Trends in Business Education

The article looks at trends in the business and management education programs offered by colleges and universities as of 2014, focusing on Canada. It notes some institutions have begun to offer shortened master of business administration (MBA) programs, or mini-MBAs, citing examples including the University of Toronto Rotman School of Management in Ontario. It also discusses programs with specific focuses including corporate social responsibility (CSR) and entrepreneurship.

Rather than seeking the full range of business education essentials, many managers and executives are looking for high-level skills targeted at their immediate challenges. Business schools have responded with programs and courses that focus on specific areas of need.

Several trends are taking shape as a result of these practical-minded market pressures. While existing programs continue to grow, many new programs that are shorter and targeted at high-profile or newly identified flashpoints are gaining momentum. Longer programs that serve specific market needs have also arisen, such as interdisciplinary programs that combine business with other professional training and entrepreneurial education embracing more creative and hands-on vehicles...
for learning. The upshot is an ever-broadening range of business education encompassing a multitude of needs.

**Accelerated MBAs**

The gold standard of business education is the MBA. Traditionally, these programs take one to two years to complete. But business schools have come under pressure to compress the traditional MBA, perhaps because of a hurry-up world but also in response to working managers and executives who are reluctant to commit to that much time in light of daily duties and family commitments. The result is the mini-MBA.

Mini-MBA programs originated in the United States as non-credit courses. The six-year-old Harvard mini-MBA, for example, targets non-business arts and science students with a five-week, 10-session series, but instructors are volunteers, and there is no degree or certificate awarded.

However, the compressed MBA is gaining credibility. The Ivey Business School at Western University has introduced a one-year full MBA program. Others have even tighter schedules. The Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto presents its MBA essentials for managers program in eight evening sessions delivered by Rotman instructors. The McGill Executive Institute presents a three-part mini-MBA series which includes: executive development, advanced management and integrated management thinking. The programs, all delivered by McGill faculty, vary in formats ranging from five or eight intensive days to three months on evenings and weekends. Graduates receive a certificate of completion for each of the three parts they take.

At the Schulich Executive Education Centre at York University, which has re-branded its essentials of business administration program as a mini-MBA, participants tend to be mid-level managers who haven't taken a business degree but have risen up their corporate ranks through their particular skill or profession.

"Now they need broader knowledge but they don't have the time for a full MBA program," says Alan Middleton, Schulich's executive director. "They don't understand many areas outside their silo, so they are being extended into unfamiliar areas, and they want to learn." This makes them highly motivated, he adds. "We get peppered with questions."

The Schulich mini-MBA runs for three days in each of April, May and June, tackling 13 subjects ranging from critical thinking, strategic management and managerial finance to supply chain management, marketing management and managing change. The 16 to 25 participants per cycle spend class time mostly on discussion, question-and-answer and simulations. Readings, online case studies and supplementary lectures take place in between sessions, and the program wraps up with group presentations.

Middleton says that, while the mini-MBA format cannot offer nearly the depth and experience of full MBA programs, it does have its advantages: "There can be slippage in longer programs, where maybe people are not as productive at all times. But in 39 hours [of mini-program time], you have to make it work for these people. There's no slippage."

**Ethics, Sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility**
Environment, energy conservation, social giving, responsible product stewardship, and relationships with indigenous people and surrounding communities -- these are just a few of the dilemmas and controversies occupying brand and corporate reputation managers in executive suites. It's a list that didn't get nearly this much consideration a decade ago.

As corporate social responsibility, or CSR, gained in prominence, business schools began including courses on the subject in their MBA and executive MBA programs, or incorporating it into their existing courses. Now, it is starting to appear in stand-alone programs. The University of St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto offers a certificate in CSR consisting of 11 days spread over three modules plus online discussions and an additional seminar or conference. The program is presented in partnership with the Conference Board of Canada, which has called CSR "the business issue of the 21st century."

The Queen's School of Business also offers a certificate in CSR, but as an add-on to its bachelor of commerce program. It consists of three weekend seminars including lectures, case studies and simulations over the four years of the program, 60 hours of outreach working with a nonprofit organization and a course requirement.

Driving the surge in CSR programs is a less-than-altruistic factor: self-interest. "Young graduates are looking very seriously at the CSR practices of their potential employers," says Carolyn Campbell, associate dean for executive education at the Alberta School of Business at the University of Alberta, which now offers a three-course CSR certificate. "They think there's more of a role for them at companies that are seen to be responsible and committed to the environment and society as a whole. Organizations have become aware that they need sophisticated CSR practices to attract the best people."

Each of the modules in the University of Alberta's certificate program runs for three days. The first examines the social, environmental and ethical dimensions of CSR and a variety of cases including the oil sands, Shell in Nigeria and the ethical dilemmas of participants' companies. The second looks at the strategic value of CSR and how it affects brand value. The third addresses aspects of sustainability. In all cases, says Campbell, discussion drills down to solving real problems faced by individual companies.

"In the same way that governance education got really hot 10 years ago," Campbell says, following scandals such as Enron and Adelphia, "CSR education is a compelling need in response to insufficient attention in the past. CSR is not a fad. There are solid business reasons for it."

**Interdisciplinary Programs**

Recognizing the increased demand for business skills in professional fields beyond finance, more programs are focusing business training on fields such as engineering, law and medicine. Some programs even run in parallel with professional training, leading to two degrees.

Given its financial pressures, health care is one of the areas most in need of management skills. In Canada, both the University of Alberta and McGill University offer five-year programs leading to both MD and MBA degrees. At McGill, for instance, candidates complete MBA core courses as well as
courses in health-care management in their first year before embarking on medical training, which is integrated with electives in management.

Joint MBA-law programs are now well established at most major universities, including York, Toronto, McGill, Queen's and Western. At the University of Calgary, an MBA degree program can be combined not only with medicine or law but also with biotechnology, social work or public policy.

However, some schools are taking the approach of integrating business and professional training without combining degrees. The career path of many engineers, for example, takes them up the management ranks as their project management skills lead them into broader planning and strategic areas. That's when they realize they need business capabilities.

The University of Regina's two-year Levene MBA with a specialization in engineering management, launched last September, meets this need. Participants take the four core business courses along with the mainstream cohort, but they also take four engineering-related electives, drawing from project management, production operations management, risk assessment and management, engineering economics and business law for engineers.

"Most students come from the engineering profession," says Andrew Gaudes, dean of the Kenneth Levene Graduate School of Business at the University of Regina, "but there are also those who need knowledge of engineering management in their current responsibilities, which are usually facilities management, construction, real estate or operations management."

After completing the courses, students do the MBA program's two-week international study trip, followed by a capstone, or culminating, integrated practicum working with a supervisor on a real-world business problem that's often brought to the table by students from their employers.

Gaudes says the business faculty worked with the Association of Professional Engineers & Geoscientists of Saskatchewan in developing its MBA with a specialization in engineering management. "They see this as a huge need in our region. It is a nationwide trend, but the Saskatchewan economy is so hot that the demand is that much greater here."

**Entrepreneurial Programs**

Educators and governments recognize the importance of entrepreneurship to the economy. In fact, job hunters of all ages realize that most new jobs result from self-employment.

The public success of some entrepreneurs combined with the attractiveness of running one's own business has made entrepreneurship something of a fabled city.

The result is a rapid proliferation of programs teaching entrepreneurship at colleges, universities and within economic development initiatives.

Programs vary depending on the level of sophistication of the participants. Some simply take students through the basics of business planning, spreadsheets, marketing and management. Others combine business training with the development of a company, which could be a business needing assistance, the participants' own companies or a group project.
Some institutions offer a smorgasbord of assistance keyed to different levels of business
development. The University of Ottawa offers a free lecture series geared to entrepreneurs, a
Startup Garage offering advice, funds and space during the summer, an entrepreneurship
mentorship program for start-ups and an entrepreneur-in-residence who teaches in the university’s
Telfer School of Management.

"There is enormous prosperity and vitality that can be brought to economies when you capture the
potential of entrepreneurship," says Mark Weber, director of the Conrad Business, Entrepreneurship
and Technology Centre at the University of Waterloo. Its master of business, entrepreneurship and
technology (MBET) program was the first graduate business program in Canada entirely focused on
entrepreneurship when it was established 11 years ago.

Weber says the goal is to teach people to build a business from scratch or to make an existing one
better. "We really see our job as developing people with entrepreneurial mindsets and skills to
pursue their dreams."

Teaching entrepreneurship is not like teaching anything else because of the need to learn by doing
and to integrate new concepts in all areas as businesses grow. As Weber says, you cannot think in
silos.

MBET addresses this in a few ways. Students join a commercialization practicum group in the first
month, and the practicum runs the length of the program. This group project involves working on an
existing early-stage business, which could be a business belonging to a student or an outside
company or organization. Students also develop their own business ideas. "Over the course of the
program, some of the new ideas that students work on become even more advanced and better
developed than the practicum projects," Weber says.

Simultaneously, students take nine interdisciplinary courses -- basics such as marketing, finance,
accounting and strategic management but also new venture creation, innovation management and
entrepreneurial technology application. Again, some courses run the length of the program, with
course material geared to the stage of business development -- for example, market research
methods are studied early on, and marketing strategies come later. Students are engaged in three
to five courses at any given time.

"When MBET was launched, it was well recognized that Canada did poorly at bridging the world of
research and discovery to the world of commercialization," says Weber in explaining the origins of
the program in the heart of Ontario's Technology Triangle. "The University of Waterloo had long
been focused on innovation and its relationship with the world of business, so it was the ideal place
to try something new."

Innovation and Productivity Programs
Although programs addressing productivity are not yet plentiful, expect them to become an
obsession for businesses and educators alike in the near future. The forerunner will be a new
innovation and productivity management program at Athabasca University, launching in April.
The first university-accredited program on the subject, Athabasca's program comes in response to a widening productivity gap identified in a 2012 study by the Conference Board of Canada in which Canada ranked 13th out of 16 peer countries. And productivity levels are falling, the Conference Board said, to 80% of U.S. performance from 91% over the last 30 years. The National Research Council provided Athabasca with $250,000 to develop the program.

The full program is demanding. The core courses, which take four weeks each to complete, are an introductory course, a performance management course that identifies more than 40 best practices and a quality management course that introduces statistical process control and total quality initiatives. Participants may then take one or more electives in three categories: process design and control tools, information systems tools and implementation challenges. They must also take a course in either technology and innovation or the balanced scorecards approach to operations, plus a three-month capstone course on building a business to enhance productivity.

The program fills a major need for corporate Canada, says Deborah Hurst, acting dean of Athabasca's faculty of business. "The challenge for many organizations is to invest time and resources to build the organizational capacity to manage productivity. Many organizations have to pay a lot of money for experts to deal with quality measures and productivity improvements, or grow green graduates into jobs, which takes time."

**CSR: Red hot in business education curriculum**

The following statistics are from The Aspen Institute Centre for Business Education's 2011 survey which revealed a sharp increase in MBA programs offering or requiring courses in CSR:

- Percent increases in core curriculum across disciplines (including finance, accounting, marketing and management) that reflect an increase in content on social, ethical and environmental issues in required courses:
  - 38% increase in Finance departments
  - 41% increase in Marketing departments
  - 22% increase in Accounting departments
  - 57% increase in Operations and Productions Management » 22% increase in relevant core IT / MIS offerings.

- Percent increase in number of schools requiring students to take a course dedicated to business & society issues: from 34% in 2001, 63% in 2007, 69% in 2009, to 79% in 2011.

- Percent increase in the number of courses being offered on social entrepreneurship among schools surveyed internationally between 2007-2011: 60%. It's important to note that most of these courses focus not just on non-profit, mission-based organizations, but on how business
models can be adapted in ways that produce companies that strive to achieve positive financial, social and environmental results.

CSR: Broader scope, greater implications
With a background in environmental management and law, Vern Albush knew something about CSR. While he spent 10 years in government relations, he read up on the field as part of his ongoing self-education. But when he took a position as director of corporate social responsibility with Servus Credit Union, a full-service financial institution based in Edmonton, he found CSR had become much broader in scope. After three years, he wanted to delve deeper into its full implications by taking the Certificate in CSR at the University of Alberta.

"I felt it was important to have external certification attached to my credentials," he says. "But also, it was critical for me to learn corporate social responsibility from the academic side as well as the practical side."

The discussions with instructors and co-participants in the program are what stand out in retrospect, he adds, as well as the guest speaker contributions. "There are elements of the program to get into deeper-dive discussions about real-world barriers and how to get around them. So the discussions are very practical. It was really phenomenal to listen to practitioners who were living [CSR] every day, as I was."

Overall, Albush enjoyed how the classroom always maintained a three-point equilibrium between the academic theory, the practical applications and the middle ground where business usually plays. "There was the basic information of an undergrad program but the discourse and argument of a graduate program."

Undergrads ride the trends alongside grads
Undergraduate programs are reflecting the same trends seen in graduate and executive education.

Ethics, Sustainability and CSR

- Dalhousie University's College of Sustainability offers an Environment, Sustainability & Society program across five faculties for a double major or combinedhonours undergrad degree.

- The University of Calgary's Office of Sustainability maintains an inventory of more than 350 courses touching on sustainability.

Interdisciplinary

- The University of British Columbia's Sauder School of Business offers undergraduates a specialized BCom degree with a combined major in business and computer science.

- The Ivey Business School at Western University in London, Ont., offers a combined degree program with Western Engineering leading to both a BESc and HBA.
Entrepreneurship

- The Conrad Business, Entrepreneurship and Technology Centre at the University of Waterloo offers undergraduate courses in starting and growing new companies.

- The Telfer School of Management at the University of Ottawa offers an entrepreneurship option in its Honours BCom program.

PHOTO (COLOR): Rutherford Library, University of Alberta

PHOTO (COLOR): Schulich School of Business, York University

PHOTO (COLOR): Kenneth Levene Graduate School of Business, University of Regina

PHOTO (COLOR): Conrad Business, Entrepreneurship and Technology Centre, University of Waterloo

PHOTO (COLOR): Deborah Hurst, Acting Dean, Faculty of Business, Athabasca University

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