

Committee on the Structure of the Core - Spring 2012

Recommendations for Changes to the MBA Core

May 3, 2012 (Final) *Approved unanimously by the Faculty of Columbia Business School on 5-3-2012*

CONTEXT

In January 2012, Dean Glenn Hubbard appointed a committee to follow up on the recommendations of the committee chaired by Trevor Harris on 'Enhancing the Effectiveness of the Core Curriculum.' This new 'Committee on the Structure of the Core' was chaired by Gita Johar and included membership from each division: Ran Kivetz, Costis Maglaras, Nahum Melumad, Katherine Phillips, Daniel Wolfenzon, Stephen Zeldes, and Amir Ziv (ex officio). The committee was charged with examining the structure of our MBA core curriculum, and recommending an improved structure.

The committee's main objectives were:

- Increase cohesion and integration of the required core.
- Effectively staff the core with full-time faculty.
- Provide students with flexibility to take more electives prior to summer internships

The committee met bi-weekly over the semester, reviewed core requirements from our peer schools, and consulted extensively with divisional faculty and others. There were several constraints that prevented a radical solution including (a) the goal of preserving the cluster system for the first year because it is a key driver of our school wide community, and (b) the need to allow students to exempt out of core courses if they have sufficient knowledge, and allow them to take an elective instead. The feasibility of delivering the core effectively was the overall perspective the committee took in its deliberations. The committee proposes the following adjustments to the MBA core curriculum that address the above objectives while keeping the constraints in mind. The proposed structure is for implementation in Fall 2013, and should be reviewed formally in three years.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I. Recommended Structure

First Term Core Courses					
Pre-term	Leadership (1/2 semester equivalent)**				
1st half	Statistics *	Strategy	Accounting	Finance ***	Micro Econ*
2nd half	Business Analytics	Marketing 1		Finance	Macro Econ
Second Term Core Courses					
1st half	Operations Management	Marketing 2	Elective	Elective	Elective
2nd half	1/2 Elective	1/2 Elective			

*Statistics and Micro will each meet for 90 minutes on three additional Fridays at the beginning of the first semester.

** Appropriate scheduling of a debrief by the faculty and coaching for all MBA students, based on their 360 Self-Assessment feedback launched by the Leadership faculty during pre-term, will occur during two or three 90 minute sessions the first and second terms of the first year.

*** Finance will likely be divided into two ½ courses: 1. Foundations of Finance, and 2. Valuation.

Any subsequent changes in structure, composition of the core, or positioning of courses in semesters, including changes in the scheduling format in which these courses are to be delivered, should be analyzed by a new faculty committee, and voted upon by the School's faculty.

The advantages of this proposed structure are that it:

- Delivers a rational, balanced, and diverse set of courses in the first term which will prepare students effectively for career as business leaders as well as electives.
- Integrates Leadership content into the pre-term orientation, which helps define the culture and values of the school.
- Increases the number of electives students can take in their first year to 3 full classes plus 2 half classes.
- Delivers 5.5 courses in the first semester (because of the pre-term class), allowing students to take just 4.5 courses in a subsequent semester, which leaves more time for development of soft skills and career management.

II. Recommendations for Former Flex-Core Classes

One significant change this structure involves is the elimination of the flex-core. The committee believes that the current flex-core classes contain content that is very important to the MBA education. The committee also acknowledges the potential impact of the elimination of the flex-core requirement on Divisions which formerly offered a set of half-semester flex-core courses, i.e. Management (1 set), Economics (1 set), DRO (1/2 set), and Accounting (1/2 set). The committee recommends the following to mitigate these concerns:

- To signal that these formerly-flex-core courses include widely relevant and important content, and to ensure some level of demand for these courses, the committee recommends that the School label them as “strongly recommended” electives for all careers (as part of the website that will provide guidance for Career Tracks and electives—described below).
- Initially, only formerly flex-core should be included in the strongly recommended electives list.
- Divisions may petition the Teaching and Curriculum Committee to add other courses to this list, but total numbers will be highly restricted in order to maintain the rigor of the strong recommendations.
- Further, the School should support divisions so that they can offer the courses previously included in the flex-core at or above the current number of sections and schedule as needed over the year, and accept lower than traditional enrollments in these sections for three years until equilibrium is reached.

III. Formal Elective Guidance: Career Tracks

The committee recommends that the School adopt a set of organizing structures which will help to guide students in their elective choices throughout the second semester and second year of their MBA.

Given that students will now have greater choice, providing thoughtful guidance structures will support them in making the best use of their time at Columbia Business School. Several structures were discussed and the committee found the following to be the best alternative.

The committee recommends that the School establish “Career Tracks” that can be used to guide students towards appropriate elective courses across divisions that are valuable in specified professions.

Career Tracks will be outlined on a website, to be developed and maintained by the Samberg Institute with input from the Career Management Center and divisional faculty, so that students will have easy access to these recommendations.

A rational organizational structure should be developed to present the recommended courses for career tracks. Each track should have a limited number of recommended classes.

IV. Integration using the GM Case

This committee has not come up with a single capstone course that serves to integrate content across courses and that can be effectively delivered, although several faculty offered suggestions for such a course. The committee leaves open this possibility of a capstone course for a future faculty committee to prototype, and suggests that interested faculty may pilot potential capstone courses in the interim as electives.

Building upon the initial efforts developing the GM integrated case, the committee recommends a mandated and supported component of each core class (45 to 90 minutes per course) which will include content that makes direct connections to the case and explores the complex business problems it raises through multiple disciplinary lenses. The case should be launched during orientation and will need to be further developed keeping in mind the new core structure (e.g., Leadership is now the first core class).

The committee recommends the appointment of a “Chief Integrator” (FT administrative appointment with both industry and excellent teaching credentials) who will serve in full time capacity and develop a co-taught component for each core class. Working closely with the core course coordinators and with all faculty members teaching the core, the Chief Integrator will participate in specific classes across the semester, drawing connections and helping faculty members to illuminate how their own disciplinary perspective adds to those presented in other contexts. Students should be required to analyze the case and complete an assignment at the end of the core. For example, students may be asked to analyze a business decision that requires the synthesis of content from across disciplines and make a recommendation to GM management. It is expected that within several years, a new integrated case would need to be developed. Appropriate incentives for those involved in the development should be considered at that time.

V. Corporate Governance

Corporate Governance is currently a stand-alone two-week course. In the spirit of integration, the committee recommends that the content be infused across courses, with one overview session taking place during the Orientation. Core courses in Finance, Strategy, Accounting, and Leadership will all have one or two 90-minute sessions specifically devoted to this topic. The core course coordinators for these divisions will be responsible for coordinating this content along with the Chief Integrator. Core faculty will be responsible for delivering the content developed on corporate governance in their classes.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

In order for the proposed structure to work (i.e., to effectively deliver a cohesive core curriculum), the committee makes the following additional recommendations.

Teaching in the Core: Responsibilities and Incentives

To ensure that the core curriculum is presented in an integrated way, it is important for faculty teaching the core classes to coordinate with each other and to integrate learnings so that students get a holistic understanding of business. As previous core committees have noted, the core belongs to the School and as such, staffing decisions for core classes should be made in consultation with the Dean's office. The committee also endorses the idea of core course coordinators, as specified by the previous core committee. Core Course Coordinators must be senior full-time faculty and would retain job description and compensation recommended and implemented in 2011-2012. This will be re-visited and adjusted as needed in FY 2015. To further achieve the aim of coordination, the committee recommends an additional set of responsibilities for core faculty. To offset the extra responsibilities and encourage faculty to teach in the core, the committee recommends additional teaching credit be given for teaching core courses.

Responsibilities of the Core Faculty

Core faculty integrative meetings

It is expected that, in a half-semester, all core faculty members participate in approximately six hours of pre-scheduled coordination meetings with faculty teaching other classes in the core. In consultation with the dean's office and core coordinators, the "chief integrator" will set the agenda for and manage these core meetings in order to best achieve the goals of coordination and integration, introduction of new ideas, and consistent quality of content and delivery. These meetings will be scheduled in consultation with faculty.

Core faculty intra-course coordination

The core team for each class should meet regularly to review and revise course material and content to ensure that they are rigorous, current, and relevant, and to coordinate content across sections. The committee stresses the importance of core teaching teams complying with the current requirement that at least 80% of course content be common across all sections of the core taught in a given year. In addition, the committee recommends that exam questions should be at least 80% common across all sections of a core course taught in any given semester.

Other core faculty team responsibilities

Core faculty are expected to devote preparation as well as class time to the GM case, IBS¹, and Corporate Governance (if assigned), and are also expected to help update course material and summaries at least annually and work closely with the core course coordinators as needed.

¹ The Individual, Business, and Society Curriculum content, which has been successfully integrated into the existing core courses, should remain unchanged.

Incentives

The responsibilities outlined above represent a significant additional commitment of time and energy, as well as reduced discretion on a number of dimensions. In order to compensate for these extra demands and encourage faculty to teach in the core, the committee strongly believes that faculty should receive additional teaching credit for teaching in the core.

The committee recommends that faculty teaching in the core be credited with .75 and 1.25 course credits for half and full classes respectively (this is a 25% bonus over the credit for elective classes.) It is expected that to earn this credit and to continue teaching in the core in future years, faculty members will actively engage in the responsibilities of the teaching assignment as outlined above.

The committee acknowledges that the above incentive policy could, in some instances, result in recruiting challenges. If, under special circumstances, the Dean's office concludes that the above incentive policy leads to an inequitable teaching load, they may, in consultation with the division chair, work to mitigate this.

Transmitting Core Content to All Faculty

The committee recommends that all full-time faculty teaching either core or elective courses attend the one-day "mini-MBA" meeting at which core coordinators present information about each core course either once a year (for core) or once every three years (for electives). The Committee recommends that all new faculty members attend this session in (or prior to) their first year before they begin to teach. These sessions will be designed so that they are not redundant with the previous year's session. In addition, the presentations will be videotaped and made available on the Samberg website. The Committee also recommends that adjunct faculty members attend these sessions before beginning to teach and once every three years. This participation will help educate faculty (ideally both full-time and adjuncts) who are teaching electives about core course materials, so that they can rely on core knowledge in their course design, build on that knowledge, and support the importance of the core in front of the students. Feedback from electives' instructors could be used in refining core materials. Divisions should develop a plan to transmit this information to adjuncts who are not able to attend the event.

Core Teaching Resources

As initially suggested by the earlier committee on the core, the committee recommends that the Samberg Institute add additional content to their website to serve faculty members with, at a minimum, the following content:

- Live, up-to-date, matrix of week by week core course content.
- Policies for students on exemptions, absence, norms, and learning contract (etc.) – In conjunction with OSA and the EMBA offices.
- Videos of core courses content from mini-mba
- Syllabi of all core courses
- Responsibilities of core course coordinators
- Best Practices for Core Course Coordinators
- Responsibilities of core teachers
- Responsibilities of core course mentors

Recommended Next Steps

In the process of carefully examining the structure of the academic core for Columbia Business School, the committee discussed several issues at length which we believe warrant careful future study and action in order to make the adoption of a revised core successful. Therefore, the committee acknowledges the importance of the following items and recommends that the School engage in a structured process to address them.

Drivers and Metrics

The committee recommends that the School develop a more concrete set of metrics against which to measure the success of the new core when the review is conducted three years after implementation. While student satisfaction is one measure, the committee believes that others such as faculty feedback, student learning, and relevance of content should also be considered.

The School should also determine what critical drivers lead to the success of the core. The committee hypothesized that several of its recommendations, such as condensing the timeframe for the core and increasing core teaching responsibilities, would support a successful core, but the School should evaluate other drivers such as setting norms and expectations, successful integration, etc. in evaluating the implementation.

Student Norms and Culture

The committee stresses that in order to ensure that the significant and costly changes recommended for the core structure result in a much improved core, and curriculum in general, it will be critical for the School to simultaneously address student culture and norms to ensure that students, faculty, and staff establish a culture of learning and mutual respect. We recommend that the School appoint a new committee (involving faculty, administrators, and students) that will identify mechanisms by which the school can further enhance its culture of learning and mutual respect.

While an effort to change student culture poses significant challenges, if the School is successful in doing so then this could dramatically improve our effectiveness in delivering the core. This in turn would improve faculty recruitment and retention, student achievement, job readiness, and alumni engagement.

Clarifying the Relationship between Core and Elective Courses

The committee believes that it is important to rationalize and manage the relationship, coordination, and integration of our core with our portfolio of elective courses. The committee recommends that the School establish a process to document the relationship between the core and our portfolio of elective courses. This will help identify possible changes to the core to better address gaps/needs of important downstream electives, identify gaps in our elective portfolio in relation to important business trends or School initiatives, and provide a systematized and rationalized approach to managing our elective course offerings.

As a first step, elective courses could be required to identify and clearly communicate their connection with specific core courses and topics and other important foundational elective courses as part of their "mandatory syllabus" document. Moreover, divisions should play an active role in ensuring that the content and message delivered in their respective electives is appropriate, including the elective courses taught by adjunct faculty.