view ethics courses favorably (Poorsoltan, Amin, and Tootoonchi 1991; Shannon and Berl 1997). Under such ideal conditions, Bok (1988) found that after students graduate they showed an even higher level of enthusiasm for ethics courses than the students currently taking the course.

On the other hand, when students do not see the immediate value of a required course, they are reluctant to view the courses favorably and will take them only under duress. International course work offers a poignant example. Although both business people and academicians see value in international course work, many students still lack interest (Albers-Miller, Prenshaw, and Straughan 1999; Cavusgil 1991; Neubaum, Burden, and Bryan 1997).

RESEARCH METHOD

It is clear from this review that the needs and expectations of the academic and the business communities have been fairly well documented. Unfortunately, despite the potential gains, less attention has been directed to the students. This study explores student perceptions of business school curricula.

The design of the study relies heavily on that developed by Albers-Miller, Prenshaw, and Straughan (1999). Interestingly, in their study of student perceptions of study abroad programs, they discovered that a majority of the student respondents would not take international courses if they were not required. Their study gave rise to questions regarding other degree plan requirements, as well as a student's general willingness to take courses that are not required. Was their finding unique to international course work? If not, would similar attitudes be observed with respect to other course topics or was their finding an indication of a general unwillingness by students to take courses that were not required? Based upon these questions, this study explores student willingness to take a variety of different non-business courses. The non-business courses included in this study were communications, computer science, economics, foreign language, geography, history, literature, and political science.

Looking at student willingness to take specific courses does not provide a complete picture. Many would argue that today's students are unwilling to take any course that

was not a degree requirement. To ascertain if students would be willing, in general, to take courses not in the degree plan, students were asked to respond to the following statement: "If there was a class offered covering a topic in which I was really interested, I would take it even if it did not count toward my degree." If students agree with this statement, but disagree with similar statements regarding specific courses, it can be argued that the students are specifically rejecting the designated topic area.

Finally, this study looks at two other issues introduced in the academic and industry review: real world applications and longer degree programs. Students were asked to respond to three questions relating to real world applications: "The ability to apply what I learn in a class to real world situations is very important to me," "I prefer teachers with real world experience," and "When I have the chance, I select classes that have real world applications." Students were asked to consider a longer degree program with the following statement "It is important that I learn everything I need to know before I graduate, regardless of the time it takes me to complete my degree."

Data Collection

Data were collected with a survey including Likert-type responses to value statements and relevant demographic questions. A five-point scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree was used for the value statements. To avoid hypothesis guessing, the students were given 71 value statements. For the purposes of this study, 13 are useful. Tables 2 and 3, included in the results section, list the statements used in this study.

Students were contacted through their instructors. Faculty members at several universities were invited to participate by directing their students to the survey that was posted to a web site. Students from a total of 14 universities are included in this study. Students from 13 universities submitted responses on the web. The professor at one university opted to use a paper version of the web survey. The students were provided with a space to provide a previously established identifier which was reported to their instructor (typically these included an id number, a name, or some other method of identification). This allowed instructors to track participation and allowed the researcher to restrict duplicate responses. There were 895 usable responses.

The universities were nationwide, included public and private, and a range of schools from large (more than 32,000 students) to small (less than 1500 students). The demographic characteristics were not surprising. The sample was 51.0 percent female. Most students, 71.2 percent, were in the typically undergraduate student ages range of 18 to 23. Most of the students lived with their parents and most had never been married (86.43%). While

the sample was largely Caucasian (68.3%), minority students were also represented (6.2% Black, 8.9% Hispanic, 12.2% Asian/Pacific Island). Most of the students took a majority of their classes during the day and were upperclassmen (94.3%). A majority of the students were at least part time employed (69.1%). Furthermore, most (80.3%) had traveled to another country at least once. As a group, they considered themselves to be “good students.”

Results obtained with the paper and pencil version were compared with results obtained from a demographically similar subset of the other responses. Not significant differences were observed between these two subsamples, validating the decision to pool the data.

The Multi-Cultural Classroom

While the task of understanding student needs and expectations is, in and of itself, a challenging task, the magnitude of the task is only fully realized with issues of a cross-cultural classroom are considered. As accreditation “common body of knowledge” expectations relaxed and mission-driven standards arose, accrediting boards simultaneously encouraged increased diversity. The characteristics of diversity that add value to the classroom, student exposure to different ways of thinking, different values and different experiences, also adds a dimension to monitoring and managing student expectations (Lindahl and Fanelli 2002). By definition – diverse students are different.

International students are an important way to add diversity to the experiences and learning opportunities for domestic students. Continuous improvement in meeting the needs of international students, comes in part, from recognizing that the students have cultural differences (Lindahl and Fanelli 2002). A wealth of studies has evidenced the differences between domestic and international students. Researchers have discovered that international students often have unique needs with regard to information process and communication style (Wang and Frank 2002). Others have noted differences between international and domestic students with regard to participation and attendance at extracurricular activities (Kwon and Trail 2001). Differences have been observed regarding “attitudes, perceptions and tendencies toward academic dishonesty” (Lupton, Chapman, and Weiss 2000). These few studies barely scratch the surface of the statistical support for treating these two broad categories of students as potentially different.

RESULTS

Surprisingly, a majority of the students included in this study **were** willing to take courses that did not apply toward their degree. Only 11.34 percent of the U.S. respondents responded negatively (“strongly disagree” or “disagree”) to the statement “If there was a class offered

covering a topic in which I was really interested, I would take it even if it did not count toward my degree;” most of the students expressed some willingness to take a course outside of their degree requirements if it was a class covering material in which the student was “really interested.” Foreign students were significantly less willing to take a course that did not fulfill a degree requirement ($\chi^2 = 7.746$, $p\text{-value} < 0.0001$). Naturally, this is not surprising given the burdens of time and finances that often face an international student. Even with these added burdens, very few of the international students responded negatively (16.23%).

Clearly business students need courses outside of the traditional business topics. Despite willingness to take “interesting” courses not in the degree plan, student willingness to take “unnecessary” non-business courses, those not required and not directly related to core, functional business areas, varied by topic area. When students were asked about taking specific courses “if they were not required,” of the eight topic areas covered in this study, only foreign language was treated differently by U.S. students relative to foreign students. Across the other seven course topics (computer science, communication, economics, literature, history, political science, and geography), U.S. and foreign student opinions were statistically indistinguishable.

The two most favorably valued course areas were computer science and communications. The mean response to computer science courses was 3.57 on a five-point scale with 5 being “Strongly Agree.” Across all students, U.S. and foreign, 61.45 percent of the students were favorably disposed (“Strongly Agree” or “Agree”) to taking computer science courses even if they were not required. Communications courses were significantly less valued, with a mean response of 3.43 ($t\text{-value} = 69.39$, $p\text{-value} < 0.0001$). Across all students, U.S. and foreign, 56.98 percent of the students were favorably disposed (“Strongly Agree” or “Agree”) to taking communications courses even if they were not required.

Less than 50 percent of all students, U.S. and foreign, would be willing to take economics, literature, political science, history, or geography if they were not required. Economics courses were significantly less favored than communications courses with a mean response of 2.98 ($t\text{-value} = 76.04$, $p\text{-value} < 0.0001$). Across all students, U.S. and foreign, 40.67 percent of the students were favorably disposed (“Strongly Agree” or “Agree”) to taking economics courses even if they were not required. Literature courses were significantly less favored than economics courses with a mean response of 2.81 ($t\text{-value} = 77.04$, $p\text{-value} < 0.0001$). Across all students, U.S. and foreign, 33.74 percent of the students were favorably disposed (“Strongly Agree” or “Agree”) to taking literature courses even if they were not required. History courses were significantly less favored than literature courses with a mean response of 2.80 ($t\text{-value} = 81.01$, $p\text{-value} < 0.0001$).

Across all students, U.S. and foreign, 29.61 percent of the students were favorably disposed (“Strongly Agree” or “Agree”) to taking history courses even if they were not required. Political science courses were significantly less favored than history courses with a mean response of 2.70 (t -value = 88.57, p -value < 0.0001). Across all students, U.S. and foreign, 30.06 percent of the students were favorably disposed (“Strongly Agree” or “Agree”) to taking political science courses even if they were not required. Geography courses were significantly less favored than political science courses with a mean response of 2.63 (t -value = 91.75, p -value < 0.0001). Across all students, U.S. and foreign, 23.46 percent of the students were favorably disposed (“Strongly Agree” or “Agree”) to taking geography courses even if they were not required.

As previously mentioned, foreign language courses were valued differently between U.S. and foreign students. U.S. students were significantly less willing to take foreign language courses than foreign students (χ^2 = 10.10, p -value < 0.0001). While 51.30 percent of the foreign students agreed or strongly agreed that they would take foreign language courses even if they were not required, only 37.52 percent of the U.S. students would. Table 2 provides the value statements, the mean response, the total percent agreement, the U.S. student percent agreement, the foreign student percent agreement, and the chi-squared statistic comparing U.S. student responses to foreign student responses for previously discussed nine statements.

In addition to specific courses, this study examined student perceptions of the need to apply classroom learning to the world at large. Students overwhelmingly agree that when they have the option, they would select classes with real world components. Across the three “real world” statements, U.S. and foreign student opinions were statistically indistinguishable. There is little doubt that students want real world application. A vast majority of all students (92.85%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “The ability to apply what I learn in a class to real world situations is very important to me.” Most of the students (88.60 percent) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “I prefer teachers with real world experience,” and a large majority of the students (86.48%) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “When I have the chance, I select classes that have real world applications.”

Finally, this study examines student perceptions of learning relative to the length of time associated with completion of the degree. On this statement U.S. and foreign opinions again deviated (χ^2 = 6.98, p -value < 0.0001). When faced with the statement “It is important that I learn everything I need to know before I graduate, regardless of the time it takes me to complete my degree,” U.S. students responded significantly less favorably. Only 39.14 percent of the U.S. students agreed or agreed strongly, while 50.65 percent of the foreign students

agreed. Table 3 provides the value statements, the mean response, the total percent agreement, the U.S. student percent agreement, the foreign student percent agreement, and the chi-squared statistic comparing U.S. student responses to foreign student responses for previously discussed four statements about course presentation and curriculum design.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Based on the results of this study, incorporating students’ opinions with those of academicians and practitioners appears to be a challenging, though not impossible task. While the academic and business communities see real value in a student’s business education enriched with a background in courses from liberal arts and sciences (e.g., Albers-Miller, Sigerstad, and Straughan 2000; Lundstrom and White 1997; Meeks 1992), business students have expressed a lack of willingness to take these types of courses unless the courses are forced upon them. Some might argue that the obvious course of action is to ignore student opinions and continue to demand that students take courses that we know are in their best interest. Students do not always have a realistic understanding of the skills and knowledge needed for a successful business program (Pritchard, Potter, and Saccucci 2004).

Unfortunately, in a competitive environment where some universities have “liberalized” professional education and others have offered “designer” degree plans selected by the students (Skinner 1993), the wisdom of such an approach is questionable. Reality dictates the universities that meet the needs and expectations of students are more likely to attract and keep students (Boyatzis, Cowen, and Kolb 1992; Davies, Preston, and Wilson 1992; Dufour 1994; Sampson, Freeland, and Weiss 1995). The present study explores students’ attitudes regarding curriculum alternatives outside of traditional business courses. Past research has shown the specific courses investigated to be of value to industry. An understanding of students’ attitudes and perceptions provides insight into potential sources of conflict between these two constituencies and offer options for realistically managing student expectations.

Consistent with past research (e.g., Chesser 1990; Sampson, Freeland, and Weiss 1995) the findings of the present study suggest a critically important challenge for those involved in curriculum review. Given the mandate by industry to provide greater breadth of course study, perhaps the most significant finding is the emphasis students place on the application of course topics to an actual business context. While this reaffirms previous findings, the magnitude of the response provides a clear mandate for both those considering curriculum design and those teaching specific courses. Further, this research identifies specific non-business topic areas that do and do not interest business students.

TABLE 2
STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE VALUE OF NON-BUSINESS COURSES

Statement	Mean	Total % Agree	U.S. % Agree	Non U.S. % Agree	χ^2	p-value
If there were a class offered covering a topic in which I was really interested, I would take it even if it did not count toward my degree.	3.91	75.64	77.46	66.88	7.746	< 0.001
I would take computer science classes even if they were not required.	3.57	61.45	60.59	65.58	1.341	ns
I would take communications classes even if they were not required.	3.43	56.98	55.74	62.99	2.735	ns
I would take economics classes even if they were not required.	2.98	40.67	40.08	43.51	0.620	ns
I would take foreign language classes even if they were not required.	2.96	39.89	37.52	51.30	10.10	< 0.001
I would take literature classes even if they were not required.	2.81	33.74	34.95	27.92	2.819	ns
I would take history classes even if they were not required.	2.80	29.61	30.77	26.62	1.043	ns
I would take political science classes even if they were not required.	2.70	30.06	29.42	30.52	0.074	ns
I would take geography classes even if they were not required.	2.63	23.46	22.40	28.57	2.702	ns

There are numerous ways to take subject matter whose roots are outside of the traditionally defined borders of business curriculum and establish relevance for students. In fact, many business courses that are commonly taught within contemporary business curricula followed just such a path. For example, numerous business courses can be found whose roots are clearly in applied mathematics and the hard sciences. Instead of teaching the introductory course on basic statistics with no obvious linkage to management application, many schools now offer the first statistics course directed specifically toward business majors (e.g., *Statistical Methods for Business*) followed by secondary applied statistic courses (such as

Marketing Research). While the roots of such courses may lie in Arts and Sciences, by focusing on the application of these courses to *business* problems, business schools have been able to incorporate the material into the regular curriculum with some success. Likewise, the theoretical foundations of psychology, sociology, and anthropology have led to the development of courses in Organizational Behavior and Consumer Behavior. Much of the popularity of such courses in modern business school curricula is a function of textbook authors' and instructors' ability to establish a practical relevance of the concepts and theories whose origins lie elsewhere. If additional breadth is to be added, it is critically important

TABLE 3
STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF COURSE PRESENTATION AND CURRICULUM DESIGN

Statement	Mean	Total % Agree	U.S. % Agree	Non U.S. % Agree	χ^2	p-value
The ability to apply what I learn in a class to real world situations is very important to me.	4.36	92.40	92.85	90.26	1.216	ns
I prefer teachers with real world experience.	4.35	88.60	88.66	88.32	0.157	ns
When I have the chance, I select classes that have real world applications.	4.16	86.48	86.77	85.06	0.319	ns
It is important that I learn everything I need to know before I graduate, regardless of the time it takes me to complete my degree.	3.05	41.12	39.14	50.65	6.981	< 0.001

to establish such relevance for the new additions. Without it, academicians cannot expect students to embrace the modified curriculum.

Topics included in this study were non-business topics, and yet, each was a topic which can directly enhance student learning and improve after graduation, on-the-job performance. Based upon the findings of this study, several topic areas need to be “sold” to students to a much greater degree. The topic areas where establishing practical relevance appears to be most critical are geography (mean = 2.63), political science (mean = 2.70), history (2.80), literature (mean = 2.81), foreign language (mean = 2.96), and economics (mean = 2.98). The mean perception for each of these topic areas was below the midpoint for the scale.

Numerous techniques can be utilized to establish relevance. First, if a college or university has the demand or resources to create classes in these areas which are exclusively for business students, course titles need to emphasize the focus on business issues. For example, a political science class called *Legal and Political Influences on Business and Industry* provides some indication as to the difference between such a class and other political science classes. More importantly, however, the course content *must* provide examples of the relevance of the material for managers. At the minimum, instructors should consider adding business relevant examples and class assignments that allow business students enrolled in these courses to explore the relevance. Another approach is to allow for active interaction with the business community

through partnering opportunities, active-learning projects, “live” case analysis and guest lecturing. These active learning opportunities may provide a tangible means to bridge the gap between the nontraditional course and traditional business curricula.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

While the present research does help us to better understand students’ perceptions of non-business course alternatives, there are some limitations worth noting. Students were asked questions about their attitudes towards several specific courses deemed important by business and industry. However, no data was collected to measure the students’ actual experience with such course topics. It is possible that their answers were a reaction to actual experiences in some of these classes rather than an *a priori* perception. Additionally, in the absence of actual enrollment information, one can only make inferences about attitudes rather than extending the findings to actual choices made by students.

The study suggests several questions that warrant further exploration. As noted, comparing these attitudinal measures with actual course choice decisions would provide additional insight. While the realities of budget cuts, lackluster fund-raising, and declining enrollment tend to discourage creative risk taking, the benefits to be gained warrant consideration of change (Barsky, Catanach, and Kozlowski 2003). Further, given the demonstrated importance of maintaining an applied orientation in non-busi-

ness curriculum, questions can be asked regarding the selection of instructors. Should the instructor be selected from the most business qualified members of the non-business discipline? Should the instructor be selected from the most topically qualified members of the school of business? Does "team teaching" represent the best possible arrangement? These are questions that future research might choose to explore.

Finally, though not a primary objective of the study, the findings suggest some interesting differences between U.S. students and international students. These warrant additional investigation. Why do U.S. students stress personal interest more so than international students? Is this a cultural artifact? Is this driven more by budgetary concerns among international students? Research into the motives underlying this difference is appropriate.

CONCLUSIONS

Balancing the needs and expectations of all stakeholders is at best tricky. Demands for new curriculum

items create an almost tangible strain. Student time demands are already heavy (Curry 1991). Some programs have explored and even implemented an additional year of study (Curry 1991; Engstrom and Wardlow 1991). While a fifth year of incoming tuition may appeal to the institution, students are less eager to accept it. Another approach is to creatively merge multiple skill areas into single course (Engle 1989; Rentz and Debs 1987). The question then becomes what skills and how many can be successfully merged in one course offering.

This research provides perhaps one pedagogical approach by infusing various curriculum needs with a practitioner-oriented method. Although students may vary in their opinion regarding what is important in a business education, they do agree that courses that will prepare them for employment and help them succeed are highly desirable (Johns and Teare 1995; Reinsch and Shelby 1996). This study suggests that the key to success and student acceptance lies in clearly communicating the relevance of non-business coursework.

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