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**LEVERAGING FACULTY TALENTS AND INTERESTS TO CREATE A
GRADUATE SEMINAR SERIES**

Abstract

The subject university is a regional comprehensive university located in the Southeastern United States. The university offers a 30-credit hour Master of Accountancy program that includes seven (7) required 3-hour courses plus 9-hours of elective credit. With a small number of faculty members who have teaching responsibilities at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, the faculty was challenged to provide interesting and relevant elective courses for the students. This paper describes the process of designing and executing a graduate seminar series consisting of three 1-credit hour courses that are team-taught with colleagues from other institutions, thus broadening the scope of the students' educational experience and incorporating many of the core competencies not addressed in the program's traditional classroom setting.

Graduate Seminar Series Learning Objectives

Overall learning objectives for the seminar series were developed by the Program Director at the time that the seminar series proposal was submitted to the Dean of the college. Specific learning objectives were then developed for each of the three seminars in consultation with the visiting instructors.

Overall learning objectives:

- Students will learn about technical content areas not specifically included in the current curricular offerings
- Students will learn personal and professional skills associated with participating in lifelong learning events
- Students will obtain perspectives from persons outside of the ranks of faculty and students at the current institution

International seminar learning objectives:

- Students will learn fundamentals of financial reporting and performance measurement in a global environment
- Students will gain an appreciation for the complexities of operating internationally
- Students will develop a basis upon which to build an understanding through further study and research of issues facing managers in multinational organizations
- Students will acquire an understanding of the past, present and future of international accounting and auditing
- Students will learn to work cooperatively in groups using on-line technologies

Forensic seminar learning objectives:

- Students will learn fundamentals of the field of forensic accounting
- Students will gain an appreciation for the complexities of investigative techniques in today's computerized environment
- Students will gain a basis upon which to build a deeper understanding through further study and research of issues facing organizations
- Students will learn and practice investigative processes and investigative techniques in a hands-on problem-based learning case study
- Students will learn to work cooperatively in groups using on-line technologies

Ethics seminar learning objectives:

- Students will learn the theoretical foundations of historical and contemporary ethics
- Students will acquire an appreciation for how ethics affect public policy and corporate responsibility
- Students will learn to use multiple models of ethical reasoning
- Students will learn to compare and contrast ethical frameworks of various professions, including the practice of accountancy
- Students will develop a basis upon which to build a deeper understanding, through further study and research, of ethical issues facing managers and organizations

**Graduate Seminar Series
Core Competencies Addressed**

The Graduate Seminar Series for the 2007-2008 academic year was designed to incorporate many of the core competencies for entry into the accounting profession, as identified by the AICPA. The following table summarizes competencies and elements addressed by each of the seminars in the series: Accounting & Performance Measurement in a Global Environment (Int'l), Forensic Techniques for Controllers and Auditors (Forensics), and Professional Business Ethics (Ethics).

| Competency/Element | Seminar | | |
|--|---------|-----------|--------|
| | Int'l | Forensics | Ethics |
| Functional Competencies: | | | |
| Decision Modeling | X | X | X |
| Risk Analysis | X | X | |
| Measurement | X | X | |
| Reporting | X | X | X |
| Research | X | X | X |
| Leveraging Technology | X | X | X |
| Personal Competencies: | | | |
| Professional Demeanor | X | X | X |
| Problem Solving and Decision Making | X | X | X |
| Interaction | X | X | |
| Leadership | X | X | |
| Communication | X | X | X |
| Project Management | X | X | X |
| Leveraging Technology | X | X | X |
| Broad Business Perspective Competencies: | | | |
| Strategic/Critical Thinking | X | X | X |
| Industry/Sector Perspective | X | X | X |
| International/Global Perspective | X | | |
| Resource Management | X | | |
| Legal/Regulatory Perspective | X | X | X |
| Marketing/Client Focus | | | |
| Leveraging Technology | X | X | X |

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE SEMINAR SERIES

Introduction and Background:

The subject university is a regional comprehensive university located in the Southeastern United States. Along with a fairly traditional 36-hour residential Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree, the College of Business offers a 30-credit hour Master of Accountancy (M.Ac.) program that includes seven (7) required 3-hour courses plus 9 hours of elective credit. Courses are usually taught on a regularly scheduled basis from 6:00 pm until 9:00 pm Monday through Thursday, with an occasional Saturday or summer offering. With a small number of faculty members who have teaching responsibilities at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, the faculty was challenged to provide interesting and relevant elective courses for the students.

The genesis of the seminar series concept occurred in early 2007 when discussions between the graduate program director and current and potential students for the Master of Accountancy program and the accounting faculty revealed two key issues:

- Students perceived the curriculum to be stale and unexciting – prospective students inquired about courses in SEC reporting, not-for-profit organizations, ethics, internal auditing, IT auditing, and other specialized topics. The actual program offerings are Theory I, Theory II, Theory III, Tax, Auditing, Accounting Information Systems, and Law, coupled with approved electives out of the other graduate business program offerings. The “disconnect” begs the question “Why would a prospective student choose this university over others within the state system?”
- The faculty is extremely devoted to the university, the program and the students; however, like many institutions, the university is faced with limited resources. The faculty, typically very stretched due to their teaching, research and service expectations, has virtually no incentive to be creative and take risks in the classroom.

The M.Ac. Program Director set forth to find a solution that jointly benefited students, faculty, and the business community. With no prospect of obtaining new faculty positions to lighten current faculty loads, any new course offerings would need to be “outside-load” (e.g., in addition to the normal 9-credit hour teaching load per semester). This paper describes the process of designing and executing a graduate seminar series consisting of three 1-credit hour courses that are team-taught with colleagues from other institutions, over the course of a full academic year.

Initial Issues to Be Addressed:

In developing the seminar series concept plan that was eventually presented to and approved by the Dean of the College of Business, several issues were addressed, including institutional and accreditation considerations, topics and faculty for the individual seminars, logistics of pedagogical delivery and funding considerations.

Because none of the current faculty members had the time or motivation to develop and deliver new 3-credit hour graduate courses, the Program Director investigated the institutional constraints on offering a series of 1-credit hour courses to be taught outside of the normally scheduled class times. While initially meeting some resistance from the administrative support functions in the registrar’s office, it was

determined that the curricular infrastructure already existed to offer so-called “Topics” courses that could be anywhere from one to three credit hours. Further, it was determined that meeting times need not be within the normal scheduling blocks currently used at the university.

In order to tap into expertise beyond the walls of our own institution, it was decided that each special topics seminar would be team-taught with a member of the resident faculty as the “lead” instructor, and a colleague from outside the university who had some particular knowledge, skill or expertise unavailable from existing faculty. Under accreditation standards of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), most of the College faculty members are either Academically Qualified (AQ) or Professionally Qualified (PQ). This fact provided us with the opportunity to select outside colleagues who had expertise but might not meet the traditional standards that define qualified faculty. The lead instructor would act as the course administrator with access to on-line pedagogical and administrative systems such as Blackboard, e-mail, and registration/grading.

As is common among most institutions, each credit hour consists of fifteen (15) contact hours. To take full advantage of the talents of the visiting instructors the seminars were structured to consist of 8-hours of face-to-face instruction by the visiting instructor. The remainder of the contact hours was comprised of a combination of advance readings, individual and group on-line assignments, and a form of assessment.

The program director, in consultation with the Accounting Advisory Board and various business contacts, initially developed a working list of possible topics and known experts in the topic areas. A short survey questionnaire was developed and distributed via email to business contacts and personally administered to members of the local state association of CPAs monthly meeting. The survey, included herein as Exhibit A, solicited input as to the respondents interest in various topics, as well as feedback about the pricing of such a course should they decide to enroll as a non-degree seeking graduate student.

There were several reasons for soliciting input from professionals. Firstly, it was helpful to determine where our curriculum was particularly weak in the eyes of the profession we espouse to serve. Secondly, the seminars are hoped to be a marketing tool for our graduate program to entice working professionals to try out graduate education without making the long-term commitment of entering a degree program or signing up for a traditional class with a 15-week duration. Finally, it is hoped that the seminars will strengthen our on-going relationships with the local business community and that the university will be considered as a source of continuing education credit for professional licensure, a role that the university has often failed to fulfill in the past.

Based upon the input received, the topics that were selected for the initial pilot program were International Accounting, Forensic Accounting, and Professional Ethics for CPAs. In true “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde” fashion, the Program Director volunteered to be the lead instructor for all three of the seminars in the initial pilot program, recruiting Professor Larry Seese, then of East Carolina University, for the International Accounting seminar, Professor Larry Crumbley of Louisiana State University for the Forensics seminar, and Professor Robert Sack of the Darden School at the University of Virginia for the Ethics seminar. Survey results also strongly favored seminars in not-for-profit organizations and in essentials of personal financial planning.

Finding classroom space for a full 8-hour day proved to be problematic. Accordingly, the program director obtained a meeting room at the local Holiday Inn near the airport and made arrangements for lunch on the premises for the seminar participants. Holding the seminar in an off-campus setting was actually seen as preferable to the typical campus classroom setting that students are accustomed to, as it allowed students to experience the type of continuing education format that they will participate in throughout their careers. We also believed it to be more appealing to working professionals who may be somewhat reluctant to return to a traditional classroom.

To extrinsically reward the lead instructor for participating in the seminar, we proposed a small stipend. Likewise, a small honorarium was provided to the visiting professor, along with reimbursement for travel, accommodations and meals. Based upon the foregoing, we established a budget and presented the concept plan to the Dean of the college. The Dean agreed to fund the lead and visiting faculty honorariums, leaving the remainder to be funded from departmental discretionary funds.

Implementation of the Plan:

Fall Semester 2007

The first seminar, *Accounting & Performance Measurement in a Global Environment*, was held on November 9, 2007 in a meeting room at the local Holiday Inn. We advertised the seminar internally to M.Ac. and MBA students. Additionally, we mailed flyers to local businesses and posted a press release in the local newspaper. Nine students registered for the seminar, all of which were M.Ac. students.

Students were sent a syllabus several weeks ahead of time, along with instructions about advance readings and how to access the university's version of Blackboard. The advance readings consisted of a case study sent via e-mail and two chapters from *International Accounting* (2007) by Douplik and Perera. An e-book from McGraw-Hill containing the two chapters proved to be a very economical option for students as the total cost was less than \$10.

The lead instructor opened the all-day session at 8:30 am, then turned the program over to the visiting professor, who conducted the majority of the day's activities, which ended at approximately 4:30 pm. Following organization of students into teams for follow-up on the on-line case study, we provided instructions about the individual writing assignment and the on-line final examination.

The seminar was very well received by the participants. Feedback from the regular course evaluation system at the university was very positive. Additionally, we asked participants to complete an anonymous on-line survey about their experience with the seminar. Once again, results were quite positive. Eight of the nine students completed the survey, which polled students about the textbook, the case studies, the facilities, as well as their overall experience in the seminar. Seven out of the eight student respondents indicated that they would be inclined to take another seminar course, that they would recommend similar seminar courses to other students, and that the atmosphere was conducive to learning. Interestingly, students reported that the small group learning case that was used was "excellent" (five out of eight) or "good" (two out of eight), even though students did not have a particularly favorable view of group projects, with half the respondents indicating that they "tolerate them." The visiting

professor received very high ratings from the participants. (Note: Due to confidentiality concerns, the ratings of the individual visiting professors are not disclosed herein; only combined information is provided. See Exhibit B). Some of the students provided meaningful written comments at the end of the survey. For example, one student wrote, "It was great! The seminar provided me with the opportunity to learn something about the subject from an expert in the field. I now have an understanding of the main issues and a foundation for further study. It was also a nice "interlude" in the semester as I was getting a little tired of my regular classes: the seminar got me intellectually stimulated and therefore back on track." The entire survey and the combined results for all three seminars are included herein as Exhibit B.

Spring Semester 2008

The second seminar, entitled "*Forensic Techniques for Controllers and Auditors*" was conducted on April 4, 2008. There were fourteen enrolled students: ten from the Master of Accountancy program, one MBA student and three non-degree seeking students from the business community. Professor D. Larry Crumbley of Louisiana State University was the visiting professor. As was done for the previous seminar, the syllabus and advance readings were mailed to the participants. At the end of the day, participants were assigned to groups for the follow-up project, *Return of the Tallahassee Bean Counters*, a case under development by Cindy Durtschi and Carol Dee, both of the University of Colorado. Students were given approximately 3 weeks to complete the case, using the on-line communication techniques available through Blackboard/Vista. There was also a short on-line examination for assessment purposes.

Eleven students completed the anonymous survey at the end of the seminar. Consistent with the results of the first seminar, the visiting professor was rated very highly. Although they had rather mixed opinions about group projects as a learning tool, the Tallahassee Bean Counters case got very good reviews, with all eleven respondents judging the case as, as an instructional tool, as good or great. Seven respondents indicated that they would be inclined to take another such seminar and nine responded that they would recommend the graduate seminar series to others. The comments generally supported the numerical ratings, with praise for both the visiting professor and the case that was used, although many noted that the case required much too much work for a 1 credit-hour seminar. There was also frustration expressed in working in a group setting.

Summer 2008

During the summer session, Professor Robert Sack of the Darden School at the University of Virginia lead a seminar entitled *Professional Business Ethics*. Advance readings and in-class materials consisted of cases and notes from the Darden Case Collection, as well as an in-development case based upon the Enron scandal. Nine students (all from the M.Ac. program) were enrolled in the seminar. This seminar was not designed to meet the state's annual continuing professional education in ethics requirement, and accordingly, it was not advertised to those outside the M.Ac. program. Content of the course was primarily general business ethics; however, there was a research and writing component that focused on both the AICPA and state principles and rules for ethical behavior.

All nine students completed the on-line survey giving much praise to Professor Sack. The cases used was also well received (all nine respondents rated the cases as either good (five) or excellent (four). Eight out of nine were indicated that they would be inclined to take another seminar and would recommend the seminars to others. The comments from this group were insightful since most of them had been participants in at least one of the previous seminars. One student commented, "I was pleasantly surprised with this seminar. The material and visiting professor were intriguing and engaging."

Current plans include submitting the course for approval from the state Board to meet the annual ethics professional development requirement. If approved, the seminar will be actively marketed to business professionals.

Concluding Remarks:

The Graduate Seminar Series is still a work-in-progress. While designed with the students of the M.Ac. program in mind, we are pleased that during the course of the academic year, the series attracted one MBA student and three non-degree seeking students. The challenge will continue to be in getting the word out to the local business community.

Although we cannot, at this point, fully evaluate the success or failure of the seminar series program, we are pleased with the response and feedback we have received. Clearly, the students are receiving a more enriched academic and professional experience, when compared to the traditional elective course offerings of our institution. If the program is continued into the next academic year, we are hopeful that other faculty members will take advantage of the opportunity to be engaged with experts in our profession and demonstrate to our student population lifelong learning at its finest.

Exhibit A: Survey of Local Professionals:

| N = 23 | Yes | No |
|---|-----------------------|----|
| Please indicate which of the following seminars you would consider attending: | | |
| • Accounting & Auditing Issues for Financial Institutions | 12 | 11 |
| • Accounting & Auditing Issues for Not-for-Profit Organizations | 14 | 9 |
| • Accounting & Auditing in the Gaming Industry | 4 | 19 |
| • Essentials of Personal Financial Planning | 16 | 7 |
| • Forensic Techniques for Controllers & Auditors | 13 | 10 |
| • Fundamentals of Internal Auditing | 9 | 14 |
| • International Accounting & Auditing | 10 | 13 |
| • International Taxation | 3 | 20 |
| • IT Auditing | 8 | 15 |
| • Professional Ethics (would meet 2-hour state requirement) | 13 | 10 |
| • Public Company Accounting & Reporting Issues | 10 | 13 |
| • State and Local Taxation | 12 | 11 |
| • Others (please list): | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| Is the projected cost of such a seminar reasonable? | 20 | 0 |
| | | |
| Would you be interested in participating in the full-day session ONLY, receiving 8-hours CPE credit, but no graduate level course credit? | 20 | 1 |
| | | |
| If yes to the preceding question, what fee would be reasonable to pay? Please enter amount. | \$195 (average) | |
| | \$100 - \$350 (range) | |
| Please provide any other information you believe would be helpful in developing this program: | | |
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

Exhibit B: Survey of Participants – Combined Results

1. The facilities provided at the Holiday Inn were:

- 1. Excellent – 21%
- 2. Good – 61%
- 3. Fair – 18%
- 4. Poor
- 5. Not applicable

2. The food provided at the Holiday Inn was:

- 1. Excellent – 22%
- 2. Good – 57%
- 3. Fair – 14%
- 4. Poor – 7%
- 5. Not applicable

3. The atmosphere/setting of the seminar was:

- 1. Conducive to learning – 82%
- 2. Distracted from learning – 14%
- 3. No opinion – 4%

4. The visiting professor was:

- 1. Very knowledgeable – 93%
- 2. Somewhat knowledgeable – 7%
- 3. Not very knowledgeable
- 4. No opinion

5. Please provide your opinion of the e-book option.

- 1. Excellent instructional tool – 25%
- 2. Very good instructional tool – 75%
- 3. Sufficient instructional tool
- 4. Poor instructional tool
- 5. No opinion

6. How would you rate the case study(ies) as an instructional tool?

- 1. Excellent – 57%
- 2. Good – 39%
- 3. Fair – 4%
- 4. Poor
- 5. No opinion

7. What is your opinion about group projects, as a learning tool?

- 1. Excellent learning tool – 32%
- 2. Good learning tool – 37%
- 3. Fair learning tool – 21%
- 4. Poor learning tool – 5%
- 5. No opinion – 5%

8. What is your opinion about group projects, overall?

- 1. Love them – 11%
- 2. Like them – 37%
- 3. Tolerate them – 42%
- 4. Hate them – 11%
- 5. No opinion

9. What is your overall opinion of this seminar experience?

- 1. Excellent – 39%
- 2. Good – 50%
- 3. Fair – 11%
- 4. Poor
- 5. No opinion

10. Would you be inclined to take another seminar course?

- 1. Yes – 78%
- 2. No – 11%
- 3. No opinion – 11%

11. Would you recommend graduate seminars to others?

- 1. Yes – 86%
- 2. No – 7%
- 3. No opinion – 7%