

AY20 Expedited Program Review – Optional Program Response to the Dean’s Findings Form

Date: February 28, 2020

To: John Stalvey, Interim Provost

From: Bogdan Hoanca, Ph.D.
Professor of Management Information Systems
Chair, Info. Systems and Decision Sciences Department

Cc: Karen Markel, Ph.D.
Dean, College of Business and Public Policy
Alpana Desai, Ph.D., Professor of Management Information Systems
Dave Fitzgerald, Professor of Management Information Systems
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Re: AY20 Expedited Program Review: Optional Program Response to Dean’s Recommendation

Program/s in this review: Management Information Systems BBA (BBA MIS)

Program response to dean’s findings:

We appreciate Dean Markel’s comments and findings about the centrality of the BBA programs in CBPP. In particular, we would like to comment on Dean Markel’s recommendation to suspend the BBA MIS program. In the response below, we would like to point out the following:

1. We are acutely aware of and in agreement with Dean Markel’s assessment of the limited faculty resources, the low enrollment, and the other challenges facing the BBA MIS program.
2. We agree that the program will need to change, especially given the past and future budget cuts.
3. We expect that placing the program on Suspension will not result in financial savings, but might instead damage the CBPP image and will in the long run lead to a loss of revenue for the College and the state.
4. We suggest that placing the program on Continued Review might be a more beneficial way forward in the long run. This is a strategic decision, somewhat counterintuitive given the tactical challenges the program and the university are facing.

We readily agree that faculty resources for the BBA MIS program are woefully inadequate and that enrollment in the program is at historic lows. As detailed in the program review document, the departure of several key faculty members over the past years has left the department barely able to meet its daily operations and has made it challenging to keep up with the fast-changing technology environment. Faculty members have had less and less time to devote to marketing the program to potential students, just as enrollments were falling. Over the past years, we have continued our efforts to market the program, have continued to refine the curriculum, but the reality of reduced resources is visibly reflected in the lower number of students in the program. Historically, Management Information Sciences as a discipline is relatively less familiar to the general public, making the job of advertising the BBA MIS program even more difficult than a more well-known discipline, for example Computer Science. Fueled in part by better public recognition and in part by better marketing, taking advantage of coding summer camps and of other outreach efforts, Computer Science has seen greatly increased enrollment, at least at the input of the program.

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Nowadays, technology is an increasingly important element in all areas of business. In her review, Dean Markel views the MIS area as a key contributor to the success of our students and as an area of high workforce demands. Her comments indicate a desire to transform the program to better meet the resources in the College, rather than a desire to discontinue a program that fails to meet its goals. Given this shared understanding of the importance of MIS at a time when more majors should be technology-literate, when CBPP faculty have endorsed a curriculum core that should include more business analytics courses, suspending the BBA MIS might send the wrong signal to our students and to our stakeholders alike. If the ultimate goal is to reinvent a program that delivers key benefits to students, employers, and the state, it might be more appropriate to place the program on Continued Review.

At the tactical level we recognize that suspending the BBA MIS program is almost an obvious choice, given the faculty resources, the low enrolment, and the recent and upcoming budget cuts to the University of Alaska. Tactical pressures are difficult to ignore at the dean level, where budget cuts have left very little choice of where to save money. At the same time, from a strategic point, we would hope that the program can be allowed an opportunity to develop to its potential, with resources commensurate with the challenge. Investing in the BBA MIS program is not a risky proposition: it is almost certain that MIS will continue to be relevant for business, and only increasingly so. The program review we submitted included data about graduates getting good and well-paying jobs and about numerous job openings that are yet unfilled because we are not graduating sufficient students. The only area where the BBA MIS program suffers is in the initial recruiting of students. The completion rate of the BBA MIS program is excellent. The curriculum provides students with a broad set of skills, including in communications and business, skills not emphasized in other IT-related programs at UAA. Thanks to their skills, the graduates are in high demand, get excellent jobs, and remain in the state. Employers have a difficult time recruiting graduates from out of state for their unfilled IT jobs. If the program is suspended and ultimately deleted, it will have to be re-created from scratch in the not too distant future.

We hope that strategic thinking can overcome the tactical pressures of impending budget cuts. Strategically, placing the BBA MIS program on Continued review will create an opportunity to develop an area that will be even more critical for CBPP and for Alaska in the coming years.