Reflections on the Digital MBA Program

At the conclusion of the spring 2005 semester, the CoB faced a "Hybrid MBA" program proposed by CoB dean Duane Harold Doty. The proposed program would put selected MBA courses in an online format with "limited" face to face contact and/or video links.

At the outset of the faculty meeting in question, Professor of Finance James T. Lindley distributed a two page document titled "Issues That Have Not Been Resolved on Hybrid MBA." During the discussion, Lindley presented nine (9) points that had not, to that point, been addressed by those pushing the program [summarized here]:

1. Integrity of Testing/Test Security
2. iTech Issues – lack of support resources
3. Substitute or Competitor – cannibalization of existing MBA program
4. Training – use of required technology
5. Loads – Will courses be in- or out-of-load?
6. Accreditation – How will this affect SACS and AACSB?
7. Resources – Where will faculty resources come from? New hires or heavier loads?
8. Shortchanging Undergraduates – We are already providing less attention to undergrads, and this MBA proposal will compound the problem.
9. Shortchanging Faculty – Requiring more teaching time and effort from faculty means less time for research, an already tenuous issue.

Real answers were not forthcoming in that meeting, at the subsequent meeting (fall 2005), or at any time in between. At the conclusion of fall 2005, the newly-named Digital MBA program was ramrodded through the CoB faculty, mostly thanks to faculty in management and marketing and at the coast campus.

In the subsequent months, we have learned a bit about the Digital MBA delivery method. First, we have learned that nobody – especially not Duane Harold Doty – is willing to address problems. Second, we have learned (via a forwarded email from an EFIB colleague) that William Gunther's recent foray into the Digital MBA program was little more than an electronic correspondence course. The video capability does not allow for streaming video, rendering the productivity of the system nearly useless. There is a large onus upon the instructor to handle testing security. iTech is still iTech, and the responsiveness of that organization is subject to the weather outside and whether or not their technicians feel like driving across campus in the iTech golf cart. There has been no solution given publicly to the issue of cannibalization. The onus for training is on the instructor. Whether or not a course is in- or out-of-load apparently follows the same decision process that is used to determine everything else in the CoB: Do the administrators like you, or not? The CoB apparently doesn't really think AACSB accreditation is at risk, so no real time is being spent to ascertain the program's effect on accreditation. Of course, providing these courses online doesn't come from new faculty; these courses are provided by faculty that are already teaching heavier loads than colleagues at less research productive schools. Apparently nobody cares about

shortchanging undergraduates, and according to our sources, Duane Harold Doty still hasn't taught even one single undergraduate course at USM. Finally, shortchanging certain faculty is actually a goal of the Doty administration.

At the end of the day, we still haven't gotten any reasonable answers to any of Professor Lindley's questions, except for answers that should have nixed the project at the outset. Typical of the Doty administration, though, the resume-building project was pushed through because it was best for Doty and his Toadies, not because it was good for students and not because it was good for faculty.

One year later, the program's courses are being offered online to extremely low enrollment, low support levels, and poor reviews, even from Gunther, a member of the Doty go-along gang.

The Digital MBA program is one that should never have been. Now the CoB is strapped with it. Unfortunately, it will take a change of leadership in the CoB to rid the college of this new albatross, because Doty will never admit or apologize for any idea of his is bad – if he did, he'd spend all day apologizing. At least then he'd have less time to dream up bad ideas.