

# IMPACT OF THE ASSURANCE OF LEARNING STANDARD ON STUDENTS' LEARNING

Adel M. Novin, Clayton State University, Morrow, GA 30260, [AdelNovin@Clayton.edu](mailto:AdelNovin@Clayton.edu)

## ABSTRACT

This paper explores whether the Assurance of Learning Standard of the AACSB International has had any positive impact on the students' learning of business students. Presumably, when the focus of business schools is shifted towards the students' actual learning measured by direct methods of assessment one should be expecting improvement in students' learning. This study investigated the changes in the performance of business students in the ETS Major Field Test in Business at the national level for periods before and after the adoption of the Assurance of Learning Standard by the AACSB. The results suggest possible improvements in the students' learning.

## INTRODUCTION

In 2003, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) International revised its standards for accreditation by shifting the focus of the standards to the actual learning outcomes of business programs measured by direct methods. Specifically, the AACSB's new standard -- "Assurance of Learning" -- requires business schools to produce evidence of learning in their courses and programs. Under the Assurance of Learning standard, business schools have to set learning goals for what knowledge and skills they want their students to learn, and then demonstrate that the students have meet the specified learning outcomes. The new accreditation standards leave it up to each institution to decide what those learning outcomes should be and how they should be measured.

For compliance with the "Assurance of Learning" standard, the AACSB has suggested two categories of assessment methods -- direct and indirect -- as follows:

### Direct Methods:

Selection,  
Course-embedded measurement, and  
Stand-alone testing

### Indirect Methods:

Surveying alumni  
Surveying employers  
Surveying graduating students

The AACSB has clearly stated that the indirect methods cannot replace the direct methods for assessment of student performance. By themselves, surveys produce weak evidence of learning. As a result, a special interest has been demonstrated in the application and implementation of the *direct methods* of assurance of learning.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether the Assurance of Learning Standard has had any positive impact on the business students' learning. Presumably, when the focus of business schools is shifted towards the students' actual learning measured by direct methods of assessment one should be expecting improvement in students' learning.

## RESEARCH METHOD

The ETS Major Field Test in Business is one of the popular *direct methods* for the assessment of business students' learning. It is a standardized test that assesses the business students' mastery of concepts, principles, and understanding obtained in the core business courses. The subject areas included in the test are: Accounting, Economics, Management, Quantitative Business Analysis, Finance, Marketing, Legal and Social Environment, Information Systems, and International Issues. The ETS Major Field test is a two-hour, entirely multiple-choice exam. The scores are reported on a scale of 120 to 200. The ETS reports contain data on the individual students as well as overall performance of the students' of each school along with national means for comparative purposes. This study investigated the changes in the business students' performance in the ETS Major Field Test in Business for periods before and after the adoption of the AACSB's Assurance of Learning Standard.

## FINDINGS

Table below displays the national mean for each subject area for period 2003-2006 and 2006-2009. The highest increase is in the area of Finance (53%) followed by International Issues (22%).

Subject Area	2003-2006	2006-2009	Percentage of Increase
	Mean	Mean	
Accounting	44.1	49.8	13%
Economics	42.5	47.8	12%
Management	56.8	54.5	-4%
Quantitative Business Analysis	56.1	46.1	-18%
Finance	35.9	55.0	53%
Marketing	46.6	51.9	11%
Legal & Social Environment	49.6	45.9	-7%
Information Systems		57.7	
International Issues	44.2	54.1	22%
Overall Mean Score	152.2	153.1	1%

## CONCLUSION

The findings of the study suggest realization of some improvements in the business students' overall performance in the ETS Major Field Test in Business after the adoption of the Assurance of Learning Standard. In an exchange of emails, the AACSB stated that none of the business schools have lost their accreditation since the passage of the Assurance of Learning Standard. However, the AACSB stated that approximately 20% to 25% of business schools received a sixth year recommendation – that is, some deficiencies were perceived during the review. However, "It is not uncommon for more than one standard to be cited in a report therefore it is difficult to state what percentage of sixth year reviews are solely due to concerns regarding Assurance of Learning." Overall, it appears that the Assurance of Learning Standard has had a positive impact in business students' learning.

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