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DEVELOPING A PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY, CAREER GOALS AND PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS: AN MBA CAPSTONE WITH A CAREER PREPAREDNESS FOCUS

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ABSTRACT

Critics of modern MBA programs maintain that the programs are not adequately preparing candidates to enter the workforce and start a career. Many programs have a capstone where students integrate the materials from their other courses to solve a business problem. We propose a capstone course where an integrated experiential project is only part of the course. During the experiential action learning component, the students will not only solve a business problem, they will learn the problem solving process. The other parts of the course are used to build a professional identity and establish career goals. Activities and techniques include reflective writing, self-assessments, goal setting and planning techniques. When the course is successfully completed, the student will know who they are, what they 'bring to the table', have a timeline for their careers, and have some experience in solving real world problems.

INTRODUCTION

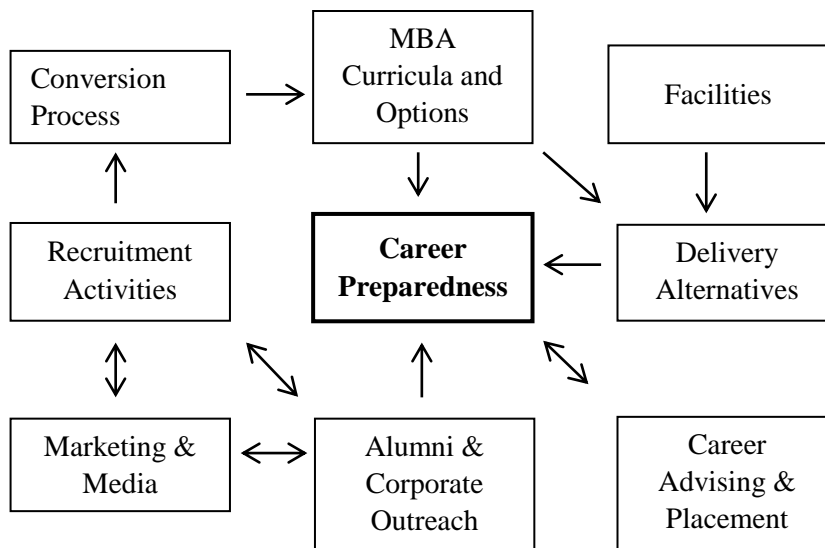
Career preparedness should be an objective of any effective MBA program; however the curricula and student experience do not always reflect this goal. Despite the fact that some indicate that MBA programs have changed (Kopas & Purcell , 2003), Mintzberg's criticisms (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2004) that students are not being adequately prepared for the challenges they will face, seems to still be relevant (Laud & Johnson, 2013). Even the top ranked schools are criticized for maintaining functional silos, not integrating the curriculum and lacking experiential components and themes (Navarro. 2008). To overcome these obstacles our principle approach is experiential learning with a focus on skill set development. The use of experiential approaches in MBA programs is generally thought to be a positive complement or alternative to traditional 'Sage-on-a-stage' lecturing, case studies or discussion of collections of published articles. (Bell & Leberman, 2010). Furthermore, experiential approaches and skill set development become more important as schools accept students with less experience 'real world' experience (Badenhausen, 2009), a reality in today's competitive MBA market. Among still other reasons to adopt an experiential learning approach is because it has been shown to be effective in integrating social responsibility, ethics and sustainability, our other potential themes, into a curriculum (Baden & Parkes, 2013; Gundlach & Zivnuska, 2010).

During our current MBA redesign we are taking a theme-based approach. Our primary theme is 'career preparedness'. In this paper we will briefly present an MBA Program Design Strategy (see figure 1). We will explore various challenges and issues that arose during our journey through the process and open the floor to explore various curriculum approaches that keep the focus on career preparedness, experiential learning and skill-set

development. Along the way we will share some innovative approaches that we found in our research or developed ourselves.

In addition to an experiential learning and skill set development focus, we consider it equally important for the curriculum to be current and relevant in order for our MBA graduates to be prepared. To this end we are taking efforts to design curriculum options that reflect the skill sets required by organizations now and in the future. To this end we are repositioning our concentrations. We are committed to continuously develop new courses and perhaps concentrations to address current issues. Finally, although all elements of the curricula concentrations, courses, etc. should reflect the ‘career preparedness’ theme by staying current with an applied, skill building focus, we propose that the capstone course focus on career preparedness.

Figure 1
Overview of Career Preparedness in MBA Program



CAREER PREPAREDNESS IN AN MBA PROGRAM

Where should ‘career preparedness’ reside in an MBA program? Answer Everywhere! It should be an underlying theme of the program. However it fits in better in some places than others and specific ‘career preparedness’ activities can be included as stand-alone components. Figure 1 shows some specific elements that can help or hinder career preparedness.

MBA CURRICULA STRATEGIES FOR CAREER PREPAREDNESS FOCUS

There are many ways that an MBA program can be designed and implemented. In this section we will list and briefly comment on the ‘top ten’ that we examined in our MBA redesign.

Orientation ‘Boot-Camp’

Orientation programs can help with MBA retention and success. (Sherman. 2013)

Experiential Exercises in courses

Many MBA programs are moving towards experiential learning (Livadas. 2014). Experiential based programs are linked to career mobility. (Ryan, Silvanto & Brown. 2013)

Skills Based Approaches in courses

MBA programs are being criticized for not developing managerial skills (Varela, Burke & Michel. 2013), whereas competencies are related to career success (Langbert. 2011). Establishing a philosophy of life-long learning regarding managerial skills is a worthwhile goal (Varela, Burke & Michel. 2013)

Self-Assessments/Key Issue Reflections in core courses

Reflective practices can help students uncover, understand and develop their values (Waddock & Lozano. 2013), and values can influence career choices (Vigoda-Gadot & Grimland. 2008). Reflection can also prepare older MBA students manage career transitions, an important responsibility often overlooked in MBA programs (Hallam, Hallam, Rogers & Azizi. 2009).

Management Portfolio (self-analysis and career plan) in core course

The ability to manage a career path is an essential part of an individual's employability (Preethi & Raj. 2013). Career development is important in maintaining a high quality of work life. (Li & Yeo. 2011), and students with specific and challenging career visions are more satisfied with their jobs. (Holtschlag & Masuda. 2011). There are many meanings to MBA career success and it is advantageous for schools to recognize this plurality (Hay & Hodgkinson. 2006), therefore students are encouraged to set their own definitions of success.

Experiential Capstone Consulting Project

Consulting projects are considered an effective mean to develop relevant skill sets (Bullough. 2014; Chaves & Yacovelli, 2008; Neiva de Figueiredo & Mauri. 2013 There are also challenges with experiential learning projects, such as those stemming from the different goals of the schools and outside organizations that they partner with, (Bell & Leberman. 2010; Kamath, Agrawal & Krickx, 2008)

Concentrations that are or will be in Demand

Business Schools are in a state of transition (Howard & Cornuel. 2012) with a key criticism being they are teaching to old models of the workplace.

Ability to have two concentrations

The MBA is looked at as a source of opportunity in the modern 'boundaryless' career (Kelan & Jones. 2009). Students can use multiple skill sets to design their own career path.

Electives that reflect current topics and skill sets. It is essential to align the competencies required on the job with those being developed in the curricula. Many schools have curricula that are not aligned with the competencies being sought by employers (Kumar & Jain. 2010).

Cross Discipline MBAs

There is increasing demand for MBA skill sets in areas such as sports management, music management and Health care (Hess, 2013; Hilsenrath, 2012).

In addition to the curricula strategies, there are things that can be done regarding non-curricular support to facilitate the above curricula ideas. Some non-curricular issues include close connection with corporate partners, Dean's Advisory Board, internship programs, career advising & placement, mentoring, career issue seminars, executive speakers program, and alumni events. Orientation programs can help with MBA retention and success. (Sherman, 2013) All of these activities are important and supported by the literature and fit into figure 1 but are beyond the scope of this article.

INTEGRATED EXPERIENTIAL CAPSTONE COURSE

Integrated capstone courses have become an accepted final course in MBA Programs. In our program we expanded the course to include additional career development components. This course is designed to prepare the MBA candidate for their career by professional development exercises, career planning activities and integrating the various disciplines that the MBA candidate has studied with a focus on a particular application in the real world. Students will establish their professional identities through reflective assignments and self-assessments. Next, they will learn use various goal setting techniques to develop a career plan. Finally, students will develop an action-learning project where they can apply new skills in an area of professional interest. Students may choose to investigate an issue at their place of work, or undertake research that will lead them to new fields or career interests. Many others have outlined action learning and experiential projects, therefore in this section we will briefly explore the career preparedness elements.

Reflection and Self-Assessment

The purpose of the reflection and self-analysis section of the course is to help the student formulate a professional identity with specific career competitive advantages that can be utilized and exploited within organizations. This will be done with a series of exercises and essays. The exercises are intended to provide insight. The essays are reflective pieces where students articulate well-justified personal stances regarding issues of ethical behavior, cultural diversity, sustainability and other current issues in organizations.

Some examples of areas where self-assessment scales and exercises are available: Self-esteem, entrepreneurial aptitude, ethics (i.e., identifying 'guiding principles' Cowden, Hartman & Desjardins, 2008), Global Manager Potential (i.e., Spreitzer, McCall And Mahoney, 1997), Holland Personality Types, Big Five, DISC Inventory, MBTI, Emotional Intelligence, Decision Making Style (i.e. Rowe, Boulgarides & McGrath, 1984), Adaptability (i.e. Ard, Donovan, Plamondon & Pulakos, 2000), learning style, conflict management style, decision making style, and undertaking a personal SWOT analysis.

Goal Setting and Career Planning

Student use the self-assessment and reflection to develop and/or revise their career goals and plans of action, identifying opportunities for growth and development. The section of the course will start with a formal introduction to planning and goal setting identifying the tools and techniques available. Students will then use what they have learned in the self-assessments to determine areas of career interest and potential. Next, in groups, students will help each other develop short, mid-range and long term goals. Along with the goals will be an

exploration of the strategies and tactics that can be used to reach these goals. Additional career related activities and ideas will be introduced such as networking and contacts, mentoring and internship programs.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have outlined component elements of an MBA Program with a formal focus on 'career preparedness'. The ideas presented are just some of the many approaches that we found in use or being considered by successful programs. The key is to match the set of tools and activities to your program. Full time day students with assistanceships and no experience will need different things than those in a part-time night/weekend program that has students with years of experience.

We also proposed a capstone course approach that expands on the experiential learning idea and incorporates professional identity and career planning elements. The capstone project can provide some experience in planning and conducting a project, and having the career elements in the same course provides a context for that learning.

THE IMPACT OF SPECIALIZED COURSES ON STUDENT RETENTION AS PART OF THE FRESHMAN EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

First-year college experience seminars that are part of an effort to increase retention and graduation rates are becoming ubiquitous in higher education. Retaining students is an important imperative from the perspectives of business operations and reputational program quality consideration of an institution. This manuscript compares fall to spring retention rates of students enrolled in five different classifications of freshman experience courses at a mid-sized regional university. The empirical results provide evidence that students taking specialized freshman experience course in business, agriculture, nursing, education, or other discipline-specific areas associated with a major have the highest retention rate. Generalized freshman experience courses or English courses perform in the middle grouping with respect to student retention. Seminar university transition courses modified in support of transfer students yields the lowest retention rate. The specialized courses in business yield a retention rate that is almost 9% higher than seminar courses targeting transfer students.

INTRODUCTION

In a study published by the National Student Clearing house Research Center in April of 2015, it was reported that of all students who started college in the fall of 2013, 69.6 percent returned to college at any U.S. institution in the fall of 2014 (a measure known as the persistence rate), and 59.3 percent returned to the same institution (a measure known as the retention rate). Thus, 30 percent of students who start college will not continue beyond the first year, a disappointing figure for students and parents who start college with the goal of graduation in mind. Low retention also creates inefficiency from the perspective of a college. Strategically, it is cheaper and more conducive to reputation enhancement for an institution to retain a student than to continue to compete for new students via the recruitment process.

In the state of Texas, the General Academic Institutions Formula Advisory Committee has recommended that state funding for general academic institutions during the 2016-17 biennium should be based on seven defined metrics to include six-year graduation rates and retention rates to 30, 60, and 90 semester credit hours (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2015). This focus on retention, with financial implications for universities, illustrates the increasing demand for institutions to focus on student success and retention. The purpose of this manuscript is to compare student retention rates in general versus specialized freshman courses designed to enhance the college experience. The manuscript is organized into five sections. The first section offers a brief review of the literature. The second section puts forth background information relating to the courses that are part of the research cohort. The third section describes the methodology and data. The next section applies the empirical results. The final section is the conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Colleges and universities have been working to find ways to improve retention rates and to help students with the transition to college for many years. Mentoring programs, new student orientations, learning communities, first-year seminars, and many other initiatives have been implemented with this goal in mind. Early research on the subject of retention determined that persistence and retention rates could be improved by increasing student involvement, and the level and quality of a student's interactions with faculty and staff (Astin, 1977). Tinto suggested that institutions can improve retention rates by having a strong commitment to quality education and building a strong sense of inclusive educational and social community on campus (1993).

The earliest freshman seminar is said to have been offered at Lee College in Kentucky in 1882 (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996). In the 1940's, freshmen seminars were utilized to provide freshmen opportunities to collaborate with faculty members with similar interests on research opportunities as a form of engagement (Levine, 1985). In the 1960's, these courses were virtually nonexistent due to the individual accountability philosophy of this decade, but fiscal and academic challenges of the mid-1970's including decreasing numbers of traditional-age students, demographic shifts in the entering student population, a commitment to access for students previously excluded from higher education, the alarming student dropout rate which peaks between the freshman and sophomore year, and a renewed concern about the quality of undergraduate education created demand for the resurgence of freshmen seminar courses (Gordon, 1991; Barefoot & Fidler, 1996). Since the 1970's, John Gardner's work with the University 101 program at the University of South Carolina, his research publications, and his later founding of The Center for the First Year Experience (FYE) and Students in Transition has been influential in the growth of such courses across the nation (Ryan and Glenn, 2004).

A first-year seminar has been defined as a course intended to enhance the academic and/or social integration of first-year students (Barefoot, 1992). Ryan and Glenn (2004) suggest that these courses fit into two broad categories: academic-socialization models, where courses built around academic themes are used for the purpose of academic socialization, and learning strategies models, where active learning skills (such as note taking, textbook reading, and time management) are taught. Barefoot (1992) suggests a classification system that offers five basic types of courses:

- *Extended orientation seminars.* Often called freshman orientation, college survival, college transition, or student success course, these courses include an introduction to campus resources, time management, academic and career planning, learning strategies, and to student development concerns.
- *Academic seminars with generally uniform academic content across sections.* This type may be an interdisciplinary or theme-oriented course and sometimes is part of a general education requirement. The primary focus is an academic theme, or discipline, but will often include academic skills components, such as critical thinking and expository writing.
- *Academic seminars on various topics.* This seminar's content is similar to the previously mentioned academic seminar except that specific topics vary from section to section.
- *Preprofessional seminars or discipline-linked seminar.* These seminars are designed to prepare students for the demands of the major or discipline and the profession and are oftentimes taught within specific disciplines, professional schools, or majors.

- *Basic study skills seminars.* Generally offered to academically underprepared students, these seminars focus on basic academic skills, such as grammar, note taking, test-taking strategies, and critical-reading techniques.

Some institutions offer first-year seminars that are a hybrid of two or more of these types, so hybrid seminars are now considered a sixth type (Young and Hopp, 2014). The National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition has surveyed institutions across the nation every three years since 1988 to collect data on first-year seminars (Young and Hopp, 2014). One finding of the year 2000 survey administration was the proportion of institutions offering academically-focused first-year seminars has increased, while seminars classified as extended orientation seminars has decreased (Hunter and Linder, 2005). Also, an increasing number of institutions report offering first-year seminars linked with other courses, from 17.2% in 1994 to 35.7% in 2009 (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996; Hunter and Linder, 2005).

George D. Kuh (2008) identified first-year seminars and experiences as one of ten high-impact educational practices to increase rates of student retention and engagement. He noted that the highest-quality seminars or experiences include critical inquiry, frequent writing, information literacy, collaborative learning, and other skills that develop students' intellectual and practical competencies.

Greenfield, Keup, and Gardner (2013) refer to first-year seminars as the curricular anchor for several other educationally effective practices, including service-learning, learning communities, common intellectual experiences, writing-intensive experiences, and undergraduate research, among others. This suggests that one benefit of students enrolling in first-year seminars could be the connection to these other opportunities that enhance the students' chances for success in college.

Ryan and Glenn (2004) found that freshmen who enrolled in strategy-based seminars were significantly more likely to re-enroll the following fall as compared to freshmen who enrolled in a socialization-focused seminar or in no seminar. Further, freshmen who enrolled in the socialization-focused, academic theme-based freshman seminar were less likely to re-enroll the following fall than students who were not enrolled in any seminar.

One finding of the 2012-2013 National Survey of First Year Seminars was the need for increasing academic rigor in all first-year seminars (Young & Hopp, 2014). The authors noted that it is important for first-year seminars of any type to provide students with an appropriate level of challenge and that students will not be well prepared for the challenges they will face in the remainder of their academic career and beyond if there are low expectations in courses they take when they first arrive on campus, including the first-year seminar. In the book, *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter*, the authors state the vast majority of students learn more when performance standards require a level of effort greater than what students would ordinarily put forth if left to their own devices. Being stretched in this way helps students cultivate habits of the mind that become the foundation for pursuing excellence in other areas of life (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Whitt, 2005).

BACKGROUND

The research cohort for this study is derived from a public university located in the Southwestern part of the United States. The institution is mid-sized with a total enrollment of approximately 9,500 students which includes 7,500 undergraduate students and 1,200 undergraduate business students. The university requires students to complete six hours in the core curriculum designated as the component area option, known as core 90, by the Texas

Higher Education Coordinating Board. This is commonly referred to a general education requirement in other states. During New Student Orientation (NSO), freshmen are encouraged to enroll in a freshman seminar course to satisfy part of this core curriculum requirement. In some disciplines, students are encouraged to enroll in discipline-linked, pre-professional seminars, or approved courses within the college (e.g., English majors are required to complete ENGL 1302 for this core requirement). The following courses are approved by the curriculum committee to satisfy the component area option requirement:

- AGRI 2300 – Personal and Professional Leadership Development
- BUSI 1304 – Business Communication (taught in the College of Business, with general information provided about campus resources and occasional discussions about college success topics)
- CS 1301 – Introduction to Computer Science (taught in the College of Agriculture, Science and Engineering)
- CIDM 1301 – Introduction to Information Science (taught in the College of Business, with general information provided about campus resources and occasional discussions about college success topics)
- ENGL 1302 – Academic Writing and Research (students must first complete ENGL 1301, Introduction to Academic Writing and Argumentation)
- ENGL 2311 – Introduction to Professional and Technical Communication
- FIN 1307 – Introduction to Personal Finance (taught in the College of Business, with general information provided about campus resources and occasional discussions about college success topics)
- IDS 1071 (1-3 hours) – Elementary Group Dynamics (this is the University's first-year seminar course with most sections focusing on basic study skills, some sections geared toward transfer students, some are linked as a part of a learning community, and other sections discipline-linked seminars catering to student in areas such engineering, nursing, and education)
- PHIL 2303 – Logic (taught in the College of Fine Arts and Humanities)

As the university works to improve retention rates, it is important to determine whether a student's choice to satisfy a core curriculum requirement during the first semester could impact retention. This research can also be useful to other institutions as they evaluate their first-year seminars and look for alternatives to engage students and help improve retention rates. The hypothesis of this study is that specialized courses within a major (e.g., BUSI 1304, CIDM 1301, and FIN 1307 in the business school) yield a higher retention rate than generalized courses (e.g., IDS 1071) based on the expectation that students in specialized courses are more engaged with access to content and faculty related to major area of interest. The alternative hypothesis is that there is no difference in retention across different freshman course classifications. The alternative hypothesis supports the notion that the first year experience in college is dominated by the often difficult transition from high school or junior college to university life, which is more of a maturation process than an academic engagement issue.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The institution for the study is a regional university with a Master's Comprehensive Carnegie Classification. The public institution is located in the Southwest and has an enrollment of approximately 9,500 students with 58 undergraduate degree programs and 40 graduate programs, which includes a doctoral program in agriculture. The student body is

56% female, 62% Caucasian, 23% Hispanic, 6% African-American, 2% Asian, and 7% as other.

Seventy-six courses approved as core 90 options and offered during the fall semester of 2014 were classified into five categories for the purpose of this study. The five categories are as follows: (1) BUSINESS (includes BUSI 1304, CIDM 1301, and FIN 1307); (2) SPECIALIZED (includes discipline-linked seminars in specialized majors outside of business); (3) TRANSFER (IDS 1071 courses tailored for transfer students); (4) GENERAL (all IDS 1071 courses that are not linked, targeted to a group, or discipline-specific); and (5) ENGLISH (ENGL 1302, ENGL 2311, and PHIL 2303). The university Office of Institutional Research is the data source. The primary variable for this research is the percentage of students enrolled in each fall of 2014 class that returned to the institution and enrolled in spring of 2015 classes (fall to spring retention). Table 1 puts forth a mean retention rate percentages by course classification of 86.54 for BUSINESS, 85.82 for SPECIALIZED, 77.87 for TRANSFER, 83.69 for GENERAL, and 82.76 for ENGLISH. Sample sizes by course classifications range from a low of three courses in the TRANSFER classification to a high of 24 courses in the SPECIALIZED classification.

The Kruskal-Wallis test is sensitive to differences among means in the k populations and is extremely useful when the alternative hypothesis is that the k populations do not have identical means. The null hypothesis is that the k retention rates in the different course classifications come from an identical distribution function. For a complete description of the Kruskal-Wallis test, see Conover (1980). The specific equations used in the calculations are as follows:

- (1) $N = \sum_i n_i$ with $i = 1$ to k
- (2) $R_i = \sum_j R(X_{ij})$ with $j = 1$ to n_i
- (3) $R_j = \sum_i O_{ij} R_i$ with $i = 1$ to c
- (4) $S^2 = [1/(N-1)] [\sum_i t_i R_i^2 - N(N+1)^2/4]$ with $i = 1$ to c
- (5) $T = (1/S^2) [\sum_i (R_i^2/n_i) - N(N+1)^2/4]$ with $i = 1$ to k
- (6) $| (R_i/n_i) - (R_j/n_j) | > t_{1-\alpha/2} [S^2(N-1-T)/(N-k)]^{1/2} [(1/n_i) + (1/n_j)]^{1/2}$

where R is the variable rank and N is the total number of observations. The first three equations find average ranks. Equation (4) calculates the sample variance, while equation (5) represents the test statistic. If, and only if, the decision is to reject the null hypothesis, equation (6) determines multiple comparisons of retention rates across the various course classifications.

RESULTS

The retention rate for core 90 business courses and specialized courses from other majors have a statistically significant higher retention rate than any other classification. The retention rate of general IDS classes and the English (EPML) classes are in a second grouping for retention. Finally, the lowest retention rate is for IDS classes focusing on transfer students.

The non-parametric empirical approach yields an equation (5) test statistics of 34.63 (p -value = .0001), indicating a significant difference in the average rank order of retention rates across one or more of the five classifications. Table 2 presents a summary of the average rank value of retention rates for each course classification. Assuming an alpha level of .05, the empirical results from equation (6) indicate there are three groupings of course classifications with retention rates that are statistically different.

The most statistically significant observation from Table 2 is the relatively high retention rate observed in BUSINESS and SPECIALIZED course classifications. The result

provide evidence that freshman experience courses that focus on specialized content relating to the area of student interest will facilitate fall to spring retention. The implication for business schools is significant given that most institutions do not have curriculum options for freshman business students that are part of the major. Courses in history, communication, math, science, political science, English, and other common body of knowledge content tend to drive freshman retention rates at most institutions. Business programs might lose a significant percentage of students before they ever take a single course in the business curriculum. Institutions that offer a freshman experience seminar course as part of the common body of knowledge can significantly increase retention if there are course options designed for specific majors or that are specialized. Introductory courses in business communication, financial planning, and computer information systems are a few options that appear to facilitate business program retention. The business program is not the only area that can benefit from program specific content in the freshman seminar. The empirical results indicate that specialized courses in nursing, agriculture, education and other areas also yield fall to spring retention rates that are higher than other classifications.

The course classifications with the second highest retention rate are GENERAL and ENGLISH classes. The difference in average retention rate for BUSINESS and SPECIALIZED courses versus GENERAL and ENGLISH courses is less than four percent. The rank order approach employed with the nonparametric test statistic yields a statistically significant difference. It is not surprising that student retention rates are higher in freshman seminar courses that offer specialized content related to a major over courses that cover general information or explicit English language content. English language courses are often difficult for students transitioning to university curriculum and general content in a freshman experience course can easily become perfunctory.

The most interesting result from the study is the low retention rate from the TRANSFER classification. The research sample institution modifies the freshman experience seminar for transfer students in recognition that most of the transfer students are from junior college environments and need help adjusting to university expectations but this adjustment is not the same as a traditional high school student joining a university as part of a freshman cohort. The research results clearly show TRANSFER as the course classification with the lowest retention rate. The results imply that the transition from the junior college environment to university is a significant adjustment for many students. Simply modifying a freshman experience seminar with content that aligns with being a transfer does not appear to be an effective retention tool. The non-traditional traits often associated with transfer students might require a completely different engagement approach than is often put forth in a new student university experience seminar. Time management, financing college, tutoring services, and support services via resources such as childcare are needs that are often critical for the success of transfer students as they move into a new university environment. Although transfer students are usually more mature than traditional freshman, the results from this research indicate a more aggressive approach with respect to engaging content and support is in order to facilitate success in retention.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research is to compare student retention rates of five classifications of courses at a mid-sized regional university. The courses are part of a common body of knowledge component in the university curriculum that can include a freshman experience seminar. The five course classification include applied introduction to business courses, specialized introduction courses in majors that are not in business, general freshman seminar courses, introductory English and philosophy courses, and college

experience seminar courses targeting transfer students. The statistical methodology incorporates a nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis test to compare the retention rate of the course classifications in the research cohort.

The results of this study provides evidence that specialized courses in business and other majors yield the highest fall to spring retention rate while courses designed for transfer students have the lowest retention rate. One policy implication is that institutions seeking to increase retention should find ways to engage students in course content specific to a program major as part of the freshman seminar experience. A second policy implication is to recognize that, despite being more mature than traditional new incoming freshmen, transfer students are a high-risk group requiring explicit academic content and student support services in order to facilitate persistence.

One of the limitations of the study is the observation that all of the data is from one academic institution. A more robust study for future research is to obtain data from multiple institutions. The inability to account for differences in rigor across the various courses in the sample cohort is a second limitation of the study. The curriculum in courses classified as GENERAL are likely to be driven more by participatory considerations while BUSINESS and SPECIALIZED courses are least likely to apply credit for simple participation. A confounding variable issue that mitigates the empirical research in the study is a lack of controlling for the impact of other freshman courses in math, history, political science, lab science, and related common body of knowledge course on freshman retention. An avenue for future research is to examine retention across the start of two academic years via a more robust empirical approach instead focusing on the less traditional fall to spring retention rate. Exploring four and six year graduation rates of an incoming group of new students as a cohort is another avenue for future research.

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Table 1 Summary Statistics For Student Retention					
Classification	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	n
BUSINESS	86.54	0.076	73.30	100.00	9
SPECIAIZED	85.82	0.086	72.20	100.00	24
TRANSFER	77.87	0.117	66.70	90.00	3
GENERAL	83.69	0.050	74.40	92.30	23
ENGLISH	82.76	0.091	65.20	95.50	17

Table 2 Comparison of Retention Rates by Course Classification (Average Rank Order Value of Retention)				
BUSINESS	SPECIAIZED	TRANSFER	GENERAL	ENGLISH
44.78 **	41.80 **	23.81 -	36.04 *	36.47 *
Notes: Asterisk(*) and negative signs (-) signify difference in average rank values as follows: (1) ** Indicates classification with the highest statistically significant retention rate derived from equation 6. (2) * Indicates classification with the second highest statistically significant retention rate derived from equation 6. (3) - Indicates period with lowest statistically significant retention rate derived from equation 6.				

BEHAVIOR EDUCATION COMFORT AND EASE: AN UNDERLYING THEME IN ORGANIZATIONAL

Larry Faulk, University of Arkansas-Fort Smith

ABSTRACT

The study of Organizational Behavior (OB) is a very complex subject as it attempts to explain the actions of people within the organizational context at the individual, group, and organizational level while taking into account the interplay between the levels. When surveying the texts used to teach the field at the undergraduate level, one can find an underlying theme which explains a great deal of this behavior: comfort and ease. Simply put, many theories in OB suggest that people do things because it is easy for them or it makes them comfortable. This paper reviews several popular textbooks used to teach Organizational Behavior at the undergraduate level and discusses the subjects therein within this framework of comfort and ease. Subject areas that are covered include ethics, organizational commitment, organizational culture, job satisfaction, decision making, leadership, and motivation. The theories in these areas are obviously providing more complex explanations, but it is argued that comfort and ease are a common focus. This paper does not suggest that comfort and ease are the basis of all behaviors, but they do provide significant guidance in understanding, explaining, and influencing behavior within organizations.

THE INSTRUCTOR'S ROLE IN EARLY ALERT SYSTEMS

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ABSTRACT

This study offers a theoretical discussion of the instructor's role in facilitating student success via Early Alert systems. The instructor reaction to a struggling student is critical as it may be only the instructor who is in a position to identify a potential threat to student academic success. Early Alert systems afford to instructors an opportunity to facilitate a community response to a student's crisis situation, and to offer the student a second chance for success. Because the instructor inherently has the opportunity and authority to intervene, the instructor may positively impact a college or university's efforts to improve student retention.