

Backstage Pass

A Look at How "EFIB Dominance" is Impacting Academic Quality in the CoB

For a number of years, the CoB's core curriculum has included ECO 336, or international economics. Some of the CoB's economists have argued that globalization trends demand that the CoB's students be exposed to a course in international economics, and for years now, they have been. At the same time there have also been small factions among the CoB faculty that have argued for an option in the core curriculum that allows students to use the international course in each major (e.g., international management, etc.) to fulfill this "international" portion of the CoB's core. Whenever these factions raised a voice, the economists would attempt to hush that voice as quickly as possible. To do otherwise would reduce the number of student credit hours taught by the CoB's economists -- a situation that would ultimately threaten the size and composition of that group.

During the 2006-07 academic year a group of faculty in management and marketing sensed an opportunity for change. As a result of their efforts, a proposal was put forward to the CoB's Undergraduate Programs Committee that would allow CoB students to use the international courses in the various majors to fulfill the ECO 336 requirement that is currently in the core.¹ After some discussion and resistance from UGPC member Bill Gunther, an economist, that proposal failed by one vote, mainly because the sponsoring group neglected to include the international finance course among the other options listed.

The group from management and marketing has returned in 2007-08 to give the proposal another go. They also have gained the support of Tony Henthorne, the Chair of Tourism Management and the Interim Chair of Management and Marketing, as well as that of Interim Dean Alvin Williams. To initiate the 2007-08 effort to replace ECO 336 in the core, Williams sent the following 4-Oct-07 e-mail to members of the CoB's Management Team:

From: Alvin Williams [mailto:alvin.williams@usm.edu]
Sent: Thursday, October 04, 2007
To: steven.r.jackson@usm.edu; 'George Carter'; 'Tony Henthorne'
Cc: 'Joseph Peyrefitte'; stanley.clark@usm.edu
Subject: Undergraduate Programs Committee

Colleagues:

The UPC is considering a request made by the faculty last year regarding ECO 336. It was suggested that in addition to ECO 336, that MGT 495 (Inter. MGT), MKT 495 (Inter. MKT) and FIN 472 (Inter. FIN) be included as choices to satisfy the international requirements in the CoB core. Before acting on this request, the UPC would like to determine if the course objectives of the suggested alternatives are 'common' enough to satisfy the CoB's expectations in the core international class. To respond to the UPC, it might be advisable for the professors of record for all of these courses to meet and develop maybe 5-8 course objectives (of which 4-5 would satisfy the overall international requirement in the core and the remaining 2-3 goals are course-specific - MKT, MGT, FIN). There should be some 'common' global content that all CoB students get from any course selected to satisfy the international requirement. Are objectives listed on the current ECO 336 syllabi? Do the objectives vary based on the professor of record? There should be common objectives for all CoB core courses taught by multiple professors.

¹ See www.usmnews.net for reporting on this proposal.

How can we make this happen? Let me know your thoughts.

Alvin J. Williams, Interim Dean
College of Business
University of Southern Mississippi
118 College Drive #5021
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
601.266.4634 voicemail / 601.266.5814 FAX
alvin.williams@usm.edu

As the e-mail above indicates, the 2007-08 proposal includes FIN 472 (international finance) along with the international options in management and marketing. Williams' e-mail also lays out a plan for making the shift from ECO 336 to a choice between ECO 336 and the others options a smooth one.

The very next day, 5-Oct-07, Henthorne responded to Williams' call for action with the following e-mail:

From: Tony Henthorne [mailto:Tony.Henthorne@usm.edu]
Sent: Friday, October 05, 2007
To: 'Alvin Williams'; steven.r.jackson@usm.edu; 'George Carter'
Cc: 'Joseph Peyrefitte'; stanley.clark@usm.edu
Subject: RE: Undergraduate Programs Committee

It should not be a problem for Joe (MGT495) and I (MKT495) to get together to make certain our objectives are 'common' enough. We would then just need to 'add' in FIN472. This would allow us all to have a common set of objectives, while still maintaining course specific content. We would need a copy of the ECO336 outline. I would be happy to head up this effort.

Tony L Henthorne, Ph.D.
Chair, Tourism Management
Interim Chair, Management & Marketing
Professor of Marketing
University of Southern Mississippi
118 College Drive, #5091
Hattiesburg MS 39406 USA
Phone: 01.601.266.4635
Fax: 01.601.266.4630
Email: tony.henthorne@usm.edu

In his e-mail (above), Henthorne not only indicates that standardizing the objectives of the various courses would be a trouble-free task, he also indicates that CoB Interim Associate Dean Joseph Peyrefitte is also supportive of the general idea *and* that he (Henthorne) would be willing to spearhead the effort.

Seeing the positive response from Henthorne, about one week later Williams e-mailed the following request to EFIB Chair George Carter:

From: Alvin Williams [mailto:alvin.williams@usm.edu]
Sent: Saturday, October 13, 2007

To: 'George Carter'; 'Tony Henthorne'
Cc: lola.ingram@usm.edu
Subject: FW: Undergraduate Programs Committee

George:

Based on the e-mail below, could you please forward syllabi for ECO 336 and FIN 472 to Tony Henthorne? Thanks.

Alvin J. Williams, Interim Dean
College of Business
University of Southern Mississippi
118 College Drive #5021
Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001
601.266.4634 voicemail / 601.266.5814 FAX
alvin.williams@usm.edu

Two days later, on 15-Oct-07, Carter responded to Williams' request. In doing so, Carter copied his response to EFIB faculty. Carter's response, shown below, went much further than to simply provide Williams with the requested assistance. Carter took the occasion to lecture, some would say piously, Williams on the function of a core curriculum.²

Date: Mon, 15 Oct 2007
From: George Carter <george.carter@usm.edu>
To: 'Alvin Williams' <alvin.williams@usm.edu>
Cc: cob-ecfinintbus@usm.edu
Reply-to: EFIB Department <cob-ecfinintbus@usm.edu>
Subject: [Cob-ecfinintbus] RE: Undergraduate Programs Committee

Dean,

I will do so.

I recommend that you consider the Undergraduate Programs Committee proposal to eliminate ECO 336 as a core course.

An accreditation strength of our degree programs has always been the international dimension, part of which has been ECO 336. As you know, AACSB has had two emphasis areas: globalization and ethics. In addition, international has been a strength in our ETS scores. This proposal will only weaken that student performance.

Of more concern to me, and I hope to you, is the trend to remove foundation material essential to modern business management. BA 303, Regression, has been eliminated as a subject matter for our students. It is inconceivable that the cause and effect analysis and trend projection of regression is not in our graduates' toolboxes. Upper level courses cannot address certain topics without that tool. As a

² Some would argue that by criticizing the proposal to allow substitutions for ECO 336, a proposal that Williams supports, in "the presence of EFIB faculty," Carter took an action that had the potential of diminishing Williams' authority in the CoB. Sources we spoke to argued that it is likely that such was Carter's intent, given the fact that Carter governs his own domain using a military-style respect for "chain of command."

result, each of the disciplines must find a major course to cover regression with the consequent dilution of the primary course material. Without rigorous sequencing of major courses, some disciplines may have duplication in order to address regression in two or more courses in order to do justice to the respective subject matters. I estimate that each course would have to devote at least two weeks of course time to regression to have a cursory handle on that tool.

Now, international economics is to be removed as foundation material. Where will MGT 495 and MKT 495, for example, obtain the foundation international trade and finance knowledge to responsibly address international management and international marketing topics. International trade and finance will have to be introduced into those courses with the resultant dilution of management and marketing issues. Even a cursory presentation of international trade and finance will take a month to introduce. Do MGT 495 and MKT 495 have so much slack that a month on foundation material can be inserted without serious attrition of course material? I do not think so.

There is a trend to address curriculum topics as isolated events. A curriculum is a coordinated whole. I strongly recommend that you work with the Undergraduate Programs Committee to gain a proper perspective on their responsibilities.

George

In his statements on core curricula, Carter not only warns Williams about the perils of eliminating the ECO 336 requirement, he also schools Williams on the pitfalls associated with the CoB's prior decision to eliminate BA 303 (regression analysis). Carter lumps the two decisions -- one past and the other present -- together, and he (Carter) characterizes them as the makings of "a trend to remove foundation material essential to modern business management." Carter finds it inconceivable that the basics of regression analysis are "no longer in our [CoB] graduates' toolboxes." Carter argues that, as a result of scuttling BA 303, various major field courses must now make room for discussion of regression analysis, and without "rigorous sequencing," some disciplines "may now have duplication in order to address regression in two or more courses in order to do justice to the respective subject matters."

Next, Carter grills Williams about locating a place for students to gain knowledge on international economics, should that course (ECO 336) be removed from the core. According to Carter, international trade and finance will have to be introduced into the international courses in management and marketing in order for management and marketing majors to have a proper foundation for international courses in those two disciplines. As Carter writes, even "a cursory presentation of international trade and finance will take a month to introduce," which will result in a "serious attrition of course material" in those two courses (MGT 495 and MKT 495).

Carter closes on his high horse by stating that there "is a trend to address curriculum topics as isolated events" rather than "a coordinated whole." By implication, Carter characterizes Williams and Henthorne as *isolators*, and not *coordinators* like himself.

How does one respond to Carter's arguments? A look at the record reveals that Carter's arguments ring hollow. Let's begin in the middle, with Carter's comments about removing ECO 336. There Carter explains to Williams that removal of ECO 336 will require that management and marketing professors spend at least one month in each semester's MGT&MKT 495 offerings explaining the basics of international trade and finance. By saying that management and marketing faculty will have to teach a month's worth of international trade and finance in both MGT 495 and MKT 495 should ECO 336 be removed from the core, Carter is assuming that, under the *status quo*, students in MGT 495 and MKT 495 have already had ECO 336 when they enter those two courses. A check of the "Course Descriptions" in the 2007-08 version of the *USM Undergraduate Bulletin* reveals the following information about MGT 495 and MKT 495:

495. International Management. 3 hrs. Prerequisite: MGT 300. A course concentrating on the comparison of problems in management in the U.S. with those of multi-national firms.

495. International Marketing. 3 hrs. Prerequisites: MKT 300. The economic, political, and cultural aspects of international business operations.

The key information that is revealed from the 2007-08 version of the student bulletin is that ECO 336 is **not** a prerequisite for either MGT 495 or MKT 495. All that is required to enter either of these two courses is the principles-level course in each area. These are MGT 300 and MKT 300, respectively. So, Carter's alarmist response to Williams appears to be a dissemblance. If ECO 336 is removed from the CoB's core, professors in management and marketing will not be doing anything at that time that they are not already doing now.

Carter also presents a selfless façade to Williams by expressing concern for unnecessary duplication in management and marketing courses, a result that would occur with the elimination of ECO 336 from the CoB's core. A look at economics' own course requirements reveals that Carter should tend to his own garden. Why does the economics major have to take **two** courses in **international economics**?

336. Survey of International Economics. 3 hrs. Prerequisites: ECO 201 and 202. An introductory study of why nations trade, tariff and nontariff barriers to trade, commercial policy, balance of payments accounting, exchange rate determination, balance of payments adjustment, and the international currency system.

436. International Economics. 3 hrs. Prerequisites: ECO 336. An intermediate study of international trade theory and international monetary theory. The pure theory of trade and comparative advantage, economic integration, international resource movements, foreign exchange markets, balance of payments adjustment mechanisms, and international monetary systems.

According to sources, the jaded would say that more IE courses employ not only more economists, but also more *international economists*, and that this is exactly what the current core-curriculum requirement of ECO 336 also does. Who are these international economists? Sources indicate that they are the Charles Sawyers, Farhang Niroomands, Sami Dakhlias, Akbar Marvastis, etc., of the EFIB -- that is, all of the characters USMNEWS.NET readers have been studying up on in recent months.

And, if Carter were truly concerned with unnecessary duplication, wouldn't the EFIB have properly sequenced its principles-level offerings years ago?

201. Principles of Macroeconomics. 3 hrs. A study of a nation's economy. Topics include inflation, unemployment, gross domestic product, business cycles, and international influences. (CC 2113)

202. Principles of Microeconomics. 3 hrs. A study of market systems. Topics include supply and demand, the behavior of firms and households in different market structures, government intervention in markets, barriers to trade, and foreign exchange markets. (CC 2123)

Sources say that by not requiring ECO 202 before ECO 201, Carter is forcing all of the CoB's students to face some unnecessary duplication of material, duplication that could cost ECO 201 students weeks worth of time learning additional material.

Carter also professes concern over other dilution of important material resulting from the elimination of BA 303 from the books. In doing so, Carter ignores any possibility of integrating the 1.5-hour BA 303 course into the existing BA 301 course, which is a 3-hour requirement of all CoB students. That is easily done, and is what occurs at many other business schools in the U.S. There is no reason CoB students have to graduate with a regression-less toolbox or less knowledge of their major disciplines. It's a false choice, and one set up by Carter.

About all that's left to do is to address the high horse comments at the end of Carter's e-mail. There he schools Williams on the difference between addressing a curriculum as a series of isolated decisions and treating a curriculum as a coordinated whole. Here's what we know: You can have all of the "coordinated whole"-style curricula you want, but if you staff the courses the way Carter often staffs the EFIB's, then it's all for naught. What do we mean? Carter currently has, or has had, John Lambert -- who holds an *online* PhD in *management* from Grenoble University -- teaching ECO 336, the very same precious course that Carter thinks the CoB revolves around. Not only that, Carter has employed Lambert to teach other economics courses that he is unqualified to teach, as well as managerial statistics courses. Recent complaints about a lack of CoB student understanding of stats usually point right back to Lambert's inability to handle the task. Next, add Carter's decision to hire *biologist* Susan Doty, wife of former CoB Dean Harold Doty, to teach various sections of ECO courses, and you have all you need to understand Carter's real feelings about all matters curriculum. No matter how pristine the curriculum is, if you staff it with unqualified instructors, as Carter often does, you are no closer to academic bliss than you are if the curriculum is a series of isolated blunders.