

## **BUSINESS WEEK SUPPORTING THE ASSURANCE OF LEARNING PROGRAM**

Robert T. Barrett, College of Business and Applied Professional Sciences, South Carolina State University, Orangeburg, SC, 803-536-8186, [rbarret1@scsu.edu](mailto:rbarret1@scsu.edu)  
David J. Jamison, College of Business and Applied Professional Sciences, South Carolina State University, Orangeburg, SC, 803-536-8186, [djamison@scsu.edu](mailto:djamison@scsu.edu)  
Marion R. Sillah, College of Business and Applied Professional Sciences, South Carolina State University, Orangeburg, SC, 803-536-8186, [msillah@scsu.edu](mailto:msillah@scsu.edu)

### **ABSTRACT**

Three pillars of AACSB accreditation are strategic planning, assurance of learning, and faculty qualifications [8]. Schools of business develop strategic plans and assurance of learning programs and build faculty based on mission driven goals. Peer review teams focus on these areas during the formal accreditation visits. This paper focuses on a set of activities that support the assurance of learning program at an AACSB accredited university in the southeast.

### **INTRODUCTION**

AACSB – International, The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, is the premier accrediting body for schools of business in the world. As of September 2009, 570 member institutions hold AACSB business accreditation, of which 171 have additional specialized accreditation for their accounting programs. In total 33 countries represent the Accreditation Council, and 105 members are from outside the United States.

AACSB accreditation and maintenance of accreditation is based primarily on three areas:

1. Mission-based strategic planning
2. Assurance of Learning
3. Faculty sufficiency

All accredited business programs and those seeking accreditation must develop and be guided by mission-based strategic plans that have been structured using faculty input and that support the strategic mission of the institution as a whole. Accredited business programs must maintain a qualified faculty who is dedicated to the mission of the program. In addition, accredited business programs must develop an Assurance of Learning program (AOL) that helps them manage the curriculum designed to produce highly qualified graduates [1, 8]. A previous paper [3] discussed a survey of South Carolina business school deans designed to determine current Assurance of Learning practices. The number of goals, the range of topics assessed, and the problem areas identified were some of the information discussed in that paper. This paper focuses on a set of activities that support the assurance of learning program at South Carolina State University.

### **THE ASSURANCE OF LEARNING PROGRAM AT SC STATE UNIVERSITY**

South Carolina State University is a comprehensive, 4-year, state supported university in Orangeburg, SC. With over 4,000 students, the university boasts accredited programs in

business, engineering, education, and many other disciplines. The Business Program received maintenance of accreditation by AACSB in April 2010. The Business Program has over 600 students majoring in five areas, accounting, agribusiness, economics, management, and marketing.

Following initial accreditation in 2001, the School of Business faculty of South Carolina State University began work on initiatives to improve the business programs. Development of a formal program to assess the curricula would be important as the university moved toward reaffirmation of accreditation. After numerous phases of development, the Assurance of Learning Program was formally approved by the faculty in 2007. Four learning goals and twelve learning objectives were approved to guide curricular decisions. The learning goals are:

1. Business majors will develop and demonstrate the ability to engage in critical thought processes whereby they are able to skillfully analyze, assess and resolve complex business problem.
2. Business majors will develop and demonstrate leadership skills in their personal and professional lives.
3. Business majors will demonstrate the knowledge of ethical conduct in business and the value of good citizenship.
4. Business majors will be cognizant of the global community in which we live and work.

Assessment of these goals and objectives has helped the Business Program determine areas that need attention. A number of initiatives have been designed to address the identified needs. Writing and critical thinking were among the areas identified in this process as needing special attention. The activities described below were designed to support our efforts to improve student performance in these and other areas of learning.

### **THE ROLE OF ACTIVE LEARNING IN SUPPORT OF LEARNING GOALS**

In recent years, the teacher-centered model has been replaced with the student-centered model. There are numerous successful active learning techniques documented in the literature. These activities include the modified lecture, invited guest speakers, videos, movie clips, peer teaching, debates, and experiential learning projects. Several studies have shown that students prefer strategies promoting active learning to traditional lectures. Other research studies evaluating students' achievement have demonstrated that many strategies promoting active learning are comparable to lectures in promoting the mastery of content but superior to lectures in promoting the developments of students' skills in thinking and writing. Further, some cognitive research has shown that a significant number of individuals have learning styles best served by pedagogical techniques other than lecturing [4]. Many students enter higher education conditioned by their previous educational experiences to be passive recipients of what they are taught. Making space for students to take control of and responsibility for their learning can greatly enhance their ability to learn from experience [6].

Leonard Springer conducted research to specifically determine whether differences in the learning outcome were apparent to faculty representing a variety of disciplines as well as to the students who participated in the course. The results suggest that students who participated in structured active learning perceived a greater ability to connect abstract concepts and real-world applications than students who participated in a relatively traditional instruction program. The positive effect of structured active learning on students' abilities to connect concepts and applications extended to both men and women [7]. The basic theme among all experiential learning models is that learning through applicable experiences, with requisite reflection and synthesis, provides for the best education [2, 5, 6].

At SC State University, the active learning model has been integrated into a long-standing annual celebration – Business Week – to spotlight AOL goals and to provide opportunities for students to demonstrate what they are learning in the classroom.

### **BUSINESS WEEK 2010**

Each year, a committee made up of faculty, staff, and students of the Business Program plans and executes a week of activities related to a specific theme. The 38<sup>th</sup> Annual Business Week Celebration was held April 5 through April 9, 2010. The theme for Business Week 2010 was, “Making a Difference through Thought Leadership and Citizenship in the Global Community.” This theme was based on the Business Program Learning Goals to ensure that our students excel in critical thinking, communication, citizenship, and knowledge of global business issues. One goal of Business Week each year is to ensure that all students participate in at least one of the activities planned for the week. Some of the activities are integrated into classes to enhance the theory and applications presented in those classes. The programs and activities of Business Week 2010 were planned to reinforce and help students become more aware of and appreciative of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that make up our learning areas. Opportunities to learn, serve, and develop were planned for each day. These activities were designed to coordinate with the learning goals in order to produce outcomes consistent with the content delivered throughout the business curriculum. Table 1, provided in the Appendix, summarizes the activities, participants, and outcomes described in more detail in the following sections.

### **MONDAY – OPENING SESSION AND CRITICAL THINKING**

*Learning Goal 1: Business majors will develop and demonstrate the ability to engage in critical thought processes whereby they are able to skillfully analyze, assess and resolve complex business problem.*

The objectives for Business Week 2010 Day 1 included setting the tone for an attitude of service, providing opportunities for demonstrating speaking and critical thinking skills, and continuing to stress the importance of quality writing. For the opening session, four community leaders spoke about how students could make a difference in our community. The Executive Director of the Edisto Habitat for Humanity, the Executive Director of the Samaritan House (a homeless shelter and food and clothing outlet), the Founding Director and Chairman of the Board of the Cooperative Church Ministries of Orangeburg (an outlet for food, clothing, and emergency funding for electricity and other needs), gave the history

and missions of their respective organizations and challenged students to make a difference by getting involved in community activities. The publisher of the local newspaper encouraged students to build their writing skills, indicating that solid writing skills would make a difference in their careers. Improving writing skills is a major part of our leadership learning goal. Some 50 students and faculty members attended this opening session.

Following the opening session, two case competitions, designed to help develop critical thinking skills of students, were concluded. Six teams competed in the Strategic Management Case Competition. The presentations by the seniors in these sections of the capstone class – Business Policy - showed the polish of well prepared soon-to-be graduates. Ninety students attended the Strategic Management Case Competition.

Over 150 freshmen competed in the Introduction to Business Case Competition. Five student teams, winners of competitions in the five sections of Introduction to Business, were asked to identify a project that they could implement to make a difference. A panel of three judges was used to select a winner. The criteria used included the meaningfulness and feasibility of the community service project, the thoroughness of the description of the project and the team's presentation skills. More than forty students attended this session.

The contrast in the presentation skills as well as the depth of analysis was evident in these two case competitions. This contrast gives us evidence of the value added by our curriculum and will give our Assurance of Learning Committee insights into how to continue our focus on critical thinking skills in core courses.

## **TUESDAY – CITIZENSHIP DAY**

*Learning Goal 3: Business majors will demonstrate the knowledge of ethical conduct in business and the value of good citizenship*

On Citizenship Day, over 100 students and faculty members participated in community outreach projects. Participants collected money for Relay for Life and Habitat for Humanity. Relay for Life has been the Business Program Community Outreach Initiative for three years. Each year students, faculty and staff have raised more than \$2000 for Relay for Life. A raffle netted over \$200 for the American Red Cross. A display from the Minority AIDS Council of Orangeburg showing facts about AIDS and other STDs was set up in the business building lobby to provide information to students. Over \$250 was raised to purchase books that were given to kindergarten students at two local elementary schools and to donate \$100 to the Minority AIDS Council of Orangeburg. Ten students visited Uni-Health Nursing Home and led the residents in games of Bingo and provided a gift basket of treats for the residents.

The closing program for Citizenship Day was directed by a guest professor from the Citadel who brought expertise in volunteerism and disaster relief. She discussed ways students could become more active in community outreach projects and how SC State students could partner with Citadel students to help make a difference, particularly during disaster times. Awareness of opportunities and actual participation in community outreach projects were the main takeaways for this day.

## **WEDNESDAY – LEADERSHIP AND COMMUNICATION DAY**

*Learning Goal 2: Business majors will develop and demonstrate leadership skills in their personal and professional lives.*

Wednesday was Leadership and Communication Day. The Executive Speaker Series hosted the Administrator in the South Carolina Department of Consumer Affairs whose talk was entitled, “Credit Sense and Debt Management: Keys to Success in Life and Business.” The speaker challenged the students to be leaders and to take charge of their own financial futures. One-hundred and eighty students attended this presentation.

The first annual Writing Competition was completed on Leadership and Communication Day. Each participant submitted an essay on “Making A Difference Through Servant Leadership.” Eighteen students participated in the competition that was supported by a Title III grant. Cash prizes were awarded to the students with the best papers: first place, \$300; second place \$200; and two students tied for third place and each received the \$100. In addition, eight students were awarded honorable mention certificates for excellent writing.

The Writing for Life Workshop was held for students with guest experts encouraging students to work to develop excellent writing skills and providing strategies for improvement. Students were assigned to teams at the beginning of the workshop. Each team was given an excerpt from anonymous papers submitted by students who had participated in an earlier workshop. Each team had fifteen minutes to critique the excerpt. In the open session that followed, a discussion of each paper was lead by the workshop presenter. This workshop was also supported by a Title III grant.

The SC State Chapter of Toastmasters International held the Table Topics Contest where eight students responded to the question, “If you could have the ideal career, where do you see yourself ten years from now, and where do you see yourself twenty years from now?” Students demonstrated quick thinking and excellent speaking skills in this competition. No student had the advantage of hearing other students’ speeches before responding to the topic. First, second and third place winners were selected by a panel of judges.

Promoting excellence in communication was a 2009-2010 focus for the Business Program. Building an attitude of concern for developing and demonstrating excellence in communication was supported with the Day 3 activities.

## **THURSDAY – INTERNATIONAL DAY**

*Learning Goal 4: Business majors will be cognizant of the global community in which we live and work.*

In preparation for International Day, students in two classes, International Business and Export Management, interviewed students and faculty members from countries outside of the United States, collected information about their home countries, and made posters that were displayed in the business building lobby. Over twenty posters showed maps and other information about these countries, as well as pictures of the student or faculty member. Flags from over forty-five countries were displayed in the lobby as well, depicting countries represented in the SC State student body.

At noon, the Business Program hosted the “Taste of the World” buffet. Students enjoyed dishes from some fifteen countries. Samples of cuisine from these countries were supplied by students and faculty.

The closing session for International Day was the International Brain Bowl. Fifteen students divided into five teams competed in a Jeopardy-like contest, showing their knowledge of world history, geography, politics, culture, and current events.

Students gained knowledge of and appreciation for business and culture around the world. As over eighty percent of SC State students hail from South Carolina, this exposure helped to broaden their horizons.

### **FRIDAY – STUDENT AWARDS DAY**

Highlight for the week for some came Friday when over 100 students were honored for academic excellence and for winning competitions during the week. Nine students were inducted into Beta Alpha Psi, the International Honor Fraternity for Financial Information Professionals. Twenty-three students and two faculty members were inducted into Beta Gamma Sigma, the Honor Society for AACSB International. The Honors and Awards Banquet was held on Friday Night where students who had earned a cumulative 3.0 grade point average were recognized. Seniors with the highest grade point average in each major were also singled out for this achievement. Two faculty members were awarded with the Dean’s Distinguished Service Award for outstanding efforts.

### **CONCLUSION**

The planned activities, case competitions, writing and speaking competitions, and the International Brain Bowl gave students opportunities to apply and demonstrate the knowledge and skills acquired in the Business Program Curriculum. The students were engaged and this generated much excitement throughout the week. While Business Week is an annual celebration, the consensus among faculty and students was a need to provide more opportunities through out the year that will challenge students and allow them to practice what they are learning. The Business Week Program not only highlighted the knowledge and skills of our students; but also brought faculty, staff and students together to focus on our learning goals and objectives.

### **REFERENCES**

[1] “AACSB Assurance of Learning Standards: An Interpretation,” An AACSB White Paper issued by: AACSB International Accreditation Coordinating Committee, AACSB International Accreditation Quality Committee, November 20, 2007.

[2] Andreasen, Randall J., “Integrating Experiential Learning into College of Agriculture Capstone Courses: Implications and Applications for Practitioners,” *NACTA Journal*, March 2004.

- [3] Barrett, Robert T., Lawrimore-Belanger, Kay, and Singh, Renu, "Experiences with Assurance of Learning," *Proceedings of the Fortieth Annual Meeting of the Southeast Chapter of the Decision Sciences Institute*, February 17-19, 2010, Wilmington, NC.
- [4] Bonwell, Charles C., and James A. Eison., "Active Learning: Creating Excitement in the Classroom," ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 1. Washington, D.C.: The George Washington University, School of Education and Human Development, 1991.
- [5] Joplin, L., "On Defining Experiential Education," *Journal of Experiential Education*, 4:1, 155-158, 1981.
- [6] Kolb, Alice Y. and David A. Kolb, "Learning Styles and Learning Spaces: Experiential Learning in Higher Education," *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 4:2, 193-212, 2005.
- [7] Springer, Leonard, "Relating Concepts and Applications Through Structured Active Learning," Paper presented at the meeting of the *American Educational Research Association*, March 1997.
- [8] [www.aacsb.edu](http://www.aacsb.edu), *Eligibility Procedures and Accreditation Standards for Business Accreditation*, AACSB International – the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, Revised July 1, 2009, pages 58-77.

## APPENDIX

**Table 1: Business Week Activities and Learning Goals**

<b>Business Program Learning Goals</b>	<b>Business Week Activities</b>	<b>Primary Participants</b>	<b>Learning Goal Outcomes (Knowledge , Skills and Attitudes)</b>
Critical Thinking	Business Case Competitions	All freshmen enrolled in Intro to Business Courses and all Seniors enrolled in Business Policy. Student and faculty audience members.	Activities provided opportunities for student to increase critical thinking and communication <b>SKILLS</b> through the preparation and presentation of the cases.
Communications and Leadership	Guest Speakers  Essay Writing Competition  Toastmaster's Competition  Writing for Life Workshop  Honor Society Inductions  Honor's Banquet	Student and faculty audience members.  Student volunteers for the essay competition and students with GPAs above 3.0 for the honors inductions and banquet.	Activities provided opportunities for students to develop <b>SKILLS</b> related to written and oral communication and to develop positive <b>ATTITUDES</b> toward community participation and volunteerism.
Global Awareness	International Brain Bowl  International Poster Presentations and Flag Display  International Food Festival	Students in the required International Business course and an IB elective course; student, faculty and staff volunteers for the Food Festival.	Students were exposed to information that added to <b>KNOWLEDGE</b> of the global community and also promoted positive <b>ATTITUDES</b> toward international diversity.
Citizenship	Student Organization Fund Raising  Community Outreach Initiatives  Guest Speaker	Student and faculty volunteers and members of student organizations.	Activities focused on promoting positive <b>ATTITUDES</b> toward community involvement and volunteerism and also increased <b>KNOWLEDGE</b> by exposing students to the activities of organizations focused on addressing critical needs in the community.