

# Walker College of Business Assessment Overview & Background

## Introduction

Prior to 2002, the assessment efforts in the Walker College of Business consisted mostly of indirect and/or informal methods; student, alumni, and employer surveys, and faculty committee discussions about student learning. Beginning in April, 2002, the university Office of Institutional Research, Assessment and Planning conducted assessment workshops for all academic departments in the College of Business and presented the university academic assessment guidelines that had been developed in the previous year. Efforts were begun to develop a more comprehensive academic assessment plan for the college that would emphasize direct assessment methods. Dr. Faye Sawyer (previously in the Office of Institutional Research, Assessment and Planning) was appointed as the Assistant Dean for Assessment in the college in July, 2003 and a college Assessment Committee was formed in September, 2003.

Since that time, the assessment efforts in the College of Business have evolved as we have learned more about direct assessment techniques, developed a broader base of support for assessment efforts in the college, and studied our own efforts and results. In the summer of 2005, with the appointment of Dr. Randy Edwards as the Interim Dean of the college, coordination of assessment efforts was assigned to a newly created position, the Associate Dean for Accreditation, which was filled by Dr. Don Cox. He guided the college through its reaffirmation of accreditation in the spring of 2008. Dr. Heather Norris assumed the position of Associate Dean in July of 2008. She now oversees maintenance of accreditation initiatives. At the same time, Dr. Martin Meznar was appointed Assistant Dean responsible for program assessment.

Following is a brief outline of the assessment program actions for the college since fall 2003.

<u>Academic Year</u>	<u>Summary of Assessment Activity</u>
2003-04	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Assessment Committee Formed</li><li>- BSBA Learning Goals Developed</li><li>- Initial BSBA Assessment Methods and Plan Developed</li></ul>
2004-05	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- First Year Implementation of BSBA Assessment Methods</li><li>- Review of BSBA Assessment Results and Identification of Changes</li><li>- MBA and MSA Learning Goal Development Started</li></ul>
2005-06	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Second Year Utilization of BSBA Assessment Methods</li><li>- Review of BSBA Results and Identification of Changes</li><li>- MBA and MSA Learning Goals Established</li><li>- Initial MBA and MSA Assessment Methods and Plan Developed</li></ul>
2006-07	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Review of Assessment Program with External Consultant (Dr. Kathryn Martell) and Redesign of College BSBA Assessment Program</li><li>- Implementation of New Methods for BSBA Assessment</li><li>- Implementation of Assessment Methods for MBA and MSA Programs</li></ul>

- Review of Assessment Results and Identification of Proposed Changes
- 2007-08
- Implementation of Assessment Program continued, focusing on assessment of functional business knowledge, written communication skills, ethical awareness, and analytical/problem solving skills
  - Faculty stipends were approved for those evaluating assessment data during the summer.
- 2008-09
- Functional business knowledge, global business knowledge, technology skills, and oral communication skills were assessed
  - Rubrics for these learning goals were evaluated and refined
  - Faculty stipends were again approved for summer evaluation of student performance in these areas.
- 2009-10
- Assessment efforts focused on functional business knowledge, ethical awareness, and problem solving skills.
  - Functional business knowledge was assessed using the ETS major field exam in business, attitude toward business ethics was assessed using Reichel & Neumann's (1988) instrument, and problem solving skills were determined using Heppern's (1979) Level of Problem Solving Skills Estimate Form.

## Summary of Degree Program Changes Linked to Assessment Actions

Over the past years, findings from newly implemented direct assessment methods and from continuing use of indirect assessment methods (surveys, etc.) have led to a variety of course and/or program changes in hopes of quality improvement. The following list, though not exhaustive, summarizes some of these changes/enhancements:

- Expanding the depth and breadth of an undergraduate business ethics module within the Legal Environment of Business course. It was agreed that additional class time would be devoted to, and more emphasis placed on the following topics: (1) ethical theories of deontology, utilitarianism, and rights based ethics, (2) consequences of the acts of an agent of a corporation, (3) ethical decision making in a group environment, and (4) distinction between ethical and legal standards.
- Receiving approval to hire, and then hiring (for January 2008), a business professor to fill an endowed university professorship in ethics (James E. Holshouser, Jr. Distinguished Professor in Ethics). The new faculty member in this role will assist other faculty members in infusing ethics education into the curriculum and offer courses dedicated to business ethics. The need for this action was partially supported by the assessment findings related to ethics noted in the item above.
- Approving an undergraduate curriculum requirement that students must take a Business Writing course (ENG 3100) in their junior year. Previously, students were able to take the course anytime from their sophomore through senior year. The new requirement ensures that students will complete the Business writing course *before* they take senior level business courses that have writing components, and also that students will have at least one significant writing-focused course in each year of their undergraduate program (i.e., spreading writing-focused courses across all four years).
- Increasing emphasis and/or refining core business course content related to functional business knowledge areas where student performance was found to be weaker than desired. A couple of examples include:
  - In the Introduction to Finance course (FIN 3680), provide increased instruction and emphasis in four areas; net present value, financial ratios, bond valuation, and historical risk-return relationships for financial assets.
  - In the Principles of Marketing course (MKT 3050), provide additional emphasis in the topic areas related to product and promotion.
- Redesigning the MBA Program curriculum, shortening the program from a two-year program to a one-calendar-year program (with specified prerequisites), and adding an international experience component. These changes were undertaken partly as a result of indirect assessment feedback from students, alumni, and employers, in conjunction with program review activities of the Graduate Curriculum Committee.
- Modifying the MS in Accounting Program, eliminating one of the previously offered specialization tracks (Accounting Information Systems), and adding a new program capstone course. These changes were undertaken partly as a result of indirect assessment feedback from alumni and employers, along with program review activities of the Accounting

Department graduate faculty members.

- Naming a Director of the International Business (IB) major who is responsible for assisting IB students in finding appropriate international experiences as required by the major. This need was identified in part from student survey feedback.
- Creating BUS 4000, a capstone course required of all College of Business students. The 1-credit hour course will be used to help implement assessment initiatives.
- Instituting a “global issues” requirement for all BSBA students. This requirement can be fulfilled in a variety of ways, ranging from taking an internationally oriented course to an internship overseas to actually studying abroad.

## **BSBA Degree Program Assessment Overview**

Our initial direct assessment efforts (academic years 2004-05 and 2005-06) for the BSBA degree program consisted of 25 separate course-embedded assessment activities spread over 13 required core business courses, implementation of 2 college entrance exams, and (beginning in 2005-06) utilization of the ETS Major Field Test in Business. By the end of the second year of these efforts, members of the college Assessment Committee and the Executive Committee were concerned that our efforts had several weaknesses:

- Too much breadth and not enough depth. By trying to implement such a large number of items in a very short time frame, our assessment methods and activities were often lacking in depth. Thus, our results did not provide sufficient information to allow college faculty to be confident that we really understood the source and/or nature of program weaknesses and it was difficult to reach consensus on making adjustments to courses and programs.
- Too much course assessment and not enough program assessment. Much of the assessment we were conducting was measuring what students knew or what they could do during the program – often in individual classes at the sophomore and junior level – with too little emphasis on what students were taking away at the end of the program.
- Not enough centralized coordination of assessment efforts. Despite having an Assessment Committee, it was difficult to maintain consistency in our assessment efforts. Some of the assessment assignments and methods were being modified by individual faculty members or departments without adequate oversight. In addition, having so many activities required assessment evaluation from many different faculty members, often resulting in uneven or inconsistent evaluation.

In January 2007, the college hired Dr. Kathryn Martell (Associate Dean at Montclair State University) as an external assessment consultant to review our efforts and to help us develop a more streamlined assessment approach that would attempt to address the above concerns. Working with Dr. Martell, the college Assessment Committee agreed to redesign our BSBA assessment program and begin its implementation during the spring 2007 semester. The revised approach is built around the following concepts:

- Focus more on end-of-program assessment.
- Reduce the number of course-embedded assessment activities, but increase the depth or extent of the assignments.
- Redesign our assessment evaluation approach to utilize fewer evaluators, with more detailed rubrics, and to summarize information with enough detail to allow better analysis of the results.
- Rely primarily on the ETS Major Field Exam in Business as the assessment tool to cover the learning goal related to functional business knowledge

During the spring 2007 semester, revised activities were implemented to allow for assessment of each of the six BSBA degree learning goals. During the summer 2007 period, the Assessment Committee evaluated the assessment activity products and analyzed the results. A number of suggestions and recommendations were identified by the Assessment Committee and were routed to the appropriate committees and departments in the college for further consideration. As a result, key changes were approved by the faculty during the 2007-2008 academic year. Two of the most significant changes were (1) the approval of BUS 4000, a new required course which will serve as the home for many of the college's assessment data gathering efforts; (2) the establishment of the international experience requirement in support of learning goal 5.

Review of ongoing assessment efforts during the 2008-2009 academic year has led to additional recommendations which are currently being evaluated by the assessment committee. These include using the ETS exam as the assessment mechanism for the “Global Business Understanding” goal; the use of ENG 3100 to assess goal 2a (Effective Writing Skills); and a redesign of the assessment schedule to comply with a 2-year cycle for assessing all BSBA learning goals.

## **MBA Degree Program Assessment Overview**

The initial direct assessment effort for the MBA program was undertaken in 2004, with utilization of the ETS MBA exam, for students completing the program in that year. The ETS MBA exam has been used as an assessment tool since that time.

Other direct assessment activities were not consistently implemented until 2006, primarily due to significant revisions in the MBA program in 2004 (from a 64-hour, two-year program to a 42-hour, 18-month program) and then again in 2005 (from the 42-hour, 18-month program to a 32-hour, one-year program, with additional prerequisites). As a result of these program changes, only assessment activities since summer 2006 are measurements of outcomes of the current MBA program structure.

In May, 2006, the Dean of the College of Business provided funding for faculty stipends for MBA faculty members to meet over a period of several weeks to work on program assessment activities to be utilized with the revised program curriculum.

The MBA program is offered both on-campus (Boone, NC) and at an off-campus location (Hickory, NC). The program curriculum, professors and graduation requirements are the same for both cohorts. However, the student profile differs between the two locations, with most of the on-campus students being relatively younger, full-time students, and most of the off-campus students being somewhat older, employed full-time, and going to school part-time. Thus, assessment results to date have been examined separately for the on-campus and off-campus students. Since the off-campus program is delivered on a part-time basis and requires approximately two years to complete, only about half of the assessment activities have been undertaken thus far with the off-campus cohort.

In the 2009-10 academic year total enrollment in the on and off campus MBA program tripled. Further, a revised 36-credit MBA program was approved by the university to begin in the 2010-11 academic year. The new program will include specialization options for students and program learning objectives are being revised. An assessment plan for the new program is being developed by the MBA Program Committee and is expected to be implemented at the end of the new program's first year.

## **MS in Accounting Degree Program Assessment Overview**

Initial assurance of learning efforts for the MS in Accounting (MSA) program were begun in the 2004-05 academic year with the development of a program mission and an initial set of program learning goals. Even before designing and implementing specific student learning assessment methods however, the process of developing an initial program mission and learning goals, and the related discussions about the program tracks (General, Information Systems, and Tax) and courses within the program, had led to the conclusion that the program and tracks were in need of revision.

Limited assessment implementation was undertaken during the 2005-06 academic year during the same time that the curriculum was being more closely analyzed and discussed for revision. Much of the assessment effort from this time was valuable for learning about how to (and how not to) undertake effective assessment, but few of the findings from this period led to specific actions for change.

The Dean of the College of Business provided funding for the entire graduate faculty in the Accounting Department to hold a week of extensive meetings in May, 2006 to re-examine the mission and learning goals for the MSA program, finalize program and track revisions, and to develop specific assessment methods and measures to be used in the following academic year. As a result of these meetings, revisions were made to the program mission and learning goals, graduate curriculum proposals were formally developed, and the assessment methods that are currently being used were developed.

The curriculum proposals, all of which were adopted, eliminated the Information Systems track (leaving only the General and Tax tracks within the MSA degree program) and made numerous changes to track requirements and course content. Although the MSA program learning goals apply to both program tracks, the way they are evidenced or exhibited in the two tracks is different in several places. Also, with the new curriculum, there is only one course (ACC 5590 – Advanced Accounting Topics) that is a common requirement for both the General and Tax tracks. Thus, the places and methodological details for conducting assessment of the MSA program are different for the two tracks, for three of the four learning goals.

The new assessment methods developed in May 2006 were implemented during the 2006-07 academic year and have been ongoing since then.