

New and Improved B-School Curriculum

The dizzyingly fast pace of change in the business world has been mirrored by an equally head-spinning rate of change in management education. For business schools to prepare students to do business today, they must keep up with the global, technical, and cultural trends in the real world.

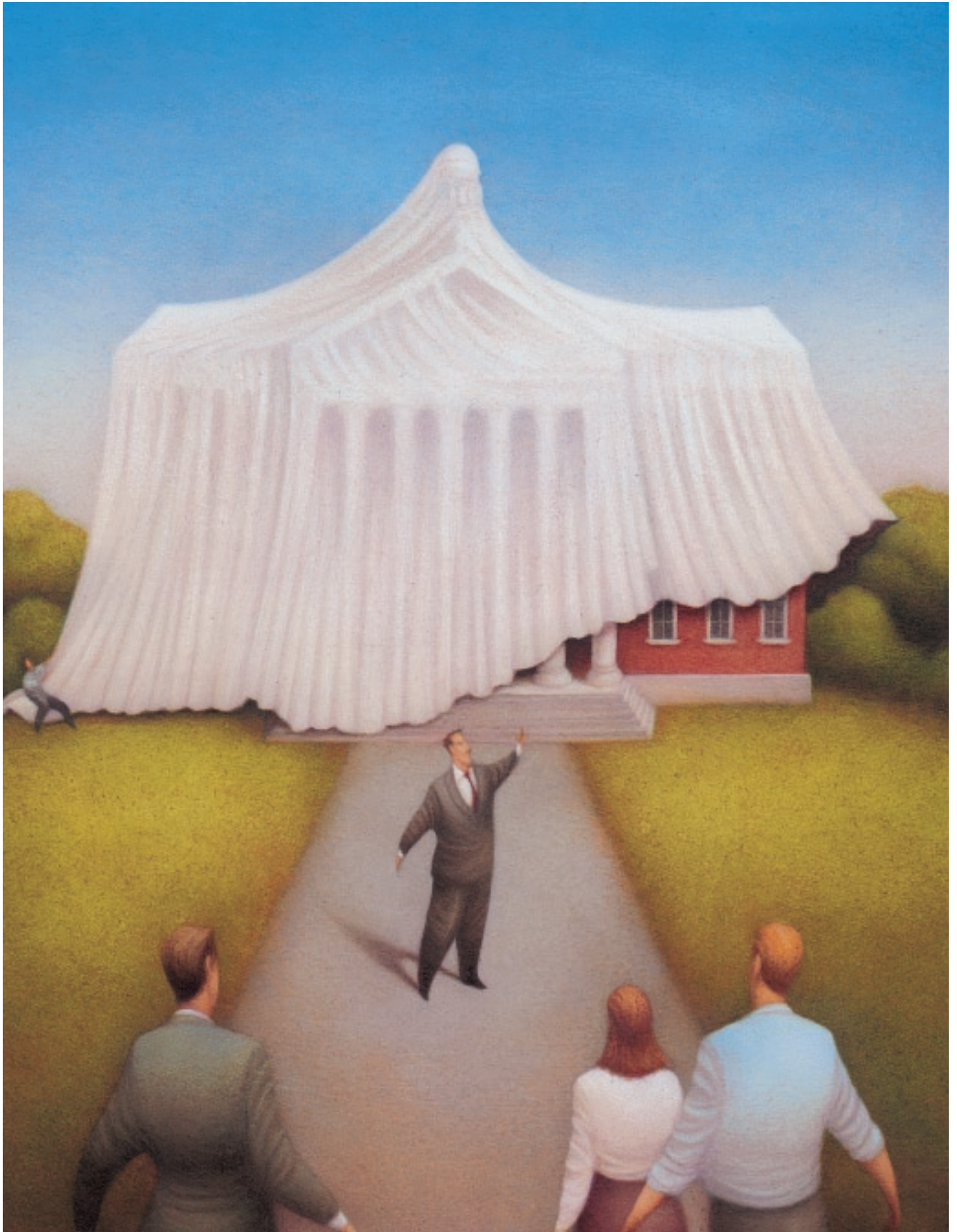
“Until recently, nearly all undergraduate business curricula were built upon an educational model that grew out of the 1950s,” says James M. Danko of the Villanova School of Business in Pennsylvania. “Those curricula focused on the manufacturing economy and compartmentalized learning into discrete business disciplines.” Even though most schools made minor updates to their b-school programs, the time for incremental change has passed, Danko says. “Curricula must be overhauled to prepare students for the competitive realities of global business.”

Lawrence R. Glosten of the Columbia Business School in New York City notes that today’s MBAs are promoted quickly, change jobs often, and switch careers frequently. “To remain relevant, management education must go beyond merely teaching a set of functional skills, such as finance, marketing, and leadership,” says Glosten. “MBA programs must impart to future executives a mindset that allows them to analyze, decide, and lead in a truly global marketplace.”

But it’s not a simple task to convince all the stakeholders that a curriculum overhaul is essential. “It can be like trying to move a cemetery out of the way of oncoming development,” says Chuck Williams of the College of Business Administration at Butler University in Indianapolis, Indiana. “Many people will question the need for the change. And the whole exercise will require extensive discussion and thorough planning.”

They speak from experience: All three schools recently have completed massive overhauls of their business school curricula. While Villanova focused on its undergraduate program, Columbia on its MBA, and Butler on both, all three schools have undergone complex and ambitious restructurings that have left them stronger, more flexible—and ready to do business.

Three schools radically revamp their programs to stay relevant in the complex and quick-moving world of business.



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Chuck Williams and Richard Fetter, Butler University

Real Challenges, Real Change

by Chuck Williams and Richard E. Fetter

From 1998 to 2003, the College of Business Administration (CBA) at Butler University in Indianapolis experienced a 29 percent drop in freshmen enrollment, as well as declining enrollment in the MBA program. During the same time period, we were reading many articles suggesting that management education was increasingly irrelevant and inadequate at preparing students for business careers. We decided we needed to address both issues head-on.

We formed a steering committee that benchmarked Butler's CBA against schools such as Babson College, Bentley College, Ball State University, and the University of Dayton. The committee concluded that Butler's CBA offered nearly the same curriculum as much larger business schools, but at greater expense. To put it bluntly, we were a good, pricey, vanilla business school. To remain competitive, our CBA needed to provide additional value.

We drew inspiration from the "hedgehog concept" Jim Collins describes in *Good to Great*—the notion that every organization has something that makes it unique. For a hedgehog, that singular characteristic is the ability to roll itself into a spiky ball to protect itself from predators. For Butler, it was our long history of linking students with real business: Many faculty members have professional backgrounds; retired executives frequently work with Butler students; and the school requires students to participate in two internships.

We determined that a real-business focus would be our own "hedgehog concept." We reasoned that, if medical students at a teaching hospital learn by doing, aspiring businesspeople could learn best by taking a hands-on approach to business.

By May 2003, our steering committee had laid the groundwork for a new, more integrated undergraduate curriculum. In August, we held a retreat to gain faculty buy-in for the new approach. Faculty-led project teams laid out the CBA's declining enrollment and made the case that the school needed a curriculum change. A local business executive talked about how changes in the global marketplace required a different business school approach.

Once faculty members were on board, the momentum for change continued to build. The project teams developed key anchor components of the new curriculum, and in October the CBA faculty formally adopted the theme of "real life, real business."

Changing our culture was challenging and sometimes frustrating. But the experience was ultimately gratifying as enrollment increased and a new excitement energized our campus.

The Freshman Experience

In August 2004, we kicked off the new approach with the Freshman Business Experience (FBE), which helps students learn more about themselves while introducing them to business concepts. To help them determine their behavioral style, we administer three personality assessments: the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory, DiSC, and Strong Interest Inventory.

During the Get Real Weekend, held soon after they arrive on campus, students conquer a demanding obstacle course that ends in a high-ropes challenge. This experience helps build their confidence, gives them insights into their abilities and fears, and stresses the importance of team building.

Each freshman is assigned not only an academic advisor, but also a career mentor from our Executive-in-Residence program. These mentors guide the students through a required, structured, four-year career development program that includes shadowing professionals on the job, attending job fairs, and participating in mock interviews.

Collaboration with area businesses begins freshman year. Each class is partnered with companies such as Steak 'n Shake, Ritter's Frozen Custard, and Indianapolis' Hubbard & Cravens Coffee Company. In the classroom, company representatives discuss concepts such as marketing, while site visits allow students to see business in action. The grand finale of the FBE is the Top Dog business plan competition, during which teams of students perform market research and devise business plans for a proposed business, product, or service.

Sophomore Through Senior Years

The Freshman Business Experience is followed by the Real Business Experience (RBE) sophomore year. In the RBE, the business plan idea introduced freshman year continues, as teams of students perform market research and write detailed business plans during the fall semester. They present their plans to real financiers for the chance to receive up to \$5,000 in seed capital.

During the spring semester, teams that choose to receive the funds launch their businesses as for-credit electives. The semester is broken into four financial "quarters"; every quarter, the business owners must report on the results of their financial, operating, and marketing strategies. They also re-forecast their operations based on initial experiences. In 2007, 24 of the 26 plans were approved for financing, and 12 businesses were launched.

Students receive more real-world experience during the two required for-credit internships—typically one between junior and senior year and another part-time during senior



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year. Grades are based on employer evaluations and students' reports on their projects. Butler has internship relationships with companies such as Merrill Lynch, Ernst & Young, Wellpoint, Lilly, and Rolls Royce. We also send several students each year to six-month Johnson & Johnson internships, and our graduating seniors join its Financial Development Leadership Program.

As the "real life, real business" approach evolves, Butler is developing an applied capstone experience for the senior year. In a pilot program last fall, 20 students were divided into teams that worked on consulting projects with four local businesses.

Seniors get many additional chances to interact with businesses. For instance, in one marketing class, seniors worked with Finish Line, a sports apparel marketer. Students analyzed the company's merchandise and pricing strategy, in-store experience, and brand recognition in the urban campus market. They used such unorthodox methods as on-campus closet raids to determine what lifestyle and athletic shoes classmates favor.

Seniors in our applied portfolio management finance class also have been getting hands-on business experience through a three-year pilot program that allows them to invest \$1 million from Butler's endowment. Last fall, the class's investment performance was favorable relative to the S&P, as the class earned a return of 5.04 percent, while the S&P 500 index was up only 2.9 percent.

Additional Opportunities

Experiential learning became an even bigger part of the CBA classrooms in 2005, after Lilly Endowment Inc. awarded a \$22 million grant to fund the Butler Business Accelerator. Through the Accelerator, students and faculty work alongside professional consultants to advise middle-market companies in central Indiana.

In 2005, a strategy team began analyzing options for reforming Butler's MBA program—including possibly

shutting it down because of declining enrollment—and determined that real-life business experiences would reinvigorate the program.

Now all students begin their graduate coursework by participating in a Gateway Experience, a one-day immersion with a local business. In one immersion, teams of students spent the morning observing on-site operations at various Steak 'n Shake restaurants in Central Indiana with the goal of improving the drive-through experience. That evening, they presented their recommendations to Steak 'n Shake executives.

As our "real life, real business" approach continues to evolve, we are infusing hands-on opportunities into all of our MBA courses. We've also created a final-semester capstone experience that requires students to help solve problems at companies during a semesterlong project. Capstone students have worked with such organizations as Roche Diagnostics and Second Helpings, a local charity.

Spreading the Word

The CBA has launched aggressive communication strategies to inform prospective students and stakeholders about our curriculum change. To attract MBA candidates, we instituted an extensive advertising campaign that included radio, print, online, and billboard ads. To recruit undergraduates, we relied heavily on new media, including the campus's first blogs and video podcasts (www.butler.edu/reallife). To raise the CBA's profile, we also created an electronic newsletter and embarked on a local public relations campaign. In addition, we have relied on our community outreach programs to spread the news through word of mouth.

Since we have adopted our "real life, real business" approach, the CBA's rate of undergraduate growth has been twice that of the overall university, and MBA enrollment has increased by more than 60 percent. This has led to a new, highly selective admissions process. However, we know that, to remain relevant, we must constantly update our curriculum so that we mirror the business world.

We are still learning what works and what doesn't with "real life, real business." Sometimes the process feels like driving across a bridge while building it at the same time. Nonetheless, we are convinced that Butler students will discover that the bridge leads them to a better business education—and greater success in the business world.

Chuck Williams is dean of the College of Business Administration at Butler University in Indianapolis, Indiana. Richard E. Fetter, who is currently professor of marketing, was dean from 2002 to 2007.

Recalibrating the Core

by Lawrence R. Glosten

At Columbia Business School, our goal is to equip MBA students with a versatile toolkit, stocked with the analytical and interpersonal skills they will need to be effective leaders throughout their careers. While we regularly assess and update our core curriculum, we carry out an extensive review every six to eight years.

For our most recent review, Dean Glenn Hubbard formed the Foundations Curriculum Committee (FCC), whose mandate was to inject greater flexibility into our core without upsetting our successful cluster system or altering our academic calendar. The FCC considered feedback from alumni, recruiters, business practitioners, and students. Our goal was to develop a new curriculum that would prepare MBA graduates to meet workplace challenges, broadly and within their chosen industries.

Rigorous and Flexible

The result was a two-tier core curriculum that consists of a Required Core of 6.5 courses and a Flexible Core of 1.5 courses. To create the new core, which makes up about 40 percent of the MBA degree requirement, we made three key changes:

First, we reduced the core from nine to eight full-term courses, which allows students to take an additional elective in the first year. The Required Core includes two full-term courses (corporate finance and financial accounting), and nine half-term courses. The Flexible Core is made up of three functional categories: organizations, performance, and markets. Students choose three half-term courses, one from each category, to gain greater depth in one specific area that matches their career interests.

Second, we placed a greater emphasis on leadership. We kept our leadership development course in the Required Core, but we moved it into the first semester. This move allowed us to integrate the course more fully with our Program on Social Intelligence, which not only is woven into the curriculum, but also is part of our student club and MBA experience.

Finally, we added a corporate governance module, taught as a series of pre-term sessions that include pre-term readings. The aim of the module is to familiarize students with the concept of corporate governance at multiple levels: their careers, their organizations, the economy, and society at large. The module also explores the interaction of the firm with shareholders, other stakeholders, and regulatory bodies.



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Ensuring Success

Reviewing and overhauling a business school's core curriculum is never an easy task. From our experience, we can offer tips for making the process as effective as possible:

- **Lay out guiding principles and achieve buy-in up front.** From the outset, Dean Hubbard and the committee members shared a unified vision of creating a more flexible, compact, and relevant core. We were committed to keeping a foundational body of knowledge necessary for every Columbia MBA student, while recognizing the curriculum review as an opportunity to refine the core requirements.

- **Install compelling leaders.** Most faculty members hold strong points of view, so it is important to appoint senior and respected committee leaders who will inspire others while keeping the project on schedule. Our committee members, all leaders within their academic divisions, were responsible for building faculty support, communicating proposed changes, and guiding the implementation of these changes.

- **Solicit input from multiple stakeholders, while carefully balancing how that input is considered.** For example, when we were evaluating our curriculum's applicability to the workplace, we gave more weight to feedback received from recruiters, CEOs, and mid-career alumni than from students.

- **Set clear guidelines, but leave room for imagination.** At the first meeting, Dean Hubbard instructed the group to design an "ideal" core curriculum, free of the cost constraints associated with course design and staffing. This dia-

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Lawrence Glosten, Columbia Business School

logue helped the committee think more creatively.

- **Cultivate broad faculty support throughout the process.** The FCC was responsible for deciding what to cut from the flexible new curriculum and what to leave intact, but important details involving content development and implementation fell to more junior faculty within the academic divisions. Going forward, each division is charged with monitoring the effectiveness of its courses.

- **Set an end date, and be sure to budget plenty of time for working out the details.** Sorting out details of the new courses can be the most time-consuming part of the process, and there will likely be many differences of opinion to negotiate. For this reason, it's important to impose a time constraint on the review process; when there is a goalpost in sight, people are encouraged to move toward consensus faster.

In our case, it took the FCC about 18 months to complete its review. The first task was to decide upon a strategy and shape the new curriculum accordingly. We then piloted some of the new courses as electives, which allowed us to perfect implementation issues before we officially launched the new curriculum in the fall of 2008.

- **Create an environment that encourages ongoing innovation.** Curriculum innovations should not end with the close of your formal review. Business changes every day, and the best management schools consistently find ways to deliver knowledge and skills that are at once timeless and adaptable, which means that even a core curriculum needs to stay flexible.

At Columbia, by splitting the curriculum into Required and Flexible components, we have built in a mechanism for innovation. Each academic division is responsible for designing the content of its Flexible courses, and, because the courses are effectively in competition with each other, faculty members have a strong incentive to develop compelling courses that address real-world challenges.

Continuous Improvement

Our formal review for this cycle has ended, but the FCC's work is far from complete. We know that even our foundational courses should not be set in stone. We will review our core curriculum continually through ongoing discussions with faculty and recruiters, as well as our usual student surveys. Such reviews not only will keep our curriculum fresh and innovative, but also will ensure that it provides our graduates the skills they need for a lifetime of business leadership.

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Reinventing the Curriculum

By James M. Danko and Bethanie L. Anderson

To make sure our school would be able to prepare students for the competitive realities of global business, two years ago the Villanova School of Business (VSB) built a whole new undergraduate program. Our Undergraduate Curriculum Task Force took a holistic approach to developing a rigorous, highly integrated curriculum infused with team teaching, action learning projects, simulations, international experiences and topics, and guest speakers.

The task force particularly wanted to focus on the intersection of disciplines that were traditionally separated, including finance and financial accounting, operations management and managerial accounting, and management and marketing. This emphasis led to the creation of three six-credit, team-taught courses in the new curriculum: Financial Management and Reporting, Business Processes, and Competitive Effectiveness. In addition, all courses in the new curriculum were designed to highlight four areas: a global mindset, innovation, ethics, and technology.

Approval and Launch

The task force submitted the proposal to a new faculty committee that reviewed it and recommended additional enhancements. This widened the circle of faculty involved in the process and built further support.

To win the support of all faculty, the committee leaders met separately with each academic department to present the proposal and ask for its endorsement. The proposed curriculum was politically sensitive, especially because it eliminated six core courses that were to evolve into three team-based courses. For example, it consolidated core Accounting and Finance courses into one team-taught course. Fortunately, VSB faculty overwhelmingly approved the new curriculum.

A key component of the new curriculum is the freshman Business Dynamics Course. The course was designed by eleven faculty members, who represented all core disciplines. The integrated yearlong course provides students with a context for their entire business learning experience, while introducing core business disciplines and showing how these disciplines interrelate. The course emphasizes innovation, openness to change, and the development of personal skills, while also integrating information on the global, political, ethical, and technological dimensions of business.

Our new curriculum officially launched in the fall of 2008. All incoming freshmen are experiencing the new curriculum this academic year.

Lessons Learned

During VSB's restructuring process, we learned that certain approaches contribute to making a curriculum overhaul successful:

- **Realize that all positive momentum facilitates curricular change.** During the three years preceding the start of our new curriculum, our business school enjoyed greater public recognition, which led to excitement within the community and support from alumni. The positive momentum also fostered new ideas and encouraged the idea that large-scale change was both possible and desirable.

Because we wanted to gain greater recognition for our business program, we were quite deliberate in the way we positioned VSB externally, which led to positive media coverage and improved positions in *BusinessWeek* rankings. At the same time, we continually emphasized to the general administration how the university would benefit by running a premier business school. All these efforts contributed to our success in rebuilding the curriculum.

- **Identify priorities and invest in them.** Starting in 2005, we regularly advanced our vision of VSB becoming a globally recognized school. This vision stressed the importance of investing resources in a flagship program and the crucial role of faculty.

- **Respect the central role of faculty.** Faculty drove the creative planning and decision-making processes, and ultimately all VSB faculty joined open discussions about the recommended curriculum. Once faculty members recognized that changes would lead to higher educational quality for their students, their support and engagement were easier to obtain.

- **Encourage creativity and entrepreneurial spirit.** In tandem with the curricular overhaul, VSB undertook a faculty reorganization to enhance cross-disciplinary collaboration in research and teaching. Our Task Force on Faculty Organization established four interdisciplinary clusters of faculty activity, called VSB Strategic Initiative Groups (SIGs), in the areas of analytics, business innovation, financial services, and corporate social responsibility. Since then, nearly one-third of VSB faculty members have become affiliated with a SIG. The SIGs have become key sources of new ideas, which generate a variety of course concepts and pedagogical approaches.

- **Appreciate the global business environment.** To establish our place in the current business market, we asked stakeholders about our strengths and weaknesses. Where could we improve? How did our culture need to shift so that we could recognize and address our shortcomings? This was the kind of research that led VSB to identify global



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mindsets, innovation, ethics, and technology as the cornerstones of our new curriculum. We also determined that we needed to strengthen our technology, mathematics, and analytics offerings.

- **Appreciate each school's potential areas of distinction.** Business schools may share a common charge to educate students to the best of their ability, but each institution's brand identity, geographic considerations, and market demands make it unique. Any curricular changes should reflect the students the school wants to attract, the market it wants to serve, and the brand identity it wants to create.

Ongoing Goals

When we revamped our curriculum at VSB, we were determined to maintain our core values, such as our emphasis on the liberal arts and our commitment to our close-knit community. In addition, we wanted to honor our Catholic, Augustinian tradition through our focus on social responsibility, service learning, and ethics.

At the same time, we hoped that a greater level of national recognition would help us attract top-quality students and allow us to strengthen our educational value proposition. Finally, we believed that the new curriculum would benefit our faculty by offering them exciting cross-disciplinary approaches to their teaching and research.

We know the process is ongoing. There is more work to be done, and there are more lessons to be learned. But so far, it looks like VSB is off to a great start. **■**

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