Master's Level Programs

The work and input provided by our graduate program reviewers has been very helpful in our improvement progress. As pointed out by the reviewers, there are a number of competitive advantages of the Lubbock and TTU community, such as cost of living, the university's strong influence and high regard, and the accessibility of leadership in a small community atmosphere. These are indeed strengths that can be capitalized upon in the recruitment of high quality graduate students.

Some changes that are relevant to our graduate programs have occurred in the interim between our report and the point at which the committee's reply to our self-review was received. Those changes will be reviewed first, and highlighted when consistent with reviewer recommendations.

In complete agreement with recommendations, the IMBA program has been discontinued due to low enrollment. External funding has been obtained to develop and reconstitute the program as a much stronger and more focused academic program that furthers the mission of the college.

Other efforts for improvement of our MBA graduates includes the institution of an "Enhancement Program", involving seminars to supplement the student learning with topics that are too narrow and peripheral to fit into a full course. Students are required to have 20 credits from this program, and they may choose among topics such as Crisis Management, Human Resource Management, Team Building, and Managing Challenging Personalities. Ten credits are earned by most students in the extensive orientation program that runs the week prior to classes. Although this change was implemented prior to the receipt of reviewer feedback, it is keeping with the goal of increasing the rigor of the MBA program.

Similarly, there are two curricular changes that are expected to improve the educational experience for students. The addition of BA 5291, like the Enhancement Program, covers additional topics in business that are not typically a part of a BBA degree, and that do not fit well as full topics for a course in the MBA curriculum. Additionally, the Business Strategy course was moved from the chronological end of the curriculum to the beginning. It provides an integrated overview of the business functions that are part of later coursework. This change is expected to aid students in painting the broad picture of what they are expected to learn and to be able to do by the end of their MBA training. Having a clear
cognitive map up front should facilitate the acquisition, recall, and integration of information as students move through the program. Similarly, the orientation program was dramatically expanded to several days, so that students can start on the same page in terms of workload expectations and common understanding of the mechanics of the MBA program.

Consistent with the suggestions of the review committee, MBA internship rates have gone up substantially. All students for whom an internship is a reasonable requirement are required to have an internship as part of their MBA. Exceptions to this requirement include students in dual degree programs such as JD/MBA, MD/MBA, international students who are unable to work in the US, and students who already hold full-time management or executive positions (as in the Working Professionals Program).

The aforementioned changes have been undertaken in the interim review period. It is reassuring that they are quite consistent with the perspective of our external reviewers. However, extending beyond these changes, the MBA has been made more accessible for working professionals (WP-MBA), with tremendous growth in this channel of MBA students. The WP program students consist largely of mid-level managers who have been out of school for at least 4 years. This has changed the quality of classroom dynamics, where peer input is more credible, based on experience; coursework expectations are higher, consistent with employment-related work expectations; and with an applied framework for understanding implications of business theory and research.

There are also suggestions for Master's programs that have not been addressed in our ongoing quality improvement efforts. Reviewer feedback suggested that we manage dual degree programs in closer coordination with other colleges. We believe that more may have been done on this front than was made clear in the initial review. However, the MBA committee also agrees that stronger collaboration between administrators in dual degree programs would improve student experience.

Lastly, there are constant efforts to improve the quality of the MBA program which may bear highlighting. The MBA committee was modified in the past few years so that the Dean appoints members, rather than having the committee membership function as a faculty assignment by area. This change is intended to enhance the leadership of the committee and to foster productive change. The MBA Committee has multiple threads of discussion regarding improvement and change, which are driven forward with several meetings each semester. For example, the use of a case-based method for content delivery in the capstone class is being considered, with the possibility that a complex case could be integrated at the outset of the MBA program and perhaps throughout. Case work could then be completed in the capstone, with the student having much deeper knowledge of critical cases, allowing the better integration and application of business principles. Although these changes have not yet been decided upon, a faculty development seminar will be conducted in March, through Harvard business school, to train Rawls faculty on the use of case-based teaching.
Doctoral Program

The graduate program review also had valuable feedback regarding our doctoral program, along with some questions that warrant clarification. Issues of GMAT score level were one area of concern. We currently look at an applicant’s academic aptitude through a review of grades, test scores, work, and life experience. These form the basis for admissions decisions. Although we have high standards, we do not simply require a specific GMAT score because doing so would be equivalent to setting a single criterion for admission which is prohibited by Texas law.

Improving recruiting efforts was also a point of focus for the review team. Our Ph.D. committee feels that our applicants for the doctoral program are of high quality, as reflected by their success in the program. We attribute this to a concerted effort to retain those highly qualified Ph.D. applicants that apply. Because they receive our offer of admissions prior to that of others, high caliber students who apply early are being successfully attracted. Nonetheless, in agreement with the review, we recognize that a major constraint is the lack of resources to be competitive in attracting students from across campus.

The review team recognized that our faculty members have received numerous college and university teaching awards and honors. We are fortunate to have faculty members of high distinction such as Shelby Hunt, Ph.D. and Peter Westfall, Ph.D., both of whom are Horn Professors.

An important change that has happened since this review is worth noting. A position of Director of PhD programs for the college was created to aid in the coordination of recruitment, retention, and graduation efforts. We are pleased that a senior faculty member of high distinction has accepted this role.

Of some concern was a 46% attrition rate for 1999-2008 derived from values provided in our Graduate Programs Review documents. The attrition rate for the time period of Fall 2001 to Spring 2007 was 34.1%. Students left the program for a variety of typical reasons, many of which had nothing to do with unsatisfactory performance. This is much lower than the 46% referenced in reviewer feedback, which covered the 99-08 period. It appears that the attrition rate referenced by the program review team was calculated as (1 - Graduation Rate) within the 99-08 period of review. This would overestimate attrition, because it counts those still in the program as of 2008 as part of the attrition group. Actual attrition rates from 2001-2007 ranged from a low of 13.3% to a high to 76.9%. Our graduation rate for the same time period was 64.6%. This time period provides a clearer picture because all but 1 student had exited the program.

Of further concern to the review team the issue of doctoral student teaching load was brought up. Interviews with doctoral candidates were referenced as a primary source of information eliciting this concern. Consequently, the teaching load has been examined carefully. In the 2011-2012 academic year, 2 of 52 PhD students taught multiple sections. Both of the sections taught were lab sections of a larger class taught by faculty. The Ph.D. committee has
similar concerns and would like area coordinators brought into the conversation as they are the individuals who determine teaching schedules.

The review also raised a concern regarding student productivity in recent years. The actual quantity of publications is not consistent with the results of this review, with current students having more than 40 publications (sole authored and with faculty) in addition to more than 80 conference presentations and proceedings. Note also that more than 140 publications are listed in Appendix K by doctoral students.

An important factor in competing for and retaining top quality doctoral students is the availability of financial resources. Beginning Fall 2012, PhD students on assistantship will pay $600 for tuition and fees each semester, half of their prior cost. The review team was also concerned about resources being directed towards our Master's programs away from the Ph.D. programs. That concern is one that we share. Resources are now being redirected from MBA assistantships to Ph.D. assistantships.