

Assurance of learning at the graduate level: an innovative roadmap for MBA program assessment

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ABSTRACT

One of the critical components of achieving and maintaining business school AACSB accreditation is the collection of assessment data that provides evidence that a program is meeting its assurance of learning (AOL) goals. Although turnkey assessment solutions are available from outside vendors, customized approaches to gathering quality data can be more feasible than program directors might currently believe as well as offer significant value-add to an MBA program. In this paper, a customized process used to collect the entirety of the assessment data needed within an MBA program is discussed. Specifically, detailed processes are examined regarding how indirect reflective student data from an MBA portfolio course is collected and combined with more direct objective data from faculty assessments of student work. The work also discusses the strengths, limitations, and effectiveness of the prescribed data collection processes.

Keywords: higher education, assessment, assurance of learning, AOL, AACSB, continuous improvement, management education, graduate management education, curriculum

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INTRODUCTION

The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) accreditation, is highly regarded as the top accrediting body in the world for business schools. One of the more important and potentially challenging aspects of achieving and maintaining AACSB accreditation is the collection of assessment data that provides independent reviewers with the information needed to show that a program is meeting its assurance of learning (AOL) goals. The process of gathering quality data may be further complicated when business schools offer both undergraduate and graduate degrees. Previous research has provided a valuable historical perspective on how AACSB incorporated AOL into its accreditation requirements and offered broad guidelines for how institutions can develop an AOL process that “closes the loop” between AOL and continuous improvement efforts (Better-Reed, Nitkin, & Sampson, 2008). This manuscript extends previous AOL recommendations by describing the process that a large school in the southwest uses to collect the entirety of the assessment data needed for its MBA program. Assessment data are collected through two channels—a capstone MBA Portfolio course which generates indirect, reflective student data, and faculty assessment of students’ graduate work, which generates more direct, objective data.

Assessment processes align with the framework proposed by Stout, Borden, German, and Monahan (2005). Specifically, the assessment process deployed (a) includes input from faculty members, administrative team, and students, (b) relies on a multi-trait, multi-method data collection method that considers direct and indirect learning assessment, and (c) provides actionable feedback to the MBA program’s major stakeholders. In the sections that follow the work first describes the background behind the decision to create a portfolio course, how assessment data is extracted from the course, and how the course is managed. Second, the work describes the process used to collect objective assessment data. An explanation is then offered on how the two types of data are combined into a reporting structure. Finally, the work discusses the strengths, limitations, and effectiveness related to the prescribed data collection process. It is hoped that this paper will provide a potential roadmap for other business schools that must collect assessment data for accreditation purposes.

Indirect, reflective data are collected through a capstone MBA course called MBA Portfolio. In this course, students create a comprehensive portfolio that includes (a) a personal introductory letter, (b) a professional resume, (c) eight self-selected works from courses completed during the MBA program, and (d) explanations of how each work in the respective portfolio demonstrates the students have successfully met the learning objectives of the MBA program. The portfolio not only allows students to reflect on their experiences as an MBA student, but also serves as a tangible artifact that showcases the major accomplishments of MBA studies.

Students enrolled in the portfolio course are required to provide eight total works from at least seven different courses to ensure portfolio diversity with the best seven works being assessed for purposes of the final portfolio score. A team of faculty members led primarily by the Director of Graduate Programs, the Director of Continuous Improvement, and the Director of Accreditation oversees the scoring of the portfolio. It is important to note that the portfolio team does not rescore the original works. Instead the team scores the content of the student reflections and the presentation quality of the completed portfolios. Final portfolio submissions might range 80 to 200 pages in length, depending on the length of the projects that students include in their portfolio. A high-quality reflective portion of any given portfolio may comprise only 16 of those

pages. At the end of each portfolio course, the faculty portfolio team aggregates the scores from the student reflections for each learning objective for purposes of assessment reporting.

The Creation of BUSI 6105: MBA Portfolio

West Texas A&M University (WTAMU) is a public institution with a regional mission located in the Texas Panhandle. WTAMU was founded in 1910 and joined the Texas A&M University System in 1990. In 2006, faculty in the College of Business unanimously agreed to pursue AACSB accreditation, which the college earned in 2012. Since then, enrollment in the College of Business has grown from approximately 1,200 students to over 2,700 students. The MBA program accounts for nearly half of the enrollment in the college.

In early 2009 two members of the administrative team attended an AACSB AOL professional development conference in Tampa, Florida. Participation in the meetings was done in effort to gain as much information as possible about the accreditation process since an AACSB initial accreditation visit was soon on the horizon. At the meeting, it became readily apparent that many business schools face similar AOL challenges, and some organizations appeared more prepared than others to meet these challenges. It was known that AOL data from the undergraduate programs could be obtained through turnkey assessments such as those offered by Education Testing Service. However, it was a struggle to determine the most appropriate method for WTAMU MBA program assessment.

One late afternoon in Tampa after the day's meetings had ended, the administrators walked through Harbour Island started talking broadly about student experiences within MBA programs. A common conversational theme emerged in that anecdotally, many individuals felt their respective MBA experiences from a variety of programs lacked important elements of a graduate-level academic capstone experience. Specifically, to obtain a master's level degree in many disciplines, students are required to complete an additional academic deliverable such as a thesis, a comprehensive exam, a number of clinical hours, or an internship—something that signaled to the student that their degree included a distinctive component that made it different than an undergraduate degree. A commonly held belief exists that this was much less the case for MBA programs meaning capstone events are rare within MBA programs. One central question became prevalent in discussions: "What does one do within an MBA program?" Unfortunately, many times over, the answer was simply the student completed some additional classes.

It is not uncommon for students or professionals in the art world to keep a portfolio of their best works. The purpose of the portfolio is to showcase an artist's most outstanding works to those that are unfamiliar with their accomplishments. Indeed, a prospective faculty member in theater, interior design, architecture, and studio or fine arts might be required to submit their portfolio as a part of the job application process. The concept of an MBA portfolio was appealing as it might provide students with a tangible, deliverable product that would help distinguish their undergraduate and graduate careers. To be fair, WTAMU is not the first to consider including a portfolio course within its MBA. Further exploration of the idea revealed a few other business schools also required an MBA portfolio. If WTAMU's situation was unique in some way it was because it was considering the introduction of an MBA portfolio requirement simultaneously while pursuing AACSB accreditation; it dawned on administrators that an MBA portfolio course might serve a dual-purpose for the WTAMU MBA program if a clear, useful link could be established between the MBA portfolio requirements and key learning goals of the MBA program in its entirety. Said another way, administrators realized that an opportunity to

develop and implement a program component that could provide a distinctive, graduate-level experience for MBA students and, if properly aligned with MBA key learning goals and objectives, a vehicle for capturing AOL assessment data.

During the development of the initial accreditation plan administrators had already created the program learning goals and objectives shown in Table 1 (Appendix). The next step was to create a mechanism for requiring students to complete a portfolio. After a lot of brainstorming, agreement, disagreement, drafting, and revising (and with little to no available information from other business programs to help blaze a trail) administrators eventually decided to add a 1-credit hour portfolio course, named BUSI 6105, to the core MBA curriculum. The portfolio course was voted on through the college and university curriculum process with the following course description:

The M.B.A. portfolio provides evidence of personal accomplishment and a tangible demonstration of skills and learning outcomes established for the M.B.A. program.

Students need to assemble a portfolio of a personal résumé and at least seven projects which demonstrate competencies in the program learning outcomes.

The pilot course, very experimental in nature, was first offered in 2009 to a small group of students. Upon successful completion of the course pilot, administrators officially added the course to the WTAMU MBA program curriculum. The course was given the code, BUSI 6105, is now a required 1-credit hour course for all WTAMU MBA students. In almost all cases, students complete the course during their final semester in the program.

Stages of the course

As mentioned previously, students in the portfolio course compile a portfolio of eight artifacts, or works they have completed within their respective courses that are believed to best demonstrate the learning objectives of the MBA program. The process of creating the portfolio occurs in several stages, as shown in Figure 1 (Appendix). At most stages in the process, students submit work that helps faculty track student progress toward portfolio completion. Faculty provide feedback to the students throughout the process, culminating in students submitting the final revision of their portfolio and receiving a grade for the course. Each of the major stages of the portfolio process are described in detail below.

Portfolio submission strategy

Prior to drafting their portfolio, students must submit a “submission strategy.” The submission strategy is the blueprint for the portfolio, and can be likened to an outline that an author might develop prior to drafting a full paper. In it, students identify the works that might be included within a portfolio, match those works to specific learning objectives, and then rank order the works within each learning objective in an effort to determine which work exemplifies achievement of that objective. Students then populate a worksheet provided with all of this information, summarizing final decisions about which works to include in the final portfolio as shown in Table 2 (Appendix). Two important things regarding the submission strategy should be noted. First, the reader will notice that in Table 2 (Appendix) one course is listed twice in the submission guide. This aligns with a requirement that the portfolio consists of works from at least 7 distinct courses. Second, there are cases in which a student will include a course from another university. This is especially the case when a student transfers to the MBA program from

another program. As far as the portfolio is concerned, the approach to this point has been to treat any course that has been officially accepted for credit towards graduation as eligible for inclusion in the portfolio.

Faculty give feedback to each student and either approve their submission strategy, clearing students to begin drafting their full portfolio, or require that the student revise and resubmit the strategy (the specific grading feedback given at this point is simply pass-fail). The main reason that students might need to revise respective strategies is a failure to include enough course diversity. Said another way, students sometimes include works from fewer than 7 courses and must rethink the submission strategy. In general, faculty are not fussy about which courses (or disciplines) a student uses for each learning objective. Typically, it is left to the student to decide which of the works best fits each learning objective. However, because the portfolio faculty are often familiar with the content of a particular course (indeed, it is not uncommon for a faculty reviewer to have taught a course listed in the submission strategy) it is sometimes suggested that a particular artifact might not be an optimal match for a given learning objective and that the student include a more appropriate work for that objective.

Portfolio Draft

At this stage, students must submit a full draft of the portfolio. For each learning objective students include in their portfolio a cover sheet listing the course information for the course from which their selected work was drawn, a “rubric trait analysis”, and a copy of the work itself. Faculty score the portfolio and give feedback related to the revisions that students will need to make before submitting their final portfolio. It is important to note that faculty only score the new material that has been created for the portfolio. That is, faculty do not rescore each individual work included in the portfolio—those have already been scored by the instructors of the course. Instead, portfolio scoring focuses mainly on the rubric trait analyses. This begs the following question: What is a rubric trait analysis and how do faculty score it?

For each MBA learning objective developed within the WTAMU MBA, a rubric that includes a number of traits related to the objective was developed, as is common in AACSB protocol. As an example, the rubric used to assess learning objective 2.1, capacity to lead, is provided in Table 3 of the appendix. The first column of the rubric lists the individual traits or skills deemed critical to the leadership learning objective, and students should, ideally, be able to demonstrate an exemplary level of learning in each of these traits. Exactly *how* students demonstrate this in their portfolio is through written, self-reflective statements called rubric trait analyses. For a given learning objective, students are required to write an explanation of how the work they have chosen for that learning objective allowed them to achieve a high level of learning in each of the individual traits of that learning objective. Students are encouraged to target their explanations with a relatively uninformed reader in mind. Specifically, faculty instruct students to assume the reader of their portfolio knows nothing about the specific work that they have selected. With this in mind, faculty further instruct students that rubric trait analyses should be written such that the reader will (a) gain a basic understanding of their work and (b) become convinced that they have increased their capacity to lead.

For students, the portfolio draft is a challenging undertaking for several reasons. First, it can be time consuming for them to compile and review the entire body of their MBA work in search of the best artifacts to include in the portfolio. Second, because the rubric for each learning objective is different, students must review the rubric traits for each learning objective

and have an understanding of their respective portfolio work at the rubric trait level. Third, because the quality of the rubric trait analyses makes up the bulk of the final grade in the portfolio course, students need put a considerable amount of effort into their explanations. In many respects, the portfolio course forces students to “reverse engineer” their MBA program by taking each portfolio item apart and put it back together again in the form of the rubric trait analyses.

Faculty expect the portfolio draft to be of high-quality, and drafts are scored as though they were the final submission. That is, faculty use the same scoring rubric on the drafts as used on the final portfolio. This allows faculty to give feedback to each student that indicates exactly what revisions need to be made to portfolios for students to be successful in the course. Table 4 (Appendix) provides a copy of the portfolio scoring rubric for draft and final portfolio submission. Faculty members score each rubric trait analysis as either 0, unsatisfactory, 1, satisfactory, or 2, exemplary. The 7 highest rubric trait analyses scores are included in the final portfolio course grade, which can range from 0 to 14 points (3 or fewer points = grade of F, 4-5 = D, 6-7 points = C, 8-10 points =B, and 11-14 points = A). Points can be deducted from the final score for various reasons such as a lack of course diversity in the portfolio works, poor presentation styles, incorrect formatting, submitting late work, etc. It is not uncommon for scores on the drafts to be low. Oftentimes students do not earn enough points at the draft stage to pass the course and, as a result, must make extensive revisions before submitting their final portfolio. On the other hand, there are times at which students score an A at the draft stage. When this occurs students are provided the option of making no further revisions to their portfolio.

Final Portfolio Submission

After making revisions, students submit their final portfolio. The faculty rescore the portfolios and record final course grades. At this last stage in the process, faculty typically provide any student who did not score an A an optional three days for a final “revise and resubmit” opportunity. Generally, students who have earned a B at this stage might elect not to revise their portfolio. Most students, however, are happy to have an opportunity to submit one last revision. Once final grades for the course have been posted, faculty revisit the portfolio scores for AOL assessment purposes. As shown in Table 5 (Appendix), final scores for each rubric trait analysis and for the overall portfolio are entered in an assessment summary worksheet and retained for inclusion in the assessment report.

MANAGING THE PROCESS

Over the years, BUSI 6105 has been an integral course in the MBA program curriculum. It has also been challenging to manage due to growth in enrollment in the MBA program. For the first few years that BUSI 6105 was offered, enrollment in the MBA program was somewhere between 200 and 250 students. 30 of those students might graduate in a given semester, and although the review process for any one portfolio could be quite time consuming, the course was led by just a single faculty member: the Director of Accreditation (DA). Since then we have experienced an exceptional rate of growth in MBA enrollment, with the number of students in the program increasing from 194 in 2012 to over 1,100 in the spring of 2018. Predictably, the growth in MBA enrollment has resulted in growth in the number of students graduating from the program and, subsequently, increases in enrollment in BUSI 6105. To relieve some of the burden

from the DA, administrators created a three-person team by adding the Director of Graduate Business Programs (DGBP) and the Director of Continuous Improvement (DCI) to the portfolio course. This format worked for over a year, but as enrollment in the course continued to grow (as of this writing 141 students were enrolled in the course) administrators decided to expand the portfolio team even further.

In large part, administrators reached this decision because serving as a portfolio reviewer for faculty can be quite time-consuming. It is estimated that a reasonable number of portfolios any one faculty member should review during a semester is somewhere between 8 and 12. By 2015 it was evident that the size of the course would soon outstrip the ability of the directors to manage the course. Thus, the faculty team expanded to its current size of twelve members. Currently, one or more of the three directors are listed as instructors of record for three different sections of BUSI 6105 and they oversee course management and scheduling, coordination of the portfolio team members, and training of new team members.

Objective Data

Objective assessment data are collected through a “Dead Day Assessment Event.” During the fall of each academic year, the DCI asks all faculty members who teach at least one MBA course to determine whether works they assign are linked to specific MBA learning objectives. If a faculty member believes they assign a project that is a good fit to the learning objectives, the faculty can volunteer to provide a copy of the project requirements and the student submissions for the project to the DCI. During the following spring semester, the DCI plans an assessment event for “dead day” (the final day of the academic calendar just prior to finals week). Faculty members volunteer to attend this event and evaluate student assignments in an effort to determine the extent to which, as demonstrated in the assignment submissions associated with a given learning objective, students met the learning objectives of the MBA program. It is important to note that evaluation of student work for assessment purposes is independent of the original grade that the student received on the work. That is, assignments are originally graded at the discretion of the course instructor and assessment scores and course grades have no impact on one another. At the event, the DCI provides faculty with a scoring rubric for each learning objective. Content experts score the assignments that are connected with a learning objective from their area of study, generally in groups of three. Faculty reviewers score each assignment independently as either 0, unsatisfactory, 1, satisfactory, or 2, exemplary for each rubric trait of each learning objective. Each rubric provides criteria for faculty members as to what constitutes unsatisfactory, satisfactory, or exemplary (e.g., Table 3 in the Appendix). The raw scores for each rubric trait are aggregated for all faculty reviewers so that it is known how many assignments were rated unsatisfactory, how many assignments were rated satisfactory, and how many assignments were rated exemplary. The aggregated scores are converted to percentages for purposes of reporting in the assessment reports. This process is employed for each assignment that has been collected for assessment. At the end of the Dead Day Assessment Event, the college has generally collected and assessed all required “direct” MBA assessment data.

Two points about objective data collection deserve additional explanation. First, the work of all students each year is not assessed. Instead, data are collected from a representative sample of MBA students. Second, the data collected in any given year inform efforts for the next year. For example, if the college has collected assessment data for learning objective 1.1 from five

different courses but has only collected data for learning objective 3.2 from two courses, the DCI plans to collect additional data for learning objective 3.2 moving forward in a given five year assessment cycle. Thus, although the goal is to have robust assessment data for each learning objective, not every learning objective is assessed in every academic year. Instead, each learning objective is assessed appropriately over the course of a five-year assessment cycle.

Putting it All Together

At the conclusion of each academic year, the DCI compiles the direct and reflective assessment data into an assessment report. In keeping with the AACSB review cycle, the college plans assessment cycles in five-year increments. For example, the current assessment cycle began in 2013 and is scheduled to end in 2018, which is when the AACSB reaffirmation visit is scheduled. Each year, new assessment data is added for the previous academic year like adding a new chapter to a book.

The college produces two comprehensive assessment reports—the Annual Assessment Summary Report (AASR) and the Assessment Results Report (ARR). The DCI begins the compilation process in the ARR by aggregating and reporting the raw assessment data for each assignment assessed via the Dead Day Assessment Event. The ARR is organized by MBA learning objective. Next, the DCI compiles the raw assessment data from the MBA portfolio courses for all semesters into the assessment summary worksheet shown in Table 5 (Appendix) and writes a summary of the MBA portfolio results. Again, the ARR is organized by MBA learning objective so that the reader can go to one section and easily review all direct and indirect data. Once all the raw data for the academic year is aggregated and reported in the ARR, the college dean drafts the AASR. It is beneficial to have two people actively involved in the reporting process to eliminate reporting errors and to view the data from both a micro level (i.e., the ARR) and a macro level (i.e., the AASR). At the conclusion of this process each summer, the college of Business closes the assessment chapter for the academic year.

Finally, the DCI implements the process of sharing assessment data from the previous academic year with faculty members. The length of the full reports makes it impractical to distribute the entirety to faculty members. Thus, the DCI instead drafts monthly newsletters that provide faculty members with updates on the assessment data and continuous improvement efforts. At least two of these assessment newsletters relate directly to the MBA program each academic year.

DISCUSSION

The goal of this paper was to describe the process that used to assess learning in the MBA program in the hopes that at least some direction could be provided for programs with similar needs. Of course, while it is believed that this particular prescribed assessment process is an effective one, it is also acknowledged that the process is not perfect. In the remainder of the paper strengths, limitations, and effectiveness associated with the assessment process are discussed.

Strengths

AACSB accredited colleges and schools are currently challenged to think, plan, react and account for fifteen different standards in four primary categories centering on engagement, innovation, and impact. If the goal of an AOL tool is to provide information to inform continuous improvement, why wouldn't a program utilize a known entity such as a turnkey solution, for example, a major field exam, simulation, thesis or some other event to be administered within a capstone course? Those solutions as well as the example of MBA Portfolio as a capstone course would provide quality data and all have associated overhead and expenses. The answer centers on the ability to tailor an AOL process to specific program learning goals and objectives, scalability, and curriculum flexibility beyond what that of the more structured AOL toolsets might provide.

To truly engage constituents, administrators looked for a way to integrate and submerge faculty into the MBA program at a root level. Administrators wanted to find additive measures to incorporate AOL in a way that would provide curriculum flexibility, e.g., not creating a course or other bottleneck, and quality of information for reporting from which to benchmark and continuously improve. This was done in a more robust, innovative way than that of utilizing other assessment tools. While the other assessment tool offerings would provide data as well, administrators wanted to challenge constituents to seek impact in the choices made moving forward with portfolio in a more reflective, quality of information manner. Additionally, if following the guidance for implementation documented in the literature of Stout et al. (2005), and cited by others, conventional wisdom would dictate that an optimal AOL plan would follow the framework of which other assessment tools may not provide beyond measures of central tendency in the aggregate.

To actively engage faculty by immersing them inside the program at the rubric trait level has created higher involvement levels in the program by faculty. The process increases the extent to which faculty members are aware of how the learning goals of the MBA program are relevant to their respective classes. The reverse of this is also true. That is, because assigned coursework is critical to the assessment process, faculty members are also more aware of how their classes can be made relevant to the MBA learning goals. As this relates specifically to the portfolio course, it is not uncommon for faculty members to discuss the course projects they assign in the context of the portfolio course. Anecdotally, the impression is some faculty members derive a sense of motivation and pride from having one of their course projects be regularly included in student portfolios. An extension of this is that through the portfolio review process and the collection of objective data, administrators are able to see which of the learning objectives are given more or less coverage across the MBA program. For example, if portfolio students in a given semester have trouble identifying a work that demonstrates their mastery of the goal setting learning objective or if few faculty members are able to volunteer course projects that incorporate goal setting for review at the assessment event, this signals a need to provide more opportunities for students to learn these skills.

Additionally, the assessment methods increase faculty engagement with one another, and this is especially true for the portfolio course. For planning purposes, discussions about the portfolio course sometimes take place at college or discipline meetings. This provides an opportunity for faculty members to interact with one another, learn about one another's courses, and work together towards a common goal. For those faculty members that serve as portfolio reviewers, the opportunity to engage with others is compounded because reviewers need to

coordinate their efforts during the course. At present, the faculty review team consists of faculty members from a wide range of disciplines—business communications, computer information and decision management, economics, finance, law, marketing, and management—which is helpful for maintaining positive relationships across the college. It also provides an outlet for junior faculty to work with senior faculty and administrators alike. Additionally, reporting the results of the assessment effort to all faculty members allows faculty members to stay abreast of assessment-related outcomes and potential program needs as per Stout et al. (2005).

Although recent rates of MBA program enrollment growth are exciting, the growth has created challenges for the college. Along these lines, an effective advantage of the assessment method is that both the direct and indirect collection methods scale very easily. The process of collecting objective data has not been affected by enrollment growth because data are collected from only samples of the entire MBA student population. The portfolio has undergone considerable change over the past few years, but those changes have been simple to implement. Four years ago the program offered one section of the course in only two semesters per academic year. As enrollment grew offerings increased to one section in all three semesters (fall, spring, and summer). When enrollment grew even more the program began offering additional sections each semester and building a faculty review team. Admittedly, scaling the course to match enrollment growth does require planning, and it also requires support from the college dean. However, all things being equal, it is relatively straightforward to ensure enough coverage in the portfolio course to meet the graduation schedules of students is available.

MBA Portfolio works very well for AOL in the MBA Program at WTAMU. Through an innovative approach to AOL, through the implementation of a multi-method, multi-trait instrument, the program moved away from turnkey and other capstone event tools and turned to a more organic, closely aligned process matching the specific program learning objectives and outcomes. By having constituents involved in the process, the base from which the assessment process stems is enhanced greatly. First-hand observations reveal a higher level of engagement of students, faculty, and others having conversations about the MBA Program and the portfolio course. This communication combined with the increased level of reporting based on the frequency of data collected (e.g., every semester as opposed to other periods in the assessment cycle), has positively impacted the frequency and the way information to program stakeholders is reported. Robust reporting creates an opportunity for increased feedback available to focus on changes that can be made more expeditiously as needed for continuous improvement efforts.

Limitations

This detailed assessment process is not without its limitations. The first, and perhaps most apparent limitation, is that the process requires what is probably an unusual amount of cooperation and coordination among faculty members. The college organizational culture of this particular program is such that high levels of cooperation between faculty members are possible, but it has taken time for this culture to be developed. Because WTAMU is, at its core, a teaching school, the faculty may be highly committed to student engagement and learning, making the assessment process something in which faculty are interested. However, faculty members at many institutions are at least equally committed to their students, so this does not explain why the faculty might be so involved in the assessment process. Instead, it is thought that culture is at least partly attributable to the pride that the faculty take in being AACSB accredited, which generates a willingness to contribute to accreditation-related tasks. In addition, over the years the

administrative team of the college has made fostering a sense of community across the college one of the focal points of their efforts.

On a methodological note, the assessment data relies on faculty ratings of student work. The major threat to the validity of this approach is low interrater reliability. That is, the correlation between two scores on the same project, independently assigned by two unique raters, may not be high. If this is the case, then the values recorded in the assessment data run the risk of being unduly influenced by idiosyncratic differences between raters instead of real differences in performance between students (Scullen, Mount, & Goff, 2000). Overcoming this threat is attained in two ways. First, and in keeping with recommendations from Ones, Viswesvaran, and Schmidt (2008), the ratings of two or three raters are aggregated when collecting direct assessment data. Second, prior to scoring reflective portfolio statements, all faculty reviewers are trained by the directors and faculty reviewers sometimes consult one another to make sure that the scoring is consistent across reviewers. In addition, the portfolio submission process allows students at least two opportunities to revise their work before portfolio scores are finalized. This approach allows students to improve their portfolio scores over time, decreases the extent to which random or temporal evaluation errors might influence portfolios scores given only a single point in time (Schmidt, Le, & Ilies, 2003), and aligns with the Stout et al. (2005) framework.

An additional limitation is that imperfect data related to student experiences with and perceptions of the portfolio course exists. The information gathered suggests that some students have experienced a sense of accomplishment and pride during the process of compiling their MBA portfolio. Interestingly, a small number of employers have indicated the MBA portfolio provides an additional piece of data to consider when recruiting MBA students, and a few students have submitted their MBA portfolio as a deliverable when seeking employment or promotion. Thus, if asked to prepare and or produce a high quality document on short notice the MBA student can quickly and easily accommodate such a request. At the same time, not all students see the portfolio as adding value to their MBA experience, and at least some students see the creation of the portfolio as “busy work.” While this could be seen as a complete negative given the somewhat mixed response, this is seen as a potential for investigative opportunity. That is, one way that improvement of the course can be instituted is to measure student experiences, responses, etc. for the course.

Finally, from an administrative perspective one limitation is that the assessment process is not free. In fact, the portfolio course in particular has overhead expenses associated with the labor that it takes to offer the course. In the end, the prescribed assessment process costs money due to the combination of two factors. First, the college gives all of faculty members on the portfolio review team a small stipend each semester. The three directors are given a larger stipend associated with their responsibility to coordinate the multiple sections of the portfolio courses. These stipends can total at least several thousand dollars each semester. Second, because the portfolio course is only a 1-credit hour course, it does not generate meaningful revenues for the college. Of course, the lack of direct financial benefit should not be misinterpreted as meaning that the assessment process is not worth its costs. And, other assessment methods can also be expensive. For example, at the time of this writing the MBA assessment offered by *Educational Testing Services* costs \$25-30 per student. In the end, it is believed that the benefits of the assessment process deployed far outweigh its costs, and, in any case, other assessment methods might also require a financial outlay.

Effectiveness

In the following section, a summation of data collected during the spring 2014 deployment process of MBA Portfolio is provided, see Table 6 (Appendix). The data from spring is aggregated, summarized, and utilized to inform faculty and other constituents as well as report recommendations for improvement moving forward, in this particular case beginning summer 2014. Table 7, 8 and 9 (Appendix), include summations of data collected during the summer 2014, fall 2014, and spring 2015 respectively. In all, the combined data provided represent one academic year assessment cycle spring 2014 through spring 2015 and the example provided concentrates on one key learning goal and objective, professional writing stating 'graduates of the MBA program will communicate effectively as managers.' Objective 1.1 would dictate further that the student demonstrate capacity to employ written presentation channels to effectively communicate with different levels of personnel and meet organizational goals. For the sake of space and simplicity, only one key learning goal example is provided, however, it should be understood the same process is implemented for each applicable learning objective during the process.

Data collection

The faculty committee evaluated the assignments individually and then discussed the results as a committee to create an overall consensus. Final results were forwarded to the Director of Continuous Improvement. A total of 38 students taking BUSI 6105 in the spring of 2014, sixty-nine in the subsequent summer and fall of 2014 and spring 2015 respectively. The DCI tabulated the scores given to each of the students by the committee. Results of tabulation are included in Table 10 and Table 11 (Appendix).

Results

From the information provided, a summary of the past year is provided to all faculty and constituents for their observation and recommendations for improvement are given. For example, in spring 2014, the data summarized in Table 10 (Appendix) tabulated from Table 6 (Appendix) indicated five percent of total portfolios particular objective 1.1 were unacceptable at the time of final submission. It was noted that in an effort to raise scores at the end of the portfolio final submission, more attention and effort would be given to the draft stage of the process as more student feedback at this stage would be communicated using the appropriate grading rubric providing a probable grade if the draft was turned in as the final portfolio. From the data observed and summarized for the summer, fall of 2014 and the spring of 2015, see Table 11 (Appendix), the implementation of the concentrated effort of draft scoring feedback, the respective number of unacceptable submissions fell to zero. Additionally, the number of acceptable portfolios moved from 34 to 41 percent respectively. The data results indicated that the change to provide more detailed feedback at the draft stage was a success in the following iteration of the assessment cycle.

The example above from the professional communication key learning goal and professional writing objective is but one of many examples of how MBA Portfolio helps inform recommendations for change in the MBA Program. While not an all-inclusive answer to every assessment need and or issue, MBA portfolio does provide a wealth of assessment data from

which to implement and document change toward continuous improvement. The summary of assessment data is compiled and shared with all faculty in a broad based effort to inform the continuous improvement process. Overall, it is felt the deployment and implementation of MBA Portfolio has been highly effective toward the assessment and AOL efforts.

CONCLUSION

AACSB accreditation efforts hinge on the collection of assessment data, because such data provides the information necessary to ensure the program is meeting its AOL goals. The process of creating and implementing an MBA Portfolio course has allowed the opportunity to blend reflective assessment and direct, objective data together in an effort to tailor continuous improvement processes to meet the needs of the MBA program. While the MBA Portfolio course is not without limitations, the utilization of a customized approach has revealed a wealth of significant value to the MBA program as well as many positive externalities. It is sincerely hoped that the experience of the prescribed processes detailed here can help guide others in their own AOL efforts and journey.

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APPENDIX**Table 1. MBA program learning goals and objectives****Goal 1: Professional Communication:*****Objectives:***

- 1.1 *Professional Writing:* Demonstrate capacity to employ written presentation channels to effectively communicate with different levels of personnel and meet organizational goals.
- 1.2 *Oral Communication:* Demonstrate capacity to employ oral presentation channels to effectively communicate with different levels of personnel and meet organizational goals.

Goal 2: Leadership:***Objectives:***

- 2.1 *Capacity to Lead:* Demonstrate understanding of the leadership skills necessary to foster team effectiveness for making decisions.
- 2.2 *Goal Setting:* Demonstrate capacity to establish and evaluate organizational goals.

Goal 3: Business Environment:***Objectives:***

- 3.1 *Business Ethics:* Demonstrate capacity to recognize and evaluate ethical dimensions of business decisions and the effects on stakeholders.
- 3.2 *Global Business Environment:* Demonstrate knowledge of the issues involved in conducting business in a diverse, global environment.

Goal 4: Business Integration:***Objectives:***

- 4.1 *Decision Making:* Demonstrate capacity to integrate quantitative and qualitative techniques from functional business areas to analyze business alternatives.
- 4.2 *Strategic Planning:* Demonstrate capacity to formulate strategies that are feasible, understandable, and foster long-term sustainability within the context of achieving organizational goals and social responsibilities.

Figure 1. The MBA Portfolio submission and feedback steps

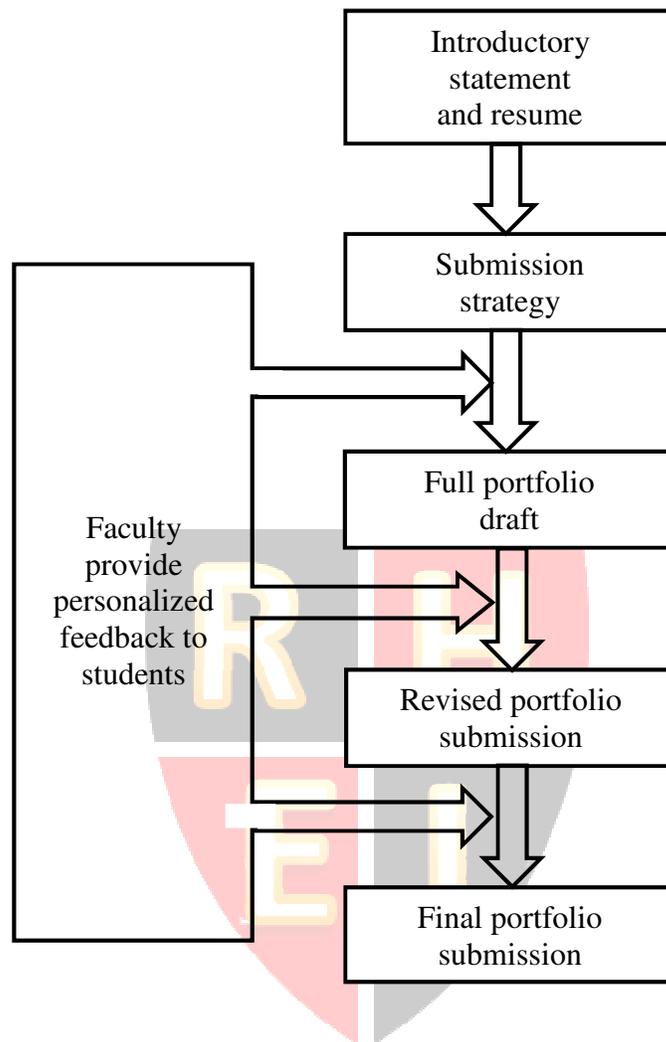


Table 2. BUSI6105 Portfolio Submission Strategy Quick Reference Summary Guide

Student Name:	Course/Section/Semester/Professor Information
Objective 1.1 Professional Writing	ECON 6306-01 Fall 2014 Dr. Heinlen
Objective 1.2 Oral Communication	MKT 6352-70 Spring 2015 Dr. Wells
Objective 2.1 Capacity to Lead	MGT 6345-01 Spring 2016 Dr. Asimov
Objective 2.2 Goal Setting	MGT 6345-01 Spring 2016 Dr. Asimov
Objective 3.1 Business Ethics	FIN 5311-71 Spring 2015 Dr. Verne
Objective 3.2 Global Business Environment	MGT 6318-71 Fall 2015 Dr. Shelley
Objective 4.1 Decision Making	FIN 6320-71 Spring 2015 Dr. Bradbury
Objective 4.2 Strategic Planning	CIDM 6390-01 Fall 2015 Dr. Clarke

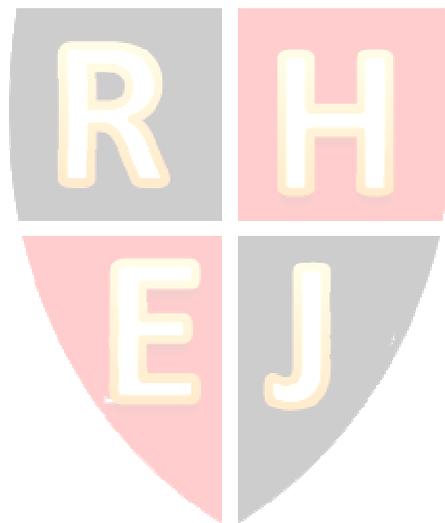


Table 3. Rubric for learning objective 2.1—Capacity to Lead

TRAIT	UNACCEPTABLE	ACCEPTABLE	EXEMPLARY
Relating to Group	Works independently but struggles to work with others.	Works well with others.	Encourages, motivates, and works well with others.
Ability to Listen	Asks for ideas or suggestions but neglects to consider or integrate.	Considers and respects suggestions of team members when preparing decision resolution.	Respects opinions of team members and makes an effort to integrate multiple perspectives in decision resolution.
Ability to Manage	Has an incomplete or inappropriate agenda for the group. Struggles to prevent the group from rambling or straying from agenda.	Has a clear agenda for the group. Fosters discussion without excessively losing agenda focus.	Circulates a clear agenda to the group in advance. Fosters discussion but facilitates agenda discussion in a timely and efficient fashion.
Balance	Unable to achieve balance between completing assignments versus the need to focus on interpersonal relations.	Balances the need for assignment completion with the needs for individuals in the group.	Effectively and efficiently assigns projects to team members. Provides positive reinforcement.
Decision	Decision is not consistent with theoretical foundation and/or does not include multiple perspectives.	Makes a decision based on theoretical foundation and multiple perspectives.	Decision consistent with best practice, strong theoretical foundation, and reflective of multiple stakeholder input.
Understanding Change	Has limited understanding and difficulty analyzing change within and outside organizational system.	With some limitation, is able to analyze and articulate impact of change within and outside organizational system.	Able to analyze and articulate impact of change within and outside organizational system.

Table 4. Scoring rubric for draft and final portfolio submission

The top 7 of 8 Key Learning Goals (KLG) and objective rubric trait analyses are evaluated on the basis of the indication of the student during the portfolio submission strategy and draft process. Each (KLG) objective has three possible scoring levels, Exemplary, yielding 2 points, Satisfactory, yielding 1 point, and Unsatisfactory, yielding 0 points creating the *Portfolio Total from Rubric Trait Analysis* or Gross Score. Any deductions, e.g., late assignment –draft, design/readability issues, level of overall detail, lack of PDF bookmark and or ease of navigation, missing components and or information, and other deductions (failure to follow directives as given, lack of professionalism, etc.) are subtracted, at the discretion of faculty evaluators, from the Gross Score providing the *Total Portfolio Score* or Net Score.

Student: **2012 SU1** **Combined Scoring Sheet Rubric Trait Synthesis**
Rubric Manager

KLG1: ProComm	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Exemplary	Total	Comments & Notes
<i>Obj 1.1 Professional Writing</i>					
<i>Obj 1.2 Oral Communication</i>					
KLG1: Score					
KLG2: Leadership	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Exemplary	Total	Comments & Notes
<i>Obj 2.1 Capacity to Lead</i>					
<i>Obj 2.2 Goal Setting</i>					
KLG2: Score					
KLG3: Business Environment	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Exemplary	Total	Comments & Notes
<i>Obj 3.1 Business Ethics</i>					
<i>Obj 3.2 Global Business Environment</i>					
KLG3: Score					
KLG4: Business Integration	Unsatisfactory	Satisfactory	Exemplary	Total	Comments & Notes
<i>Obj 4.1 Decision Making</i>					
<i>Obj 4.2 Strategic Planning</i>					
KLG4: Score					
Portfolio Total from Rubric Trait Analysis (Gross)					
Deductions	BValue_2	BValue_3		Assessed to the portfolio	Comments & Notes
Late Assignment-Draft	2-4 Points				
Cover pages/missing information	1-4 Points				
Level of Detail	1-3 Points				
PDF Bookmarks	1 Point				
Other	1-4 Points				
Total Deductions					
Total Portfolio Score (NET)					

Notation: **B**=Brief, **LD**=Lacking sufficient depth and integration, **A**=lacking attention to detail, **CID**=lacking course diversity, **NSX**=Not Scored, **I**=Incomplete rubric trait discussion, **S**=Lacking rubric trait / objective synthesis detail

Table 5. Assessment summary worksheet

BUSI6105, MBA Portfolio
Assessment Summary
Semester 20__-__ Students Enrolled

Student ID	Professional Communication		Leadership		Business Environment		Business Integration		Gross Portfolio Score*	Net Total Portfolio Score**	Final Course Grade
	Writing	Oral Communication	Capacity to Lead	Goal Setting	Business Ethics	Global Business Environment	Decision Making	Strategic Planning			
	1.1	1.2	2.1	2.2	3.1	3.2	4.1	4.2			
	2	X	2	2	2	2	2	2	14	14	A
	2	1	1	1	1	X	1	1	8	8	B
	2	X	2	2	2	2	2	2	14	14	A
	2	X	2	2	2	2	2	2	14	14	A
	2	2	X	2	2	2	2	2	14	14	A
	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	14	14	A
	1	1	X	1	1	1	1	1	7	7	B
	2	X	2	2	2	2	2	2	14	14	A
	2	X	2	2	2	2	2	2	14	14	A
	2	X	2	2	2	2	2	2	14	14	A
	2	X	2	1	1	1	1	1	9	7	B
	2	2	1	X	1	0	1	1	8	8	B
	1	1	1	1	X	1	1	1	7	7	B
	1	X	1	1	1	1	1	1	8	7	B
	1	X	2	1	1	2	1	1	8	7	B
	2	X	2	2	2	2	2	2	14	14	A
	2	X	2	2	2	2	2	2	14	14	A
	2	X	2	2	2	2	2	2	14	14	A
	2	2	1	1	0	X	1	2	9	8	B
	X	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	14	14	A
	1	1	2	1	1	2	X	2	10	10	A
	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	X	14	14	A
	2	2	X	2	X	2	2	2	14	9	B
	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	2	12	10	A
	1	X	1	2	1	1	1	2	9	8	B
	1	X	1	2	1	1	1	2	9	6	C
	2	2	2	2	X	1	2	2	13	13	A
	2	2	2	2	X	2	2	2	14	14	A
	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	14	14	A
	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	X	14	13	A

Blank = item not scored as top 7 of 8 are scored, * Denotes gross portfolio score before any assessed deductions, **Denotes net total portfolio score after any assessed deductions, Total Final Course Grade computed from Net Portfolio Score as follows: A=10 or more total points, B=7 or more total points, C=5 or more total points, D=less than 5 total points.

Table 6. BUSI6105, MBA Portfolio Assessment Summary Spring 2014, 40 Students Enrolled

Student ID	MBA Key Learning Goals Objectives		Professional Communication		Capacity to Lead		Leadership		Business Environment		Business Integration		Gross Portfolio Score*	Net Total Portfolio Score**	Final Course Grade
	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.2	2.1	2.2	2.3	3.1	3.2	4.1	4.2				
	2	X	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	11	10	A
	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	X	2	1	1	11	8	A
	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	X	1	1	1	2	8	8	B
	1	X	1	X	1	1	2	1	1	2	2	2	11	11	A
	X	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	0	0	2	8	7	B
	1	X	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	8	7	B
	1	0	1	0	1	2	1	X	0	0	1	1	6	5	B
	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	X	0	8	5	B
	0	X	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	-5	F
	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	8	7	B
	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	8	6	B
	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	X	2	2	12	10	A
	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	12	10	A
	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	6	5	B
	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	14	12	A
	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	14	12	A
	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	8	7	B
	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	8	8	B
	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	0	1	1	1	X	8	8	B
	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	9	8	A
	1	0	1	0	2	1	0	0	X	1	1	1	6	5	B
	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	X	2	1	1	1	12	11	A
	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	6	-4	B
	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	6	5	B
	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	11	8	A
	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	11	8	A
	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	1	1	10	10	A
	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	1	1	2	12	10	A
	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	X	1	2	2	2	13	10	A
	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	14	13	A
	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	14	13	A
	1	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	X	1	1	1	11	10	A
	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7	5	B
	2	1	2	1	2	0	1	1	X	0	0	0	6	5	B
	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	X	1	1	2	2	11	11	A
	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	X	2	2	2	2	14	14	A
	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	14	14	A
	2	1	1	1	X	2	1	1	2	2	2	2	12	11	A
	2	X	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	14	12	A
	1	1	1	1	X	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	6	6	B
	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	X	2	2	14	14	A

Blank = item not scored as top 7 of 8 are scored, * Denotes gross portfolio score before any assessed deductions, ** Denotes net total portfolio score after any assessed deductions, Total Final Course Grade computed from Net Portfolio Score as follows: A=10 or more total points, B=7 or more total points, C=5 or more total points, D=less than 5 total points.

Table 7. BUSI6105, MBA Portfolio Assessment Summary, Summer, 2014, 19 Students Enrolled

Student	Professional Communication		Leadership		Business Environment			Business Integration		Gross Portfolio Score*	Net Total Portfolio Score**	Final Course Grade
	1.1 Professional Writing	1.2 Oral Communication	2.1 Capacity to Lead	2.2 Goal Setting	3.1 Business Ethics	3.2 Global Business Environment	4.1 Decision Making	4.2 Strategic Planning				
ID												
1	2	2	1	2	2	2	2		2	13	13	A
2	2	2	2	X	2	2	2	X	2	13	13	A
X	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7	7	B
2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	X	2	11	11	A
2	2	2	2	X	2	2	2	2	2	13	13	A
2	2	2	2	X	2	2	2	1	1	12	12	A
2	X	2	X	1	1	1	1	1	1	9	8	B
2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	X	2	12	12	A
1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	10	10	A
2	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	X	2	11	10	A
1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	X	10	9	B
1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	X	1	8	8	B
2	2	2	X	1	0	X	1	1	1	8	8	B
2	2	2	2	2	1	2	2	2	2	12	10	A
2	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	10	8	B
1	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	10	7	B
2	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	X	X	10	10	A
2	2	2	X	2	1	1	1	1	2	11	10	A

Blank = item not scored as top 7 of 8 are scored. * Denotes gross portfolio score before any assessed deductions, **Denotes net total portfolio score after any assessed deductions, Total Final Course Grade computed from: Net Portfolio Score as follows: A=10 or more total points, B=7 or more total points, C=5 or more total points, D=less than 5 total points.

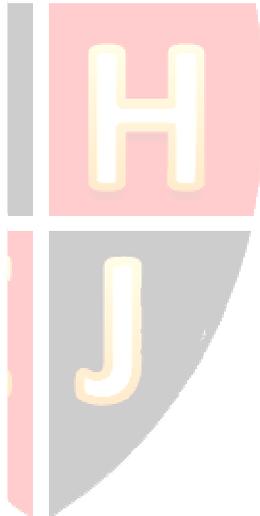


Table 8. BUSI6105, MBA Portfolio Assessment Summary, Fall 2014, 17 Students Enrolled

Student ID	Professional Writing		Professional Communication		Leadership		Business Environment		Business Integration		Gross Portfolio Score*	Net Total Portfolio Score**	Final Course Grade
	1.1	1.2	1.1	1.2	2.1	2.2	3.1	3.2	4.1	4.2			
	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	10	10	A
	2	X	2	2	2	1	1	1	1	X	9	8	B
	1	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	X	2	10	10	A
	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	1	X	10	10	A
	1	2	2	2	2	1	X	X	1	1	8	7	B
	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	X	13	13	A
	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	X	2	11	8	B
	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	2	X	10	10	A
	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	X	11	10	A
	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	X	11	10	A
	1	1	2	1	2	1	2	2	1	X	11	10	A
	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	X	8	7	B
	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	X	1	2	12	12	A
	X	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	1	1	11	11	A
	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	X	6	5	C
	2	1	1	1	X	1	1	1	1	0	6	5	C
	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	X	2	14	13	A
	2	X	2	2	2	2	2	2	1	2	12	12	A

Blank = item not scored as top 7 of 8 are scored, * Denotes gross portfolio score before any assessed deductions, **Denotes net total portfolio score after any assessed deductions, Total Final Course Grade computed from Net Portfolio Score as follows: A=10 or more total points, B=7 or more total points, C=5 or more total points, D=less than 5 total points.

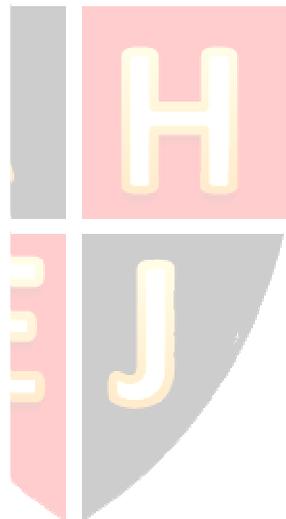


Table 10. Results from BUSI 6105 MBA Portfolio Professional Writing Component (2014)

Results from BUSI 6105 MBA Portfolio Professional Writing Component (2014)			
CATEGORY	PORTFOLIOS RECEIVING AN UNACCEPTABLE SCORE	PORTFOLIOS RECEIVING AN ACCEPTABLE SCORE	PORTFOLIOS RECEIVING AN EXEMPLARY SCORE
<i>Overall</i>	2	13	23
<i>Overall Percent Average</i>	5%	34%	61%

The table above reports detailed information about how the faculty committee rated the portfolios. Overall 95% of the portfolios in the sample scored acceptable or higher. The results imply a high degree of faculty satisfaction with student performance.

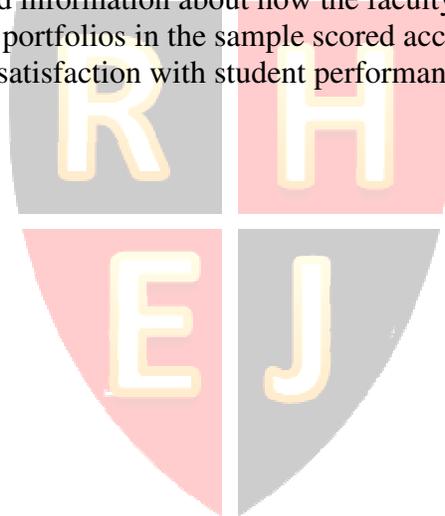


Table 11. Results from BUSI 6105 MBA Portfolio Professional Writing Component (2015)

Results from BUSI 6105 MBA Portfolio Professional Writing Component (2015)			
CATEGORY	PORTFOLIOS RECEIVING AN UNACCEPTABLE SCORE	PORTFOLIOS RECEIVING AN ACCEPTABLE SCORE	PORTFOLIOS RECEIVING AN EXEMPLARY SCORE
<i>Overall</i>	0	28	41
<i>Overall Percent Average</i>	0%	41%	59%

The table above reports detailed information about how the faculty committee rated the portfolios. Overall 100% of the portfolios in the sample scored acceptable or higher. The results imply a high degree of faculty satisfaction with student performance.

