A Case Study to Address the AACSB Curricula Management Review

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines a curricula management improvement process model to apply to the review of a business school core curriculum consistent with AACSB (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International) Standard 8. AACSB accredited schools are required to perform periodic curricula management review. A flexible business process model extensible to other curriculum programs is proposed. The results of the model implementation from an action-research study at a medium-size public university in the northeastern United States are discussed. AACSB requires that a continuous improvement review process for curricula management be in place (AACSB, 2017a). However, there is a lack of formal business processes to address how business schools can systematically manage their curriculum. This paper bridges that gap by presenting a formal approach. Lessons learned from the process and recommendations are also presented.

Keywords: Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business; AACSB Standard 8, business curriculum; curricula improvement model; business process model; curricula management.

INTRODUCTION

Most business school programs consist of a combination of university core curriculum requirements, a business core curriculum, and courses that are specialized to a major or area of focus. The business core curriculum provides a foundational skill set of several business disciplines and enables all business students to understand how each discipline interacts and is functionally dependent upon the others. Although this concept has been around since the earliest business programs began, the core curriculum itself must undergo regular review to ensure that it remains current and effective. Accrediting organizations now look for processes to measure learning outcomes and periodic review to regularly assess that curriculum supports the key stakeholders' requirements and the mission of the school. In spite of this need, formal business processes have been lacking in this area. The focus of this paper is to propose a business process model for curriculum management review and discuss an action-research example of its implementation. The purpose of the process is to improve the quality of the business curriculum and to ensure stakeholder engagement in the process. Gunderson et al. [8] point out that although there is significant literature on the development of curriculum, no step-by-step process that fulfills the requirements of the AACSB standards has been developed. This paper seeks to help bridge that gap.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows: First, a discussion on the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) curriculum management standards. Second, a formal business process model of the business core curriculum management is presented with implementation recommendations from past literature and the authors' experiences as well as proposed time frames for each stage in the process. Next, an action-based example of the implementation of the proposed core curriculum management process model is presented along with findings and lessons learned for future continuous improvement reviews of the business core curriculum. Lastly, concluding remarks summarizing the process, implementation, and "lessons learned" are discussed.

AACSB ACCREDITATION CURRICULA MANAGEMENT

AACSB

The AACSB is a non-profit organization founded in 1916. AACSB is the world's largest business education accrediting organization. The AACSB Accreditation Standards were initially implemented in 1919 with major revisions to ensure business education quality and ongoing improvement occurring in 1991, 2003, and more recently in 2017. The accreditation standards are separated into two sections. Section 1 outlines the criteria to be eligible for AACSB International Accreditation and Section 2 provides the standards for business accreditation. Section 2 is then further separated into four areas of focus:

- Strategic Management and Innovation (includes standards 1 through 3)
- Participants – Students, Faculty, and Professional Staff (includes standards 4-7)
- Learning and Teaching (includes standards 8-12)
- Academic and Professional Engagement (includes standards 13-15) [4].

Upon achievement of AACSB accreditation, business schools are required to enter the Continuous Improvement Review process managed on a five-year cycle beginning in the year accreditation was awarded. The school's continuous improvement review processes should focus on educational improvement, strategic management, and fulfillment of their mission [3] and should demonstrate high quality and alignment with the spirit and intent of the accreditation standards.

Standard 8 Curricula Management and Assurance of Learning

Standard 8 requires schools to establish and document systematic processes for designing, delivering, and improving degree program curricula to achieve their learning goals and to demonstrate that such goals are met. A quality curriculum management process should include input from key stakeholders and consider results from assurance of learning results, new developments in business practices and issues, and any revision of mission and strategy that relate to new areas of instruction. See Figure 1. [4, p.1].

Figure 1 Quality Curriculum Management Inputs.
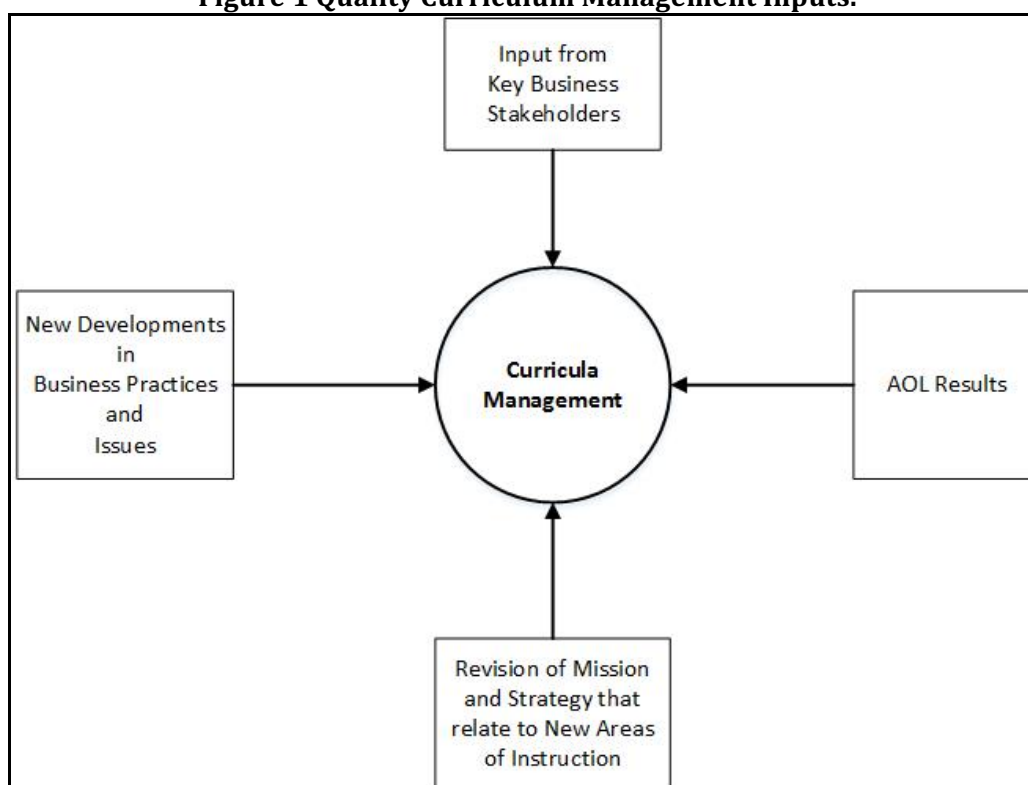
AACSB states:

The Continuous Improvement Review process minimizes the reporting burden on accredited institutions. The process creates an ongoing 'Continuous Improvement' focus signaling that once an institution has achieved AACSB accreditation, a process of documented continuous improvements in support of the stated mission and strategic management plan will sustain AACSB accreditation status [3].

Standard 9 Curriculum Content

An effective business school curriculum, as revised by a quality curriculum management process, tends to have many common learning experiences across institutions, which prepare graduates for business careers. The curriculum management process frequently tends to concentrate on many of the "broadly-defined skill and knowledge content areas listed below.

General Skills Area
- Written and oral communication
- Ethical understanding and reasoning
- Analytical thinking
- Information technology / Software applications
- Interpersonal relations and teamwork
- Diverse and multicultural environments
- Reflective thinking
- Application of knowledge

General Business and Management Knowledge Areas
- Economic, political, regulatory, legal, technological, and social contexts of organizations in a global society

- Social responsibility, including sustainability, and ethical behavior and approaches to management
- Financial theories, analysis, reporting, and markets
- Systems and processes in organizations, including planning and design, production/operations, supply chains, marketing and distribution
- Group and individual behavior in organizations
- Information technology and quantitative methods
- Other specified areas of study related to concentrations, majors, or emphasis areas

[4, p. 31-32].”

BUSINESS PROCESS FOR CORE CURRICULUM MANAGEMENT
The Importance of a Business Process Approach

A business process is a set of activities that support a specific organizational goal. The business process creates a method or roadmap to reach an end goal. A common component of successful business processes are interim deliverables or benchmarks as early indicators of success or failure of steps in the process. These early indicators allow for adjustment or revisions to efficiently manage the overall process. To be able to measure the success of a business process the output must be clearly defined. Business processes are generally described via flowcharts or business process models, which provide a diagrammatic representation of the sequence of activities that support the overall processes. Smith and Finger (2006) add to the definition by including that in addition to coordinating collaborative and transactional activities, a business process must deliver value to its customers. Business process models have been used in many different contexts to provide clear description to the participants in the process for how results are achieved. There are few formal business process models that document how improvements to business school core curriculum can be managed on an on-going basis.

Kundu and Bairi [11 defined a business process model framework for the management of the AACSB accreditation process. They purport that using a business process model provides a knowledge-richer methodology to communicate requirements and develops a deeper understanding of those requirements by the participants. Since judgments in the accreditation process are based upon formal documentation, a process approach provides a verifiable source for describing continuous improvement processes [9]. Cooper, Parkes and Blewitt [7] conclude that to achieve and maintain accreditation, organizations must adopt more formal processes for the purpose of engaging stakeholders.

AACSB standard 8 requires that “the school uses well-documented, systematic processes for determining and revising degree program learning goals; designing, delivering, and improving degree program curricula to achieve goals; and demonstrating that degree program learning goals have been met [3, p. 32].” They further state that “a curricula maps out how the school facilitates achievement of program learning goals [3, p. 32].

Business Process Approach to Curriculum Management

When a business program is part of a larger university, the curriculum typically consists of the university’s general education requirements, a business core curriculum, and the courses that pertain to the major. This paper addresses a flexible and robust process for managing the business core curriculum that can easily be adapted for either general education curriculum or the curriculum in the major. Figure 2 provides a business process model for schools going through initial accreditation or a continuous improvement review. This process model aligns with the guidance provided in AACSB’s Standard 8 and was developed in response to the need

for continuous improvement review at an AACSB accredited public university in the northeast United States. The proposed process provides tremendous flexibility in the identification of key stakeholders and which tools to use to solicit feedback from the key stakeholders.

Figure 2 Business Core Curriculum Management Process.
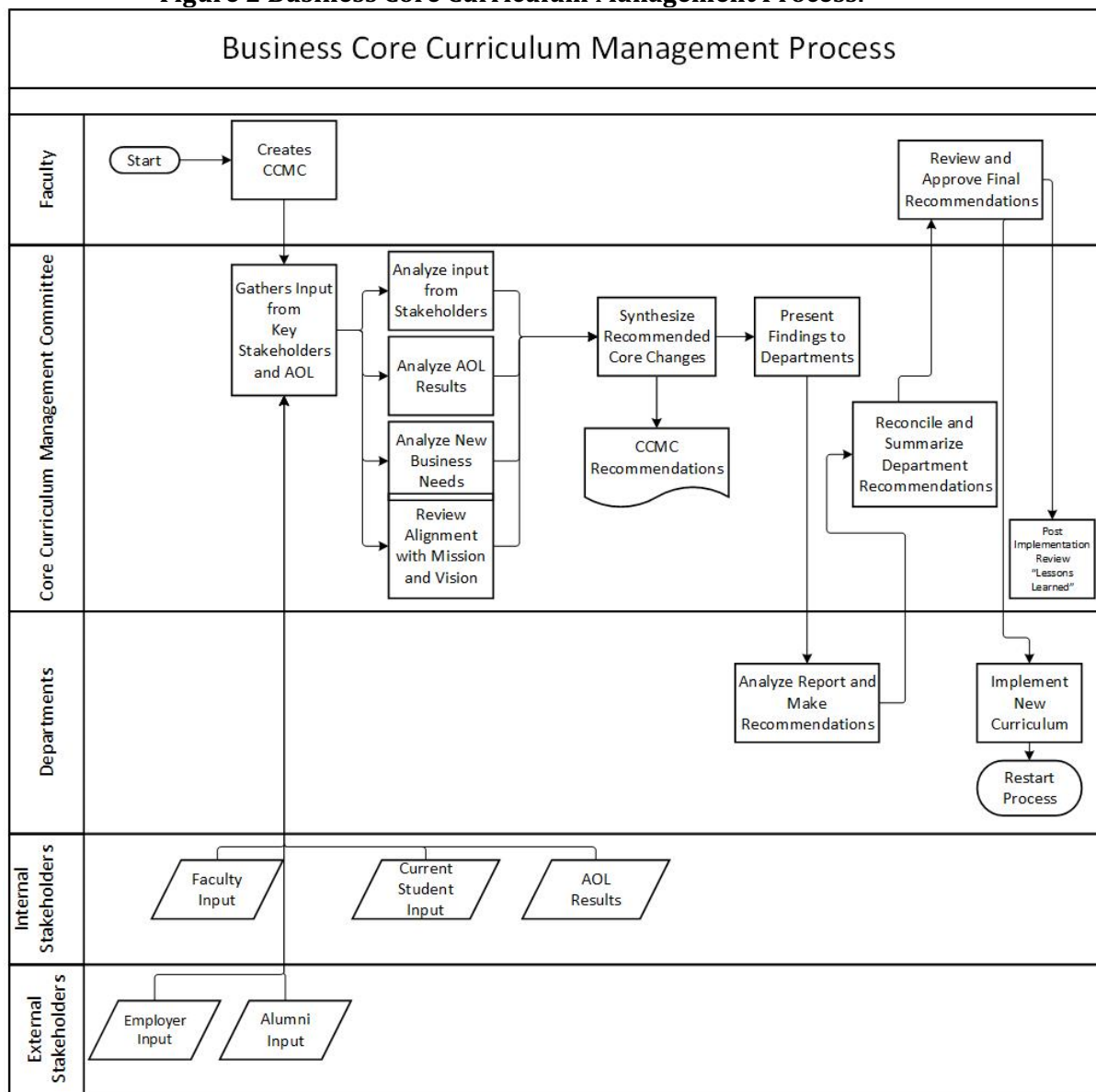
Core Curriculum Management Committee

The process starts with the creation of a core curriculum management committee (CCMC). The committee should be comprised of members from all business disciplines including both senior and junior faculty. Faculty can be selected by the Dean or volunteer to serve on the committee. Representatives from each department should serve on the committee. Gundersen et al. [8] recommend committee members possess significant diversity in educational backgrounds and faculty experiences. They also recommend that senior faculty be represented on the committee as they would tend to have vast knowledge of the curriculum in their disciplines. We recommend, based on our experience, both senior and junior faculty representation as well as faculty representation with industry work experience because, like Gundersen et al. [8] their different educational and personal backgrounds add tremendous value. Additionally, the involvement of junior faculty can be a rewarding, positive professional development experience for junior faculty. Faculty diversity of discipline offers advantages in sharing

experiences, understanding topics covered in other core courses outside each faculty's area of expertise, reducing the "silo" mentality, and building a sense of community. It is also desirable to have faculty who have experience teaching in different modalities, particularly when these are a requirement of, or a desired goal for, the curriculum under consideration. All faculty should be willing to serve, recognizing the significant time commitment for the endeavor to be successful. In fact, course release time and/or grant money should be considered to faculty serving on the committee [2,5,6]. Once the committee is established a chair should be identified. This process can be "kicked-off" at the beginning of an academic year and the creation of the committee could be done easily in the first month.

Input from Key Stakeholders

The next major step is for the committee to gather input from the business school's key stakeholders. The committee in conjunction with the school's administration should identify their school's key stakeholders. At a minimum, the key stakeholders should include faculty, students, alumni, and employers (including advisory councils which normally are comprised of employers and/or alumni). Other key stakeholders to be considered based on the school characteristics are parents and benefactors. If the committee is large, it is advisable to create sub-committees by key stakeholder. Each key stakeholder sub-committee should be responsible for gathering input and analyzing the results from their identified key stakeholder responsibility. Input can be collected several ways, for example surveys, interviews, brainstorm sessions, focus groups, total quality management techniques.

In addition to input from key stakeholders, the other key inputs to the curriculum review process are the results from the Assurance of Learning (AOL) process. AOL measures must already be regularly gathered and analyzed to evaluate the effectiveness of the existing curriculum towards meeting program learning objectives. While not a key stakeholder the committee could consider a comparison of geographic competitor schools, peer schools, and aspirant school's core business curriculum which they may find helpful in gaining insights into how other school's address curriculum content [8].

The recommended timeframe for gathering input from key stakeholders can be lengthy. First the committee needs to decide what tools will be used to gather the information. If the committee decides to gather feedback from a survey instrument, time needs to be allotted to develop and disseminate the survey. If interviews, brainstorming sessions, or focus groups are used, preparation time as well as time with the stakeholders needs to be considered. If the committee is large enough to permit sub-committees gathering input from the different key stakeholders, then the process can occur concurrently thus reducing the time length. Overall, this step in the process could take one to nine months. Once the tools are created they can be updated and re-used in the next continuous improvement review cycle.

Analysis of Key Stakeholder Feedback, AOL Results, and Business Needs

Once feedback from the key stakeholders is received, the results should be summarized within the sub-committees and then analyzed by the entire committee. Committee members should share the results with their department colleagues as well. Additionally, analyzed AOL results should be considered along with the key stakeholders' results. Any new business practices or issues that have come to the faculty's or administration's attention outside of the input from key stakeholders' results should also be taken into consideration. Lastly, any revision of the mission and strategy that relate to the curriculum management processed should be incorporated into the results and recommendations. Once all the feedback is analyzed, the results should be presented to the faculty and the Dean. This could be done by committee members reporting to their departments in department meetings, reporting the results in a

faculty assembly meeting, or other special meeting. Depending on how the input from key stakeholders was obtained and the statistical rigor in the analysis of the results, this step in the process could take some time. The recommended timeframe for this phase is one to six months. As input is sought from multiple key stakeholder groups, portions of the analysis phase could overlap gathering feedback from other key stakeholders.

Final Recommendations and Implementation

Once all feedback is received from the key stakeholders with consideration of new business practices and issues, AOL results, and any revisions to the school's mission and strategy, the results should be synthesized into a list of recommendations to be applied to the business core curriculum. These recommendations could include modifications to existing courses, addition of new courses, and/or removal of one or more business core courses. The recommendations may also result in recommendation(s) that apply to discipline courses outside the core courses. The final recommendations by the committee should be presented to faculty and the dean in a faculty assembly meeting. Faculty should review the final recommendations and approve. Once recommendations are approved, the proposed changes and implementation would become the responsibility of the department who has ownership of the course(s) that are being modified, added, or removed. Each department or discipline area can also apply the same core curriculum management process to the courses in their discipline or major. In fact, feedback solicited from the key stakeholders should include gathering information as it relates to both core and major courses.

Depending on the recommendations, obtaining approval from faculty and administration should be done within one to two months. Implementation of the recommendations could take much longer depending on the university's policies and procedures. Obstacles may include obtaining university approval, funding to staff the recommendations, course development, faculty expertise, and use of other resources. This implementation timeframe is unique to each school.

On-going Improvement

Once the recommendations are presented and faculty approval obtained, the committee should meet one more time to review "lessons learned" to improve the process for the next cycle. This is consistent with the optimized level of maturity modeling for management control based upon the method developed by the Software Engineering Institute [10] that requires that a post-implementation review be a part of any implementation. The improvements should be reflected in an updated business process, any modifications to the tools used to gather and analyze key stakeholder feedback should be noted. The time commitment for this last step could be one meeting and time to document the improvements recommended. The core curriculum management process is ready to begin again.

Overall, the proposed timeframe to allocate to the review of the core curriculum should be between five months (just over two semesters) to 19 months (approximately two and half academic years). See Table 1. The proposed timeframe is a guideline and dependent on the time commitment available from faculty and the tools used to gather, analyze, and synthesize the feedback from key stakeholders.

Table 1 Timeline for each phase.

Timeline for each phase	
Phase	**Approximate Time to Complete Phase**
Create Committee	One month
Gather Input from Key Stakeholders	One to nine months
Analyze Input from Key Stakeholders Analyze AOL Results Analyze New Business Needs Review Alignment with Mission and Vision	One to six months
Present to Findings to Faculty/Dean	One month (one meeting). Could be done at the end of the Analyze process.
Synthesize Findings into Recommended Changes	One month to six months
Present recommended changes to faculty and Dean. Receive feedback, modify recommendations, and obtain faculty approval.	One month to two months
De-brief to review "lessons learned" from the current process and recommend changes for improvement	One month. Could be done immediately after presenting recommendations and faculty approval.
Implement new curriculum	Determined by individual school

PROCESS IMPLEMENTATION AND RESULTS

The process was implemented by the School of Business at a regional, public comprehensive university. The university has approximately 11,800 students with approximately 2,100 students in the School of Business. The School of Business has 52 full-time faculty. The school is AACSB accredited offering majors in Accounting, Finance, Management & Organization, Management Information Systems (M.I.S.), and Marketing.

Committee Formation

The School of Business recently hired a new Dean and during his initial semester he addressed the school's vision, mission, and strategic initiatives. Curriculum Management Review was identified as a Strategic Initiative by the Dean and the Strategic Committee. School strategic initiatives were identified and sub-committees were formed to address implementation of these initiatives. Members from the Dean's Strategic Committee were assigned as chairs for each sub-committee. Faculty volunteered to serve on the sub-committees. The Core Curriculum Management Review sub-committee, hereafter referred to as the Core Curriculum Management Committee (CCMC), comprised approximately 12 faculty members and one administrative member. The administrator was a former faculty member and attended key meetings where recommendations were being brainstormed. Some of the 12 members were recruited to ensure representation from all departments. Five of the 12 members were untenured. However, two of the five had significant industry experience and several of the untenured faculty had previous academic experience at other institutions. Their contributions were significant during the process.

Gathering Information from Key Stakeholders

The Committee split into sub-committees, typically comprising two to three faculty, to collect data from students, employers, alumni, and faculty. These sub-committees worked primarily independently and contemporaneously. The tools used to gather the feedback were decided on a sub-committee preference. Separate surveys were created and distributed to each of the stakeholder groups. In addition, it is both important and required by AACSB to consider what peer schools and aspirant schools have incorporated into their curriculum and assess how appropriate that is for the mission of your own school.

Voice of the Employer

During an Accounting and Finance Career Fair an open-ended survey was provided to the employers. The survey informed the employers that the School of Business was strategically identifying common skills that all business students need prior to graduation. The employers were asked to identify and list the soft/social and technical skills that they want the students to possess when hiring the school's students. The questions focused on 1) Type of organization and 2) The soft/social and technical skills required. There should be a systemic method for gathering feedback from employers.

Twenty accounting and finance employers provided feedback. Table 2 provides a summary of the results. Excel, communication (oral) skills, writing skills, and analytical skills ranked as the top four skills students should possess upon graduating.

Table 2 Feedback from employers.

Feedback from 20 Employers at the Fall 2016 Accounting/Finance Career Fair	Total
Excel	14
Communication skills (speaking, presentation, small talk, interview)	12
Writing skills (letters, resumes, email, note taking)	12
Analytical skills/Critical thinking/problem solving	7
Detail oriented	5
Dress	5
Time management	4
Teamwork	4
Research Ref skills	3
Willing to ask questions	3
Networking	3
Organization	3
Quickbook	3
Confidence	3
Problem solving	3
Ability to prioritize	3
Leadership capabilities	3
Ettiquette - dining/email/phone	3

The Marketing department provided informal feedback from employers hiring marketing majors. Feedback included engagement, social skills, customer service, and communication (oral and written) skills as well as marketing specific skills. The M.I.S. department chair informally interviewed employers and provided feedback which included demonstration of initiative to learn outside of the classroom, interviewing skills, and scripting languages.

Voice of the Faculty

After reviewing preliminary feedback from the Voice of the Employer and the skills/knowledge items from the previous curriculum review, the CCMC members met for a half-day brainstorming session on what would be the skills and items the committee members would like to see in the curriculum if the business core curriculum was being developed from scratch. This resulted in 56 skills/knowledge items. A sub-committee then synthesized the list to 19 items based upon commonality of the topic/curricula concept (Table 3). A survey was then developed and sent out to the faculty. The survey had seven questions (Table 4).

Table 3 CCMC Recommended Core Business Skills/Knowledge.

	CCMC Recommended Core Business Skills/Knowledge
1.	Financial and managerial accounting concepts
2.	Communication skills
3.	Financial concepts
4.	Information systems concepts
5.	Marketing concepts
6.	Critical thinking and analytical thinking
7.	Entrepreneurial thinking
8.	Global and external awareness
9.	Interpersonal skills and awareness
10.	Legal environment of business
11.	Motivation and leadership
12.	MS Office
13.	Operations management
14.	Professionalism, etiquette, and time management
15.	Quantitative data analysis
16.	Research (primary and secondary applied)
17.	Sales skill
18.	Sustainability, social responsibility. ethics/moral issues
19.	Team work and organizational behavior

Table 4 Faculty survey.

Faculty Survey	
1.	What department are you in?
2.	Are you tenured, tenure-track non-tenured, non-tenure track?
3.	Below is a list of 19 general skills categories plus "Other" for a total of 20 categories. To illustrate what you think should be the emphasis of the Core Curriculum, score each of the categories with a minimum of 0 points and a maximum of 10 points. You must distribute exactly 100 points.
4.	If you scored points in the "Other" category, please identify the skill.
5.	Do you think the courses in the curriculum should change?
6.	What course or courses (if you suggest dropping a course(s) should be added?
7.	If you believe the list of core courses should change, which courses should be retained or dropped?

Forty-one faculty responded to the survey. Key findings are reflected in Table 5. The results of the faculty survey identified all the discipline introduction courses in the top 10 categories. Faculty in all five disciplines identified critical thinking skills in the top 10 categories. Microsoft Office skills were ranked in the top 10 in all the discipline areas except marketing, where it ranked 19 out of 20.

Table 5 Results from Faculty Survey.
Results from Faculty Survey

Sample Size		Total	Tenured	Non-tenured	Other
Sample Size	Accounting	15	4	6	5
	Finance	6	3	1	2
	Management	6	3	3	0
	Marketing	7	3	3	1
	MIS	7	6	0	1
	Total	**41**	**19**	**13**	**9**

<u>**Notes**</u>
(1) **Core Accounting/Communication/Information Systems/ Marketing Concepts** - All disciplines ranked in top 10
(2) **Critical Thinking Skills** - All 5 Disciplines ranked in the top 10
(3) **MS Office** - All disciplines ranked in the top 10 except Marketing; Marketing rated this last of 19
(4) **Interpersonal Skills and Awareness** - Accounting, Finance, MIS ranked in top 10; Marketing & Management ranked #11
(5) **Research** - Accounting Marketing, MIS ranked in top 10
(6) **Entrepreneurial Thinking** - Finance & Marketing had Entrepeneurial thinking in top 10; MIS ranked #11
(7) **Teamwork & Organization** - Marketing & MIS ranked in top 10;Finance ranked #11
(8) **Quantitative** - Finance & Management ranked in top 10
(9) P**rofessionalism/Etiquette/Time Mgmt** - Accounting & MIS ranked in top 10
(10) **Legal Environment of Business** - Management ranked in top 10; Accounting ranked #11
(11) **Global and External Awareness** - Marketing ranked in top 10.

Voice of the Students

The Voice of the Students sub-committee, started with the 56 items from the CCMC brainstorming session, the feedback from the Voice of the Employer, and the School of Business mission statement selected what they believed to be the 33 most important items (see Table 6). This resulted in a survey that asked students how well-prepared they thought they were related to 33 skills/topics. Most of the skills/topics were taken from feedback identified by employers as important skills students should possess by graduation. Students were asked to rank each individual skill/topic on a Likert-scale (1-5) ranging from Highly-prepared to Not-prepared at all. In addition, demographic data related to the student's major and class-level were asked.

Table 6 Student perspective of skills/topics.

	Student Perspective of Skills/Topics
1.	Ethics/Integrity
2.	Critical thinking
3.	Teamwork
4.	Management skills
5.	Ability to ask questions
6.	Ability to receive feedback
7.	Communication – oral
8.	Adaptability
9.	Time management/Organization
10.	Communication – written
11.	Diversity (from mission statement)
12.	Leadership (from mission statement)
13.	Professional dress/etiquette
14.	Motivation/Positive attitude
15.	Understand financial statements
16.	Big picture thinking
17.	Conflict resolution
18.	Understand cash flows
19.	Technical knowledge in your field
20.	Understanding current business environment
21.	Business research
22.	Marketing skills
23.	Information technology
24.	Data/Information security
25.	Quantitative data analysis
26.	Community engagement (from mission statement)
27.	Information systems
28.	Personal financial planning
29.	Theory to application
30.	Globalization and external awareness (from Mission statement)
31.	Networking
32.	Sales skills
33.	Entrepreneurship (from vision statement)

A total of 322 students responded. Ninety-one percent of the students were juniors or seniors. Thirty-three percent of the students were accounting majors, followed by 23% finance majors, 15% M.I.S. majors, 12% management majors, 11% marketing majors, and 6% listed Other.

In all but four categories greater than 50% felt highly-prepared or prepared. The top responses were in the following categories: Ethics/Integrity (79%), Critical thinking (78%), Teamwork (78%), Management skills (76%), and Ability to ask questions (76%). The categories that students ranked the lowest in highly-prepared or prepared were Globalization & external awareness (48%), Networking (47%), Sales skills (42%), and Entrepreneurship (39%).

Voice of the Alumni
No new feedback was solicited by the CMCC, but prior feedback was reviewed and included. In the previous year, a general survey covering many topics was sent to alumni. Included in the survey was a question asking alumni if there was a particular skill or attribute critical to your career that you wish would have received greater emphasis in your degree program at the university. One hundred and twenty-eight alumni completed the survey (54 accounting, 17 finance, 45 management, 12 marketing, and 0 M.I.S. alumni). Fifty-two of the alumni provided a relevant response to this question with 25 of the 52 questions pertaining to Excel skills. No other responses were remotely close to the skill.

Voice of the Advisory Council

Feedback from the School of Business Advisory Council and the Accounting Department Advisory Council was also provided. During the meetings council members provided feedback on the skills and knowledge that graduates should possess upon graduation. The School of Business Advisory Council stressed communication and Excel skills while the Accounting Department Advisory Council recommended advanced Excel skills and data analytics skills (e.g., IDEA software) as well as oral and written skills citing ability to express thoughts concisely and e-mail etiquette.

Other

As part of review of the business core curriculum, a spreadsheet comparing the university's business core curriculum and required courses by major to 12 other universities' business core curriculum and required major courses was created. The 12 universities included geographical competitor schools and top business schools and universities. This information was shared with all members of the committee at the start of the process. The results of the comparison indicated a high degree of similarity amongst business core curriculum.

Analysis and Recommendations

The sub-committees representing each of the key stakeholders provided summaries to the CCMC. The CCMC met a twice to review the findings. This information was disseminated by committee members to their departments either in a department meeting or via e-mail. The findings were informally shared with faculty at an Assurance of Learning (AOL) results review. Overall, there were several common themes received from the key stakeholders – communication, EXCEL, and teamwork skills ranked very high as skills needed by students.

AOL Results

As part of the on-going improvement process, each year the faculty and administration of the school has an offsite AOL results review to discuss progress towards achieving AOL goals and suggestions towards improvement in achieving those goals. Many of the faculty involved in the AOL learning outcome sub-committees were also involved in the CCMC. The AOL results review happened to occur at the same time the CCMC was synthesizing the results and starting to develop recommendations. Two recommendations related to curriculum were proposed at the AOL results review. First, the faculty suggested that key issue modules be created and shared across several courses in each department. Each module would be focused on a specific learning goal (e.g. teamwork, ethics, Excel) and developed as a drop-in addition to any course's online learning management system (e.g., Blackboard). The second recommendation was to develop a third-year cross-disciplinary course to reinforce the various disciplines beyond each student's major to improve their success in the fourth-year cross-disciplinary capstone course.

Current Business Core Curriculum and Practical Limits

The school has nine required business-core curriculum courses which include eight introductory courses and a capstone course. The introductory courses include two accounting courses (financial and managerial), and a course in each of the following: finance, law, managerial communications, management, M.I.S., and marketing. The capstone strategy course is intended to bring all of the students of each discipline back together to deal with business problems and issues on an interdisciplinary and team basis. Each course is three credits for a total of 27 credits in the business core. Due to general education requirements, the school is limited to a total of 30 credits that can be allocated to the business core. In addition, the school is limited to changing many of its core courses as there is an agreement between the four-year

state universities and the state's community colleges whereby many of the business core courses taught at the state community colleges contractually transfer in to the university.

Proposed Recommendations to the Business Core Curriculum

The major recommendation from the CCMC was a proposed new third-year integrated business course, focusing on business problem solving through projects and cases. Emphasis would be placed on teamwork, communication, critical thinking, ethics, and personal branding. Included in the course would be intensive training and application of targeted skills. After deliberations and thorough review, the committee achieved a consensus that twenty-five percent of the course content would cover development of Excel skills and 25% would extend communications skills beyond the introductory managerial communications course to include more focus on careers, personal and online identity, and further reinforcement of interviewing skills, particularly behavioral interview techniques. Approximately 6% would introduce a few moral and ethical theories and have the students solve an ethical business issue applying one of the theories. Another 6% would involve learning the stages of team building and conflict resolution. The course would include both oral and written communication assignments. The remainder of the course would involve integrated activities through cases. The cases reinforce thinking, presentation, Excel, ethics, and teamwork skills.

Outside of changes to the core curriculum and beyond the mission of the committee, there were other benefits from the process. Other faculty recommendations included encouraging cross-departmental collaboration in course development, encourage faculty "Brown Bag" lunches where faculty could share topics/ concepts taught in courses. This would include courses that include team work, Excel, and ethics assignments covered across the curriculum. Also, the CCMC recommended that each department review feedback from the key stakeholders and AOL results and identify where appropriate assignments could be added to reinforce or develop these skills. Examples of incorporating these finding from the key stakeholders, business needs, AOL results, and the school's mission and strategy into the curriculum outside of the core courses include the management department adding an entrepreneurship major and minor, and the accounting department requiring each course to contain at least two Excel assignments to reinforce Excel skills. Additionally, introducing IDEA software into an accounting applications elective course was recommended. This is an example of extending application of the process to specific disciplines. Recommendations for curricula improvement were based upon the highest priority gaps identified from all of the feedback. Specific recommendations by course were documented for subsequent review within future analysis of AOL results.

Lessons Learned

This was the first time a formal business process was used to review the business core curriculum. The planning and design took approximately one semester while the implementation of the core curriculum management review process covered another full semester. Some of the input from key stakeholders had been gathered in a prior semester. A significant amount of time was dedicated by CCMC members during the implementation of the process. The CMCC met several times each month including two four-hour meetings. This does not include the time spent by the sub-committees, analysis, documentation, and other written and verbal communications. None of the committee members received course load relief or grant money. There was a sense of urgency by the committee to meet a deadline. Now that a formal process is in place, the start of the next cycle will begin much sooner in the continuous improvement review process.

One of the success factors was sub-committee flexibility. The work of gathering feedback could

be done simultaneously or the work of one subcommittee could inform other subcommittees. This allowed later work to take advantage of what was learned from previously surveyed stakeholders. In particular, feedback from employers and alumni informed the questions asked of faculty and students.

Feedback from several committee members indicate that a key success factor was the existence of a clear process in place for the committee to keep the diverse faculty group focused on the assigned task, while minimizing wasted efforts and "mission creep." Any endeavor whose goal is to seek substantial cross-disciplinary faculty buy-in for significant and substantive changes requires a large amount of energy. A substantial share of that energy must be focused on highlighting acknowledged weaknesses and the need to win the "hearts and minds" of all faculty stakeholders as much as address the technical issues.

Other positive feedback obtained through the "lessons learned" process was the benefit of specific goal setting having a constructive impact on meeting deadlines. Expectations and deliverables for subsequent meetings were clear and helped maintain focus and commitment.

Areas for improvement identified in the "lessons learned" stage centered on improving our data gathering. The surveys asked overly broad questions. Going forward more narrow questions to gather specific information should be utilized. This would take advantage of the lessons already learned in both process and substance.

CONCLUSION

A significant amount of time is required from the committee members. Further, to implement bold and significant change into the business curriculum requires involvement of all stakeholders as well as leadership support, release time, and supplemental financial grants to faculty members significantly involved [2,5,6]. One curriculum review of a school's marketing curriculum and using a zero-based approach took two years including time during the summer. Their approach collected input from employers, alumni, and other industry contacts to identify the necessary skills and knowledge demanded [5]. The nature of the academic environment does not lend itself to consistent progress, especially when considering or proposing changes to the status quo.

A business-process-based approach to curriculum management provides a well-defined, documented method for ensuring that curriculum is reviewed on a regular basis. As part of that review it ensures that each of the key stakeholders is represented and their perspective is considered. The process utilizes business processes familiar to the external stakeholders and reinforces the implementation of business methods amongst faculty. Prior to implementation of the business-process-based approach, the business core curriculum had very little review that was only conducted irregularly. Courses were modified without communication across disciplines and without data to support which learning outcome(s) the changes supported. Through the implementation of a business-process-based approach, the results are regular reviews of the business core curriculum that is both data driven by key stakeholders input as well as guided by AOL results, changing business practices, and the school's mission. Leadership support, in combination with periodic reminders and progress reports, are also key to business process success.

This paper introduced a flexible business process for reviewing the business core curriculum that can be applied to other curriculum reviews. A real-life implementation of the business process was presented along with findings and recommendations.

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