

Can the SBI Program Survive? An Examination of the Relationship of AACSB and the SBI

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Abstract

This research began as the result of an article arguing that because much of the SBI's benefits were intangible, less quantifiable, and harder to justify, then the SBI program would not survive. A short explanation of the SBI's environment finds that higher education as a whole is being criticized. To meet these criticisms, one trend that emerged from accreditation agencies was to require more empirical and therefore quantifiable evidence. The AACSB's 2003 standards provided some relief by requiring schools to be mission based. Further enhancement came with the 2013 standards' requirement of impact, innovation, and engagement that provide a unique opportunity for SBI programs to justify their existence by showing how this program can meet all three of the new standards.

Keywords: SBI program, AACSB, assessment, engagement, innovation, impact

Introduction

The authors' quest

This research began as a reaction to an article by Ames (2006) that the Small Business Institute (SBI) program might go "bust" because its benefits are usually unquantifiable. The authors' institution received initial accreditation from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) and faces a coming five-year review. Historically the school was primarily a teaching institution and now pursues a balance of teaching and research. How do schools with this balance and with SBI programs go forward? Can our school and the SBI program verify their existence and meet the new standards?

The trend to verify one's existence can be traced to the current higher education environment. Criticism is being leveled at higher education, AACSB, its accreditation, its assessment, and down to SBI programs. The article reviews the history of AACSB, its mission, its quality search, its assessment process, the history of the SBI, its benefits, and how it can provide evidence to verify the three new pillars.

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Higher Education's Environment and AACSB

Criticism is coming from all of higher education's stakeholders including parents, government entities, funding agencies, and students themselves. A white paper on U.S. Higher Education by Spellings (2006) found increasing costs of higher education, lack of transparency with respect to costs and benefits, lack of accountability to their stakeholders, and in some cases a lack of adequate assessment. Arum and Roksa's (2011) study found no improvement in student critical thinking and analytical skills with some students showing no improvement from their four years. One study found a decline in student performance and learning (Moskal, Ellis, and Keon (2008).

The major route for business schools to prove their worth is through AACSB accreditation and AACSB's assessment programs. However, while AACSB is associated with quality, it and its assessment programs have their share of criticisms. Pfeffer and Fong (2002) argued that business schools did not help their alumni's career. Bieker (2014) found no substantive evidence that AACSB accreditation enhances a business graduate's career. A recent report on alumni placement from international programs found that only 3% of those programs were strongly satisfied with the placement of their graduates. The report concludes that better knowledge of what businesses require is needed with the use of better classroom methods.

AACSB

History Mission of the AACSB.

AACSB's mission is to "foster engagement, accelerate innovation and amplify impact in business education." Stepanovich, Mueller, and Benson (2014) believe that lack of AACSB accreditation is a competitive disadvantage. After AACSB revised its standards to include more teaching and international institutions, it had a 42% growth rate in AACSB accreditation and a 300% increase in accreditation of schools internationally (Stepanovich et al, 2014). As of April 2017, AACSB reports a total of 817 accredited institutions in 53 countries (aacsb.edu, April 10, 2018).

With approximately 3,100 undergraduate business majors, the authors' institution falls just above the largest category in terms of number of business students. In addition, our school has a balance of teaching and research. Table 1 shows that 46% of AACSB accredited schools have less than 1,000 undergraduate business students, the median undergraduate business enrollment is 1,200, and 48% have less than 200 business graduates (Stepanovich et al, 2014). Therefore, most schools, like the authors, require some balance of research and teaching.

Like the authors' institution, a majority of institutions (56%) manage a mix of teaching and research (Table 2). A minority are in the tails of the distribution, 29% almost all teaching, and 5% focused solely on research. This data leads to the conclusion that like our institution they are asking the same questions, how do they balance teaching and research, and what do they have to do to meet the 2013 AACSB standards?

Types of AACSB Schools (from AACSB website, 2018)

Table 1: Types of AACSB Schools by undergraduate business school enrollment

<u>Percent</u>	<u>Intervals</u>
35.3%	< 1,000
42.9%	1,000 < 3,000
14.7%	3,000 < 5,000
4.2%	5,000 < 7,500
2.8%	7,500 +

Source: AACSB website, data FAQs April 10, 2018

Table 2: Teaching versus Research

<u>Percent</u>	<u>Teaching vs. Research</u>
32.9%	Focused on Teaching
11.9%	Focused on Research
34%	Have a balance of Teaching and Research
81.2%	Had a Bachelor’s Program
95%	Had a Master’s Program

Source: ACSB website, FAQs April 10, 2018

Skills assessed by Accreditation

The most assessed skills are: communication, professional knowledge, critical thinking, and problem solving. Other skills include interpersonal skills, and technical or computer knowledge (Shooshtari and Manuel, 2014). The least assessed are global issues, professional integrity/ethics, and lifelong learning. Early AACSB assessment methods were standardized tests, and research surveys of students, faculty, and alumni. By 2006 the most used were oral and written imbedded assignments and test questions (Shooshtari and Manuel, 2014).

2013 AACSB Standards

AACSB’s 2013 standards continue the quest for quality business education with 15 standards covering faculty, students, mission, and the institutions. To achieve quality improvement the 2013 standards require schools to develop learning objectives for programs and courses. Schools must demonstrate not only quality in their programs but quality improvement. In addition, they must “close the loop” by documenting the entire process including actions taken as a result of assessment to improve their educational quality and their assessment process (Dostaler, Robinson, and Tomberlin, 2017).

A particular difference from the 2003 standards are the inclusion of “three pillars of continuous quality improvement: engagement, innovation and impact” (Dostaler, et al, 2017). The immediate reaction to the three pillars is what do they mean? For example, the pillar of engagement raises the following questions: who should be engaged, with whom should they be engaged, and engaged with what? The standards state that quality of business education should be achieved with a mixture of academic and professional engagement. The standards typically refer to engagement

as internal activities but it could also include external ones. This allows schools to define their engagement, innovations, and impact as they align with their mission statement.

While the description of the three new pillars is open ended, these new pillars provide the SBI program a unique opportunity to fill in some of the gaps. The following reviews the history of the SBI program, its benefits, and how it can help answer some of these questions.

The SBI and the New 2013 Three Pillars

History of the SBI

The Small Business Institute (SBI) began in 1974 when a group of academicians broke from the Decisions Sciences Conference to establish their own conference. The SBI's focus is to encourage field based consulting by having students work with actual business clients. The SBI reached its peak with a grant from the Small Business Administration (SBA) to provide consulting to some of its small business clients. Some 600 schools provided consulting to SBA clients all over the United States. With the loss of this grant SBI membership has fallen to approximately 200 members. The SBI hosts an annual conference with peer reviewed papers on consulting, entrepreneurship, family business, and other small business issues and sponsors two quality academic journals.

Table 3: Holmes, Wilkins, and Zhang's examples of teaching effectiveness Examples of Engagement, Innovation, and Impact Standard 12

<u>Possible for SBI</u>	<u>Examples of Teaching Effectiveness</u>
Yes	Comments from peer classroom evaluations
Maybe	Outstanding performance by SBI students on standardized exams
Yes	Activities and outcomes consistent with learning goals
Yes	Course innovations with notable outcomes
Yes	Evidence that courses and teaching methods are innovative/dynamic/current
Yes	Participation in teaching workshops provided at the SBI conference
Maybe	Other teaching-oriented development activities
Yes	High teaching evaluations in the presence of appropriate course rigor

Source: Holmes, A.F., Wilkins, M., & Zhang, S. (2017, April). Engagement, Innovation, and Impact: tracking faculty activities under the 2013 AACSB standards. *Organizational Management Journal* 14 (1).

Research on the Benefits of the SBI Program

Numerous academic articles have researched the benefits of SBI programs. As opposed to traditional classrooms, use of actual clients in field-based consulting exposes students to real world problems. The advantages include: forcing students to integrate all of the business disciplines (Cook et al, 2013), interpersonal skills (Cook et al, 2013), client and consulting ethics (Hoffman et al, 2016), ways to create economic development (Bradley, 2003), active not passive learning (Cook et al, 2013), development of team work skills (Lacho and Bradley, 2010), problem based not textbook based learning (Cook, Belliveau, and Koop, 2013), and analytical and critical thinking skills (Boyers and Lang, 2009). It is the authors' belief that these advantages meet many of the current criticism of higher education.

How the SBI meets the new standards using Holmes' examples.

Table 3 provides examples of Holmes' et al (2017) standard 12 examples of teaching effectiveness. As this table shows the SBI program can provide comments from peer observations, activities consistent with a school's mission, course innovations, evidence that the teaching is dynamic (because it is in the real world) and usually higher teaching evaluations.

Table 4: Holmes, Wilkins, and Zhang Standard 13 Examples of Student academic and professional engagement

<u>Can SBI Provide?</u>	<u>Example</u>
Yes	Utilization of business professionals in the classroom
No	Involvement with student internship program; the experiential experience is similar to the SBI experience
Yes	Sponsorship of student consulting programs
No	Involvement with School of Business study abroad experiences
Yes	Interaction with companies that employ our graduates
Yes	Engagement with campus organizations in a professional setting.

Source: Holmes, A.F., Wilkins, M., & Zhang, S. (2017, April). Engagement, Innovation, and Impact: tracking faculty activities under the 2013 AACSB standards. *Organizational Management Journal* 14 (1).

Table 4 has examples of how to meet standard 13 student – academic. The SBI is using real business clients so the first is satisfied and sometimes the students are hired by previous clients. The authors encourage their SBI graduates to place an entry on their resume about their real consulting project. Their experience is that the entry is almost always noticed by a recruiter or interviewer and leads to a higher percentage of job offers.

Table 5: Holmes, Wilkins, and Zhang examples of Impact: academic

<u>Provided by SBI</u>	<u>Example</u>
Yes	PRJ journal quality – the SBI has two quality peer reviewed journals
Possible	Citation counts
Yes	Editorship and editorial board membership
Yes	Journal and conference reviews
Yes	Key appointments in professional organizations
Yes	Conference paper awards or similar recognitions
Yes	Conference paper presentations or panel discussions
Yes	Use of papers in courses taught by visiting professor or scholar
Possible	Appointment as a visiting professor or scholar

Source: Holmes, A.F., Wilkins, M., & Zhang, S. (2017, April). *Engagement, Innovation, and Impact: tracking faculty activities under the 2013 AACSB standards. Organizational Management Journal* 14 (1).

Many schools are interested in intellectual contributions and its verification. The SBI program has two quality journals providing outlets for empirical, pedagogical, and case studies. For example, the above benefits section mentioned peer reviewed articles by SBI Professors Cook, Bradley, Lacho, Hoffman, Bradley, Hendon, Lussier, and many others. SBI Researchers have outlets for presentations of academic papers and panels at the annual SBI conference. Both journals have editorial boards. Many SBI directors have meet AACSB standards in both teaching and research via their SBI involvement – a statement made many times by Ron Cook and Leo Simpson at the SBI workshops on running an SBI program.

Similarly, Table 6 shows that most of the examples of impact- practice can be met with the SBI such as consulting projects, practitioner publications and especially case research based on their projects. Other Table 6 practices that the SBI provides include case studies from the projects and membership on editorial boards.

Usually student ratings of the instruction are higher in SBI field-based consulting classes than traditional lecture classes meeting (Table 7 impact-teaching). Many of the authors mentioned above have published cases from their SBI projects, developed textbooks (Cook et al 2008), mentored undergraduate research and received teaching awards from higher student evaluations.

Table 6: Holmes, Wilkins, and Zhang Impact: Practice

<u>Provided by SBI</u>	<u>Example</u>
Yes	Media citations
Yes	Consulting projects based on expertise
Yes	Practitioner publications
Yes	Case studies of research leading to business solutions
Yes	Participation in policy or practitioner
No	Expert witness
Yes	Membership of Boards or Directors; SBI board is possible
Yes	PRJ publications

Source: Holmes, A.F., Wilkins, M., & Zhang, S. (2017, April). Engagement, Innovation, and Impact: tracking faculty activities under the 2013 AACSB standards. *Organizational Management Journal* 14 (1).

Table 7: Holmes, Wilkins, and Zhang Impact Teaching

<u>Percent</u>	<u>Teaching/Research</u>
No	Grants for research influencing teaching practices
Yes	Case studies
No	Textbooks
Yes	Pedagogical publications
No	Instructional software
Maybe	Mentorship of undergraduate research or independent studies
Yes	Teaching awards
Maybe	Use of teaching materials at other universities
No	Involvement with School of Business study abroad programs

Source: Shooshtari, N.H. & Manuel, T. A. (2014). Curriculum internationalization at AACSB schools: immersive experiences, student placement an assessment. *Journal of Teaching International Business* 25 (2) 134-156.

Conclusion

Higher education is enmeshed in a very critical environment. Stakeholders are criticizing many factors of higher education such as: the basic value of a higher education, it's costs, the lack of

transparency and accountability, its value to a business career, and even AACSB and its assessment methods. Assessment can meet some of the stakeholders' criticisms by showing that business education does improve student knowledge and skills. However, the pursuit of quantifiable measures left one author concerned about SBI's future (Ames, 2006). Fortunately, the new pillars open an important avenue for SBI programs to justify their use, provide new examples of AACSB assessment, and met some of the stakeholder criticisms. As the table explanations above show, SBI programs meet many of Holmes, Wilkins, and Zang's (2017) examples of engagement, innovation and impact. SBI programs need not go "bust" but can be a pivotal pillar of AACSB accreditation.

The Future

Stakeholder criticism will probably increase. It is imperative that academia explore additional and innovative ways of measuring the three pillars. For example, Hoffman, Bechtold and Tung (2018) argue that SBI programs have a greater potential for moving student learning from short term to long term memory that is available for recall throughout an SBI graduate's career. Perhaps future assessment could include measures of SBI student graduation rates, engagement in school, employment rates, and longitudinal surveys of SBI alumni use of SBI acquired skills in their careers.

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