



# Is for B-School

**Accreditation, Adjuncts, and Assessment — these three elements require careful management if a business school program is going to stay at the top of its game. Four authors recount how they have handled crucial processes at their own schools.**

Successfully running a business school requires balancing so many imperatives that even the short list is impressive. Administrators must fine-tune the curriculum, keep up with business trends, raise funds, upgrade facilities, maintain quality programming, worry about rankings, recruit faculty—and, while they’re at it, make sure their students are learning what they need to know.

It’s difficult to cover all these topics in depth, but a quick look at ways to manage three key factors offers helpful insights and strategies. Phyllis Zadra recounts Baruch College’s long journey toward *assessment* and the lessons other schools can learn from its travels. Jeffrey A. Mello of Barry University examines the best ways to recruit *adjuncts* and make them loyal, productive participants of the faculty. And Ruth Guthrie and Louise Soe of California State Polytechnic University of Pomona urge schools to strive for a mature attitude toward *accreditation* so that the high quality standards achieved when schools attain initial accreditation continue to affect everyday operations.

All administrators and many faculty will encounter these three A’s of business school management. With a little assistance and a positive attitude, they’ll find their handling of such issues can be letter perfect.



# Assessment

## The Long Road

Embarking on a lengthy journey to learning assessment, Baruch College finds the way rough but the destination worthwhile.

by Phyllis Zadra

**T**he road to learning assessment winds over rocky terrain that can leave travelers weary, confused, and frustrated. But the end of the journey offers a glorious reward: faculty who are energized by a sense of shared purpose and students who have demonstrably mastered critical business skills. At Baruch College's Zicklin School of Business in New York City, we started out on our journey more than eight years ago, and we're still on the road. But every step we take makes our school stronger and prepares our students better for the working world.

It's still amazing to me how far we've come. In 1999, when I joined the Zicklin School, there were no conversations about teaching and learning environments or assessment metrics. There were general assumptions that faculty were teaching challenging material and that if students could not pass the courses, they either would not or could not do the work.

One of my first assignments was to review our micro- and macroeconomics courses. I found that faculty were using 11 different books and sharing no common syllabus for the 12 microeconomics sections. Math prerequisites for the courses were unclear. Instructors ranged from senior tenured economists to Ph.D. students. Class sizes varied from large lectures with 300 students to sections with 40 students. When I analyzed grades for the 1,300 students registered in microeconomics that fall, I found that more than 45 percent had received a D or an F or had withdrawn from the course.

The ensuing revision of the introductory economics courses was pivotal. It taught me that our faculty were not only desperate to consider issues of teaching and learning, but also hungry for leadership to focus these efforts.



### Beginning the Journey

It became even more important to focus on teaching and learning when AACSB International officially approved the concept of Assurance of Learning as part of its new standards in 2003. Schools undergoing re-accreditation in the following few years could choose to be evaluated under either the old or new standards. As Baruch prepared for its spring 2005 re-accreditation visit, we elected to be judged under the new criteria.

This meant we first had to articulate learning goals for the undergraduate and graduate programs, and then we had to develop direct measures of student learning to assess those goals. By early 2004, the undergraduate curriculum committee had drafted eight learning goals for the BBA, and these were unanimously approved by the Zicklin faculty. Two learning assurance committees were then formed to determine how to measure student learning at the graduate and undergraduate levels. As the associate dean for undergraduate programs, I headed the BBA committee, which

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included representatives from each major or department, the coordinator of the BBA's capstone course, and an executive from the business community.

I have vivid memories of our first committee meeting in November 2004. The other associate dean and I had to explain why course grades did not provide satisfactory assessment data and what other methods we could use to assess learning goals. We also had to reassure faculty that assessment was not a backdoor method for evaluating teachers, nor would assessment results be used to punish students. One of the members said flatly, "If you want the students to learn more, then pay the faculty more!" Clearly, we needed to educate the faculty about assessment before we had any chance of achieving our goals.

To prepare for our next meeting, committee members were asked to elaborate on the definitions of the learning goals. The members brought copies of materials they thought were relevant. We were inundated with paper. An undertaking that I thought could be outlined in a few meetings began to look like a project without end.

### Slow Progress

Eventually, the committee focused on the oral and written communications skills that BBA graduates should possess. To help us, we brought in "outsiders" from Baruch's Bernard L. Schwartz Communication Institute and Communication Studies Department. It was soon clear that many of the business faculty had never thought about how to improve basic communication skills, even though we knew most of our students were not particularly good writers or speakers.

We began with oral communication. By spring 2005, we created a 12-item checklist that outlined the essentials of a good oral presentation and a three-point scale to rate them. Items were scored either as: 1—below expectations, 2—meets expectations, or 3—exceeds expectations.

Two members of the BBA Learning Assurance committee worked with the Schwartz Communication Institute to develop scoring criteria. We gathered pilot data from business policy classes, where students were required to make oral team presentations. We created three-person evaluation teams consisting of one outside faculty member, an outside executive, and a Schwartz Communication consultant.

Pilot assessments showed that most students barely met or were below expectations. One evaluator commented that the presentations would improve if the assignment itself were more clearly focused, and the course supervisor conveyed this to the instructors. Thus, the assessment exercise immediately had an impact on the curriculum.

### Finding Roadmaps

During the spring of 2006, we eventually collected oral assessment data on 101 students who made oral presentations in 12 different business policy sections. After the BBA Learning Assurance Committee compiled the results, we recommended the following actions for the Zicklin school:

- Increase opportunities throughout the undergraduate curriculum for students to make short presentations and receive feedback on them.

- Map the curriculum to find out exactly what opportunities existed for students to develop oral communication skills.

- Provide instruction to faculty and students about how to improve specific oral communications skills, such as speaking clearly and maintaining eye contact.

- Set the goal of having 30 percent of the ratings *exceed expectations* in every category, with no more than 10 percent of the ratings falling *below expectations* for the next assessment in three years.

### New Paths

We followed similar strategies as we addressed learning assessment in written communication, analytical and technological skills, and civic awareness and ethical decision making. Each learning goal has required a somewhat different approach.

When we assessed written communication, we sought the input of faculty from the Writing Center to learn more about writing techniques. We also held freewheeling discussions on issues that faculty had not talked about in any form, such as whether we helped our students when we accepted lesser proficiencies in English.

When we assessed analytical skills, we decided we had to embed the assessment in an assignment that would be a learning experience for the students while providing a product that could be evaluated by our teams. We ultimately settled on a broad-based case study that allowed students to demonstrate their ability to understand issues, consider solutions, and prioritize them.

We have recently turned our attention to assessing the next learning goal, "civic awareness and ethical decision making." Again, we first needed to define those terms in the context of our undergraduate curriculum. We recruited our law department representative to head this initiative. Concurrently, representatives from our economics, CIS, finance, statistics, and accounting departments have joined forces to consider the statistical and spreadsheet skills BBA graduates need to

succeed in the workplace. This draft will propel us toward defining and measuring technological skills. The process will continue as we work our way through all eight of the BBA learning goals.

### **The Journey Never Ends**

At the Zicklin School, I've seen remarkable side benefits to the assessment journey. Conversations about curriculum, teaching—and, most important, student learning—now occur frequently. Assessment concepts have seeped into the college culture. We have become a school that is centered around student learning. The rewards have been numerous, but three stand out:

1. Assessment has provided common ground for curricular discussions. I assume that such conversations are sorely needed in all institutions. Administrators who want to start such discussions at their campuses should find a diverse and reasonable group of people and encourage them to start talking.

2. The process, the discussion, and the camaraderie engendered by our assessment process have brought about a sea change in faculty attitudes. Faculty are upbeat about what is possible in the classroom and what their responsibilities are in regard to student learning. We've found that it's important to publicize the progress the school is making so that faculty can learn from and support each other.

3. Our assessment program is constantly expanding and improving. As the Zicklin faculty continue to be thoughtful and creative in considering assessment, our attitudes about student learning become even more refined—and more embedded in our school's culture.

Still, it hasn't been easy. Based on our experience, I would say that embedding assessment into the culture of the campus is a mammoth undertaking. In our case, I'm not sure we could have been successful if the new AACSB standards had not created the urgency for us to focus on learning as well as teaching. Expectations imposed by external agencies can serve internal purposes.

The assessment journey can be a long and arduous one, but the destination makes the travel worthwhile. Because of our assessment efforts, we feel more confident that our students are prepared to enter the working world. We are clarifying what we want to teach them and discovering what they've learned. The winding road to learning assessment has led to a better education for Zicklin students.

Phyllis Zadra is associate dean of the Zicklin School of Business at Baruch College in New York City.

# Adjuncts Groomed for Success

Adjunct faculty are making up more and more of the b-school roster. It's up to administrators to ensure that adjunct faculty are as good as they can possibly be.

**by Jeffrey A. Mello**

**F**ew business schools could successfully deliver their programs without the aid of adjunct professors. These part-time, temporary instructors are generally drawn from the ranks of business executives, bringing a fresh perspective to the classroom. They also offer administrators a great deal of scheduling flexibility and a chance to cover new topics in the curriculum. And because they're usually paid by the course and accrue no benefits, adjuncts are less expensive to employ than full-time research faculty.

As the doctoral shortage worsens, schools are likely to rely even more on part-time instructors. Indeed, changes to AACSB's standards now allow schools to classify many adjuncts as professionally qualified (PQ) faculty and use PQ professors for up to 50 percent of their undergraduate "faculty resources." These changes make it easier for business schools to bring adjuncts on board—and make it critical that administrators understand the best ways to recruit, deploy, and reward adjunct professors.

### **Finding the Best**

Administrators who want to utilize more adjunct faculty need to hire top-notch individuals who will be committed to the school's mission, and the effort begins with recruiting. One way to identify likely candidates is to network at meetings of professional academic or practitioner organizations, such as the Society for Human Resource Management or the American Marketing Association. It's also useful to attend meetings sponsored by alumni groups.

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cover departmental policies regarding class cancellations, evaluations, grade rosters, and grade submissions.

Even more important, however, is to assign each adjunct a mentor from the full-time faculty, particularly one who currently teaches or has recently taught the course the new professor will handle. It's even better if the adjunct can come to campus during the previous semester and watch the professor teach the course—and perhaps even deliver a guest lecture.

If adjuncts have no teaching experience, they might find it useful to ask for an

informal evaluation by students sometime after the fifth week of the course. This can give teaching novices enough feedback to adjust their approaches in the following weeks to make sure students are pleased with the course. Classroom visitation by a peer or mentor can also provide important early feedback.

Full-time faculty can aid in the recruiting process by being active in the associations serving their own disciplines and looking out for new teaching talent. Many outstanding adjunct faculty never even think about teaching until they're approached by a colleague.

Hiring adjuncts with no experience in a classroom is always a little risky—even if they have impressive professional qualifications and an interest in teaching. Such individuals still might make excellent teachers, but it's critical to gauge classroom effectiveness before offering a contract. One way is to ask applicants to deliver guest lectures at the school, so administrators can judge their ability to run a classroom and interact with students. Candidates will find that guest lectures offer them a realistic job preview as well—and, if they're effective, these opportunities can boost their confidence before they accept the position.

### **Developing the Talent**

Because adjunct faculty are frequently hired to plug teaching gaps, and most are hired on a semester-to-semester basis, the majority are left to succeed or fail on their own. Rarely are they afforded opportunities for development or integration into the department.

Administrators can take several commonsense steps to ease adjuncts into the business school, such as walking them around campus, introducing them to full-time faculty, and providing a handbook that covers parking, library hours, and technological resources. It's also necessary to

Over and above monitoring adjuncts' teaching success, administrators can make teaching more rewarding for adjunct faculty by stressing their value to the college, actively acknowledging their contributions, and perhaps even promoting team teaching opportunities between adjuncts and full-time faculty. An institution that truly values its adjunct faculty might go even farther, by offering adjuncts seminars to help them improve their pedagogy, funding travel to conferences, or paying for professional organization membership or professional certification. Simply asking adjunct professors what they need to be more effective might turn up more targeted development ideas—and offer a motivational lift. If administrators invest some time and effort, they'll find that adjuncts are valuable assets that produce significant returns.

### **Strengthening the Commitment**

Both school and faculty benefit if adjuncts pursue professional accreditation and improve their teaching skills. Remember that, to maintain their professionally qualified status in AACSB's estimation, these individuals must participate in continuous development activities over five-year cycles. These activities include maintaining an active consulting practice;

serving on a board; publishing in academic, professional, or trade journals; or continuing an “active role of significance in a business enterprise.”

For most adjunct faculty, the most obvious of these choices is to continue their roles as business executives. Because few adjunct faculty are interested in becoming full-time academics, most feel more loyalty to their professional careers than to the schools that hire them part-time. That’s why administrators should seek ways to integrate these executives into the life of the school and make them feel good about their contributions. Administrators can help adjuncts bond more closely with the university if they:

- Include them in department communications, meetings, lunches, and other events. Administrators should particularly seek their input during discussions about teaching. Because adjuncts usually aren’t putting energy into research and service activities, they often are more focused on teaching and student needs than full-time faculty can be, so they have a great deal to offer on these topics.

- Give them office space, even if they have to share it, so they feel like they belong.

- Ask them to share their professional experience by giving presentations, acting as resource guides, or providing industry contacts for the full-time faculty.

- Recognize them through annual teaching awards handed out to adjunct faculty—or include them whenever faculty are being considered for such awards. This kind of attention will help adjuncts develop a real sense of connection to the university.

### Ultimate Payoff

Because their professional experience complements the academic strengths of tenured research faculty, adjuncts can be vital components in a school’s efforts to achieve its mission. As the competition for qualified faculty becomes more intense, outstanding adjuncts with successful teaching experience may be courted by a number of eager schools.

However, adjuncts aren’t in it for the money; they’re teaching because they want to share their knowledge. If they’ve developed a deep connection to one school, they’re unlikely to be tempted away by better salaries. Administrators who treat them well and manage them as critical assets will find that their adjunct professors are loyal, productive, and insightful members of the faculty team.

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# Accreditation

## Achieving Maturity

Schools should strive to integrate the lessons of accreditation into their ongoing operating procedures.

by Ruth Guthrie and Louise Soe

**W**hen a business school is preparing for initial accreditation, the whole faculty pulls together to make sure the school meets the standards of necessary quality. Once this milestone is achieved, however, sometimes faculty and administrators relax and revert to their traditional operating levels. It’s far better for schools to aim for “accreditation maturity,” which can serve as both an outlook and a strategic plan as they work to maintain accreditation-quality standards in all their daily operating procedures.

Schools can track and improve their accreditation maturity by consulting a Capability Maturity Model (CMM), a tool originally developed at Carnegie Mellon’s Software Engineering Institute to help the government assess a vendor’s ability to deliver work to a certain standard. Vendors that had achieved a Level 3 CMM rating were eligible to receive a government contract. In this article, the CMM model has been adapted to track accreditation maturity among colleges.

The CMM system shows schools where they stand on five possible accreditation levels. At Level 1, schools follow an ad-hoc approach to delivering education. At Level 2, schools have developed repeatable key practices, but these do not inform improvement. At Level 3—which we consider the minimum level for accreditation—key practices are defined and actively maintained by the college faculty. At Level 4, the college manages key practices with quantitative data. At Level 5, the optimum maturity level, the school continually assesses and improves key practices.

## It's essential to realize that accreditation should be a long-range, ongoing project, not a yearly assignment.

Developing a tiered view of process improvement gives administrators a way to keep their faculty's enthusiasm at the same level that it was during the initial accreditation stage. It helps them maintain focus and sustain their accreditation over time. In addition, the CMM approach reduces staff anxiety. Because faculty know what level the school has attained, they can discuss what issues they still need to address without resorting to any of the negativity that sometimes accompanies accreditation or re-accreditation efforts.



### Barriers to Accreditation Maturity

Even schools that follow the CMM method might encounter several obstacles to accreditation maturity:

**Dean turnover.** When a college of business hires a new dean, continuity between old and new processes is often lost. The strategic planning, action items, and goals are sometimes forgotten; and even if the mission stays the same, processes for achieving it sometimes are abandoned. If a new dean is hired every five years, it's difficult to main-

tain systematic strategic planning processes to meet objectives. Instead, processes are reinvented, and the maturity level remains the same.

**AACSB director turnover.** Many universities ask a knowledgeable senior faculty member to assemble the accreditation committee and meet with the visiting team. If the faculty member returns to the classroom after the visit and the re-accreditation responsibilities are taken up by someone else, continuity and knowledge can be lost.

**Committee turnover.** Business schools expect faculty to serve on many key committees, such as those overseeing curricula, strategic planning, and assessment. Individual faculty may store reports, minutes, and e-mails on their computers, and this knowledge and institutional memory can be lost when committee membership changes.

**Faculty reluctance.** Professors who know how much time and effort are required to serve on an accreditation committee might be unwilling to serve on a re-accreditation committee. In addition, such a role might not seem urgent to them if another visit is several years in the future, so even if they accept the assignment, they may put most of their attention elsewhere. At the same time, many faculty are not interested in accreditation. They perform student assessment daily but are reluctant to discuss program assessment, particularly if it affects discipline distinctions or steps on anyone's toes.

**Poor technology.** Compiling accurate information about budgets, strategic management requirements, and assurance of learning targets is a labor-intensive process. Schools can buy commercial software packages that manage this information, but it still takes labor to key in the continually changing data. If administrators don't know what information they need or how to use it once they've cap-

tured it, data collection won't improve decision making or shed light on process improvement.

### Gaining Maturity

To move a college toward accreditation maturity, it's essential to build an institutional memory and an experience base so that the whole school is working to maintain and improve key practices. It's also essential to realize that accreditation should be a long-range, ongoing project, not

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a yearly assignment. To achieve accreditation maturity, schools should follow these five actions:

**Involve all faculty in accreditation committees.** While it seems like a good idea to load the accreditation team with associate deans and department chairs, such a structure misses a chance for shared governance. A team comprising mostly faculty encourages a sense of ownership, safeguards against personnel turnover—and ensures that accreditation is part of the organizational structure. Such a committee also creates liaisons to departments and dispels misconceptions about accreditation.

**Focus on what the school already does well.** Don't assume that operations must be completely revamped if the school is to achieve accreditation. Look for existing key practices and map these to the accreditation standards. Areas that are not mature will become apparent and can be improved.

**Take advantage of technology.** Instead of relying on informal e-mail communication, invest in a mechanism such as an electronic project library to store all data relevant to the accreditation process. Such a tool enables a school to build a searchable database of reports and correspondence and allows faculty and staff easy access to accreditation information. In addition, whenever it's practical, use Web-based automated processes and data collection to store information on curriculum changes, meeting minutes, and action items.


**Formalize training about accreditation.** Design a professional training system to give all faculty and staff, including new

hires, a consistent level of understanding about accreditation efforts.

**Focus on the goal, not the individual.** Identify weaknesses in key practices, but don't focus on who was responsible for the weakness. Instead, develop action plans to improve the process—and if the first approach doesn't work, try another one. People will be more eager to embrace change if the goal is not punishment for something they've done wrong, but process improvement for the school.

### Higher Goals

A school with a mature accreditation rating finds an AACSB accreditation visit is just that—a visit. There is no frenzy before the team arrives as staffers collect reports about achieving mission statements and establishing infrastructure. The accreditation team simply shows up on a certain day, meets with the required groups, and looks at existing documents.

If business school administrators allow the energy and focus that preceded the initial accreditation to dissipate, they'll only make the re-accreditation process that much more difficult. They need to lift their schools into the mindset of accreditation maturity, so that excellence becomes the baseline of school operations. 

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