

**Title: A Look at the Business Curricula at Other Christian Institutions**

**Authors/Co-Presenters: Dr. Jack Wheeler, Dr. Bob Hamill**

**Institution: Indiana Wesleyan University**

**Contact Information: [jack.wheeler@indwes.edu](mailto:jack.wheeler@indwes.edu), [bob.hamill@indwes.edu](mailto:bob.hamill@indwes.edu)**

### **Abstract**

This study investigates the structural characteristics of business programs at CCCU member schools. We were interested in discovering the range of total required hours for business majors, the size and composition of any required core of courses within the business major, the additional courses required for each major beyond the core, and any other distinctive characteristics of the curricular structure of each program. After finding that there is a significant level of similarity in the structure of CBFA business programs, we raise a series of questions concerning the rationale for such similarity.

## **A Look at the Business Curricula at Other Christian Institutions**

### **The Debate**

At our university, the total number of required hours for each major is a frequent topic of discussion in various committee meetings and academic policy-setting groups. The long-standing academic debate between those who want to cap majors at approximately forty semester hours to allow students to have a broader liberal arts experience and those who prefer a much higher cap to allow for a more thorough preparation for a professional career is alive and well on our campus.

### **A More Systematic Review**

As our own business curriculum was due for an update, we wanted to get beyond the typical anecdotal basis for identifying how our program curriculum compared to similar universities and where we had any distinctives. We decided to be more systematic in our evidence gathering for a comparative analysis.

#### Primary Focus

As a member of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU), we chose to review the business curricula at other CCCU institutions that would be the most likely competitors for our prospective student base. Our primary motivation was (1) to discover the range of total required hours for business majors across our sample and (2) to identify where the majority of programs were positioned within that range.

#### Size and Composition of Required Core

Further, we wanted to discover the size and composition of any required core of courses within the business major. The questions we wanted to answer included the following:

- *Required Core Hours*: Is there as much variation in the required core hours across programs as there is in the total major hours?
- *Common Business Core*: Is there a fairly common business core across institutions? If so, what is the course composition of that common core?
- *Additional Required Hours*: Beyond the common business core, how much variation is there across programs in the additional required hours? Are they elective courses from a relatively large list? Or are they grouped into concentrations (emphases, tracks, cognates) and/or majors (management, marketing, etc.)?
- *Concentrations and Majors*: Within the concentrations and majors, are the courses specified or chosen from a list of electives? One of the questions we have wrestled with in this regard is the extent to which business majors have flexibility in designing their program and coursework to meet their needs and interests. From the faculty perspective, the more flexibility that is built into the program for the student, the more challenges there are for the planning and administration of the program.

### Curriculum Distinctives

In addition to discovering the commonalities of business programs within the CCCU, we were also interested in curriculum distinctives, namely, whether they were courses in existence for many years or whether they were more recent innovative endeavors. Courses

that we anticipated in this category included international business, information technology, e-commerce, and various computer applications. In a similar manner, we had a specific interest in discovering how many programs required their majors to complete a practicum or internship.

### Business-Related Course Requirements

Finally, we were interested in how required, business-related courses were specified in the curriculum. What math, computer science, and economics courses are required? Are they listed as part of the required major courses and included in the major totals? Are they listed as business courses and taught by business faculty, or are they taught by the respective departments across campus?

## **Sources of Data**

### Catalogs

The data for this study was gathered from online catalogs and program descriptions available on the websites of the CCCU member institutions. Nearly all of the university websites had complete catalog access and/or departmental web pages that presented the requirements for each of the business majors offered through their program. Some general observations can be made concerning the accessibility of this information. First, there was a significant difference in the prominence of the positioning of the catalog within the university website. The most common location for the catalog was within the Academics section. But that does not mean that the catalog was convenient to access. In some cases it was simply one of six or eight options on the academic drop-down menu. In other cases,

only a site search or browsing the site directory would disclose the location of the university catalog. Once found, the catalog was frequently provided in PDF format. The most difficult searches were characterized by browsing through hundreds of pages of PDF format to find the business program pages with only a very brief table of contents to assist. In addition some of the catalogs in PDF format were very difficult to print properly. In other cases, the catalog included a very detailed table of contents that allowed the user to go directly to the desired departmental pages. Further, some universities provided separate links to various parts of the catalog, making a search of the table of contents unnecessary.

### Departmental Web Pages

In addition to the online university catalog (and, in some cases, instead of the catalog), many schools provided program descriptions and the business major requirements on their departmental web page. The seemingly logical purpose in providing program requirements in both locations is to assure the student or prospective student a greater likelihood of finding the desired information about the program. It was interesting to see that the presentation formats were quite different between the university catalog and the departmental web page. The catalog presentation was a typical academic layout with a compact use of space. Often the course descriptions were located at the end of the catalog and therefore separate from the departmental pages. On the other hand, the departmental web page presentations were far more student-focused and user-friendly. Unlike the catalog, which was designed as a print document and uploaded to the website, the departmental web pages took full advantage of the capabilities of the web to provide a significantly different user experience. In some cases, the complete set of course descriptions were provided on the same page with the program requirements; in other cases, the course descriptions were

available individually with a link. There were other business programs, which did not provide course descriptions without locating the online catalog.

### Commonalities and Uniqueness

An unexpected aspect of this data collection process was how many different ways that program requirements can be articulated and presented. In spite of the commonalities within catalog presentations and within departmental web page appearances, the variety of ways in which the courses required for different majors, concentrations, and emphases within a business program are described seems unlimited. This testament to the uniqueness of the individual as well as the group of professionals will be contrasted later with the substance of the major requirements.

## **Findings**

### Primary Purpose

The primary purpose that prompted this study was an interest in knowing the number of total hours required for majors within a business program. The total hours required in a majority of the programs was in excess of 57 semester hours with some requiring as many as 70. It would appear that the majority of business programs at CCCU schools are structured with a professional program in mind, with the additional expectations of preparation.

### Broad Foundation

One aspect of the business profession that contributes to the curriculum size is the broad spectrum of disciplines that contribute to the effective and efficient operation of the organization. Including accounting, economics, finance, management, marketing, and law as components of a strong foundation makes it difficult to keep the total down. In academic policy meetings at our university, we frequently need to explain this broad foundation aspect

of our field and explain why our students need all of the components of this foundation. This issue surfaces in academic discussions of major total hours, distinctiveness of multiple majors offered in the same department, double majors offered within and across divisions, minors offered within the business department and total hours for a minor. In addition to the broad foundation, each area of emphasis needs enough coverage to develop some measure of specialization and to provide sufficient distinctiveness among the majors.

### Common Core

The second major purpose for this study was to investigate whether the specific courses making up the common core of business programs was undergoing any significant changes or even subtle shifts. For each of the CCCU member schools, the intent was to identify the courses included in each of the multiple majors, concentrations, or emphases, whether the program description labeled that set of courses as a common core or not. The majority of programs did specifically identify a business core set of courses. Nearly all programs included the following:

- two semesters of accounting,
- two semesters of economics, and
- one semester each of management, marketing, finance, business law, strategic management, and statistics.

Clearly, this is a strong indication that the perception of the broad, multi-disciplinary nature of business has not wavered among academicians within the CCCU schools. In addition, it is clear that the specific course make-up of this broad base has not shifted, although the course content has evolved over time. In addition to this traditional set of ten courses, the majority of programs included two or three more courses that were common to all of the majors,

concentrations or emphases that they offered. The specific courses that frequently were a part of a school's core were as follows:

- introduction to business,
- business communications,
- international business,
- information technology (CIS), and
- math (although usually taught through the math department).

Less frequently required core classes included these courses:

- human resource management,
- production and operation management,
- seminar (usually taught at the senior level with various course content from school to school), and
- business ethics.

The fact that ethics was a required class more often is probably an indication that the school is taking an integrated approach to business ethics and making it a part of many if not all business courses.

### Specialization

The number and make-up of specialization areas in the form of different business majors, concentrations, or emphases was also quite traditionally oriented. A few of the smaller programs offered only a business administration major and an accounting major, but most of the CCCU member schools offered four or more areas of specialization whether they called them majors, concentrations or emphases. Accounting, management, marketing, finance and business administration were the most common majors. Far less often majors

were offered in economics, international business, information technology, entrepreneurship, and, occasionally, human resource management, e-commerce, or not-for-profit management.

### Beyond the Common Core

We also identified what the nature of the additional courses (beyond the common core) was for each area of specialization. Specifically, we wanted to know whether the additional courses were specified by the program or whether students were given a choice from a list of acceptable electives. The majority of the additional courses were specified in nearly all of the programs. Seldom was a student given the opportunity to choose more than half of the courses beyond the core. In many cases where the student was to choose, they were to choose one of only two listed classes. One specific example of a recommended elective that we were interested in was an internship or practicum opportunity. With the emphasis on practical application and work experience, we had anticipated that we would see a growing number of programs requiring a practicum experience. On the contrary, we found a very *small* number of schools with required work experiences. It was likewise unexpected how few program descriptions on the business department web page emphasized the opportunity to gain the work experience and receive academic credit for the experience.

### Number of Hours in the Common Core and the Major

It was challenging at times to identify the total number of hours required for both the common core and the total for the major because of the business-related or support courses taught in other departments across campus. In some cases, such courses were listed along with the required business courses and included in the total hours displayed. In other cases, these support courses were referred to but not included in the total number of hours for the major. This is especially challenging when the support course can be used to satisfy a

general education requirement. In this case, it is not increasing the student's total hours, but only specifying which course to take in the required set of general education courses. Fortunately it did not have much impact on our conclusions or our program decision making since it applies to one or two classes at most. Courses that could fit in this category were math, computer, and economics if not taught in the business program and satisfying a general education requirement.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The original motivation to initiate this study was to discover what the CCCU norm was for total major hours. As useful as it is to know the range of total major hours and where the majority of programs are, it is even more interesting to consider some of the other findings and consider the questions that these findings prompt.

#### Questions Raised about the Traditional Common Core

The prominence of a ten-course common foundation that has persisted over time raises these questions:

- Does the stability of this common core indicate a lack of creative thinking on the part of business academicians?
- Does all the progress in effective business practice and research on the contributing factors of superior performance not give us the basis for restructuring our business core curriculum?
- Are we stuck in a rut of following some traditional curriculum norm, afraid to take the risk of being innovative and taking the lead of reform?

- Do traditional textbooks and their common table of contents provide restrictive boundaries that are too costly in time and resources to break free from?
- Do the discipline-based courses somehow represent a categorization of business concepts that works as well now as it did 50 years ago and, therefore, stand the test of time?
- Do the new developments in business fit as well in this structure as they would in a redesigned structure?
- Is the single perspective of most of these courses still acceptable in this current business environment, or is it time to develop a new structure that takes an integrative approach.
- In a traditional business program structure, where the only course that is deliberately integrative may be strategic management, is it sufficient to bring together two or three years of business coursework in the students' senior year and attempt to instill an integrative nature of business decision making and effective implementation?

### Academic and Fiscal Boundaries

The academic and fiscal boundaries that we work within sometimes restrict us in such a way that innovative ideas never make it beyond casual conversation among colleagues. It may be enough for us to focus our innovative efforts on course content and teaching methodology. For those of us who see the need to emphasize the integrative nature of business, the course content and our chosen teaching methodology can be designed to make such integration central to the students' understanding of effective organizational operation.

The question that remains is whether a course-by-course approach within the traditional structure is enough.

### Internships

Similarly, the value of a practical work experience for the business major is recognized by most business academicians. It was, therefore, unexpected to find so few programs that required an internship or practicum as a part of their business core or additional courses for one or more major. Again, is the implementation of an internship program large enough to provide for all business majors too costly in time and resources to be seriously considered? Or are there other practical or conceptual reasons behind the small number of CCCU business programs that require internships? In our case, prospective students and their parents visiting our campus are frequently asking about internship opportunities that we offer.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, it would seem that the distinctive characteristics of business programs within the CCCU are not related to the overall structure of the coursework or the uniqueness of innovative course offerings. There may actually be an abundance of creative thought and expression in the selection of course content and teaching methodology in many of the courses in any particular program. Program features beyond the curriculum provide ample opportunity to develop distinctives as well. Both of these areas represent excellent opportunities to do further research on the characteristics of our business programs. It would be valuable to extend the investigation of business curricula at CBFA member schools to other Christian universities as well as other private and public universities.