

## **Martin V. Smith School of Business and Economics**

### **Program Learning Outcomes Assessment Project 2005-2006**

The MVS School of Business & Economics (the “School”) prepares students to work in a variety of “for-profit” and “non-profit” organizations. The School emphasizes the liberal arts of *critical thinking*, *cooperation* (working with others), and *communication* (oral and written English) in the context of traditional core courses such as accounting, economics, finance, information systems, management, and marketing. Because the School stresses the acquisition of interdisciplinary knowledge, students are required to take courses outside the traditional business and economics curriculum; e.g., Biology, Chemistry, English, History, Political Science, Psychology, and Sociology.

As the School’s graduates enter the workforce, they will apply knowledge to problems that require the analysis and evaluation of accounting, economic, and financial data. More important, they will be able to effectively comprehend group dynamics and work with others in group settings, organize and prepare effective management and other written reports, and make effective oral presentations.

#### **A. The School’s Program Goals and Student Learning Outcomes**

The School offers two undergraduate degrees: a Bachelor of Arts in Economics (120 units) and a Bachelor of Science in Business (120 units). Both programs require a student to complete 48 units of General Education courses and 6 units of American Institutions (e.g., U.S. History or U.S. Political Science). In addition, the B.A. in Economics requires a student to complete core courses in Economics, Calculus, and Probability and Statistics; the B.S. in Business requires core courses in Accounting, Business Law, Economics, Management, Marketing, and Statistics. Within each degree program, students have the opportunity to pursue areas of special interest: in Economics, students may emphasize General Economics, Environmental Resource Economics, International Economics, Managerial Economics, or Quantitative Economics; in Business, students may emphasize Entrepreneurship, Global (International) Business, or Marketing.

The School seeks to provide its students with entry-level employment opportunities in a variety of public and private organizations and with admission opportunities to professional schools of business, law, and public management or policy. A distinguishing aspect of the School’s economics and business programs is the requirement that students complete courses outside the traditional business and economics curriculum. Thus, the School’s graduates are expected to be competent in:

- Comprehending or recognizing general business problems;
- Applying accounting, economic, financial, management, and quantitative knowledge and tools to the analysis and resolution of those problems;
- Understanding that business problems occur within a cultural, ethical, and political context and that moral and social values will usually affect business decisions;
- Designing, constructing, and presenting appropriate business plans that are consistent with sound business, economic, and social principles and values;
- Proposing and discussing plans, reports, and other work products and accepting revisions and critical comments from others.

Various student learning outcomes can be demonstrated in the core courses. As examples: accounting (which embraces *critical thinking*) requires students to be able to record business and economic transactions and prepare effective financial statements from raw transactional data. Business law (which embraces both *critical thinking* and *communication*) requires students to analyze business disputes, apply common law legal principles to predict the dispute resolution outcome, and prepare an appropriate report for the benefit of business management. Finance (which embraces *critical thinking*) requires students to understand time value of money and capital budgeting principles for investment discrimination purposes.

The direct assessment of student learning outcomes in specific accounting, business law, economics, and finance courses can be accomplished by using published (textbook authors) or locally (CSU campus) developed tests. A principal drawback to specific skill testing is the lack of ecological validity: in the business world, problems are not usually compartmentalized; instead they almost always cross over and into diverse disciplines and subject areas. For this reason the School has chosen to assess student learning outcomes in BUS 499, which is the “capstone” course for the B.S. in Business (ECON 499 is a similar capstone course for the B.A. in Economics). The capstone course is useful to the assessment process because it requires students to integrate all business core subjects (use *critical thinking*) and apply their individual and collective knowledge in a case study and simulation environment. The course also stresses *communication* and *cooperation* (working with others).

During the course of subsequent semesters it is the School’s intention to assess student learning outcomes in accounting, business law, economics, and finance. This will

be accomplished through specific objective subject matter tests and student confidence inventories.

## B. BUS 499 Data and Analysis

For the business capstone course (BUS 499), students' written communication skills were evaluated on both a group and an individual basis using a four-point scoring rubric. Admittedly, the scores are subjective and statistical tests of discrimination may be inappropriate. The mean class score results for the most recent five classes are:

Semester	No. of Students	Group Writing Quality	Group Writing Analysis	Individual Writing Quality	Individual Writing Analysis
Spring 2006 (WC)	29	3.2	3.0	3.1	2.8
Fall 2005 (WC)	18	2.5	3.0	2.9	2.6
Fall 2005 (JS)	25	2.8	3.0	2.5	2.1
Spring 2005 (WC)	24	3.0	3.3	2.8	3.2
Fall 2004 (WC)	10	3.0	2.5	3.1	2.5

[WC denotes class taught by Prof. William Cordeiro; JS denotes class taught by Prof. Jeffrey Stone]

Ideally, students who are graduating college seniors should exhibit very good-to-excellent analytical and written communication skills. Accordingly, the scoring rubric would suggest “touchstone” scores of at least 3.5 for both individual quality and individual analysis. The actual scores (shown in the above table) are disappointing. Clearly, there are discernable and noticeable analytical and writing deficits.

## C. Action Plan

In response to these data, the Director of the Smith School has called a meeting in October 2006 for all tenure track faculty members and the Smith School's Assessment Officer. We will discuss these data and consider possible future corrective actions, including:

- Reviewing all course syllabi to assure that writing has an appropriate emphasis within each course;
- At the Spring Faculty Meeting (for all Smith School faculty members), discuss the implications of these data and offer suggestions to improve students' writing experience—such as the submittal of drafts;

- Revisit the structure of the Smith School curriculum to determine if writing has an appropriate emphasis within the curriculum;
- Meet with faculty colleagues in the English Program to discuss our data and seek suggestions for improving our students' writing.

**BUS 499 Capstone Course—Assessing Communication (Writing) Competency**

BUS 499 requires students to prepare individual and group projects. Thus, using the rubric (below) students were assessed on the basis of both individual and group performance with respect to two variables: the *quality of writing* (i.e., composition, grammar, and syntax) and the *quality of analysis* (critical thinking, including report integration).

<b>Scoring Level</b>	<b>Quality of Writing</b>	<b>Quality of Analysis</b>
<b>1</b>	Poorly structured, with numerous grammatical and syntactical errors throughout the report.	Little or no analysis and flecked with inconsistent statements throughout the report.
<b>2</b>	Quality is inconsistent; some portions of the report are well written, others are poor.	There is some analysis but the analysis contains inconsistencies.
<b>3</b>	Generally good, but with a few grammatical and syntactical errors scattered throughout the report.	Good analysis with good integration throughout the report.
<b>4</b>	Well written from beginning to end; the ideas are well organized and there are smooth transitions throughout the report. A pleasure to read.	Excellent analysis and integration throughout the report.