

## The School of Business at Utah Valley State College: Where Do We Go from Here? By Dr. Janice Gygi\*

In the fall of 2000, the School of Business at Utah Valley State College (UVSC) commenced a complete restructuring program. Throughout its 60-year history, one of the most consistent and important attributes of the college has been change. Beginning as the Central Utah Vocational School in the fall of 1941, in transition the college became Utah Technical Institute in 1953, Utah Technical College at Provo in 1967, Utah Valley Community College in 1982, and Utah Valley State College in 1993 when it began offering four-year bachelor's degrees. One of the first three degrees offered was a bachelor's degree in business management.

Assumptions were that students obtaining the Bachelor of Science in Business Management from UVSC would prefer to work in Utah County and that students wanted a degree that enabled them to enter the business world immediately upon graduation.

The mission of the School of Business, as shown in its mission statement was "to provide an applied, technology-based business program designed to prepare students for employment." Within very few years, it became obvious that some of the students wanted more than an applied education. While career skills still remained an important goal, students began to apply to graduate schools. Another change was required to allow for improvements to meet both academic requirements and market needs.

In the fall of 2000, a new College of Computer Science and Engineering was announced. Within a year, the Computer Science Department moved from the School of Business. As a result of this change, the School of Business formulated new goals, changed the organizational structure of departments, and assessed future accreditation needs. To accomplish the new goals, the school sought and was accepted into candidacy for academic accreditation by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). Some faculty members worried that the school was moving too fast and abandoning the original goal of applied training, while others felt that a more rigorous academic emphasis would serve the needs of students who wanted to go into the business world immediately as well as those who wanted to continue their educations.

In order to determine what the students wanted, Dean Ian Wilson and Associate Dean Barbra Hoge engaged the marketing research class at the college to conduct a survey of the students in the School of Business. The students were given a real-world experience on how to conduct research, and the survey provided useful information. In addition to obtaining demographic information about the students, the class examined the research questions that were important in planning for the future of the School of Business.

### Methods

A questionnaire was completed by 352 students in the Business Principles course and in two of the required courses that seniors typically take. Undergraduate marketing research students designed the questionnaire and collected the data over a two-week period in November of 2000.

### Adapting the Educational Experience

Nontraditional students are typically defined as being 25 years of age or older and typically have responsibilities that require adaptation of class schedules or education delivery methods. While UVSC faculty members often express the concern that their students have more responsibilities than most college students, more and more colleges and employers appear to be adapting to meet the needs of busy students. According to Compton and Schock (2000), the number of students over the age of 30 increased by more than one million between 1990 and 2000. Older students often have time constraints because they are employed and have family responsibilities. "Most nontraditional students are familiar with the delicate balance among family responsibilities, work schedules, and the academic calendar."

Natalicio (2000) reported on the efforts of the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) to meet the needs of nontraditional students. Natalicio indicated that for nontraditional students, "rising educational costs and students' family and job constraints represent major barriers to access, retention, and graduation." UTEP is currently using technology, including distance education, to try to meet the needs of these students. At the City College of New York (Healy, 2000), students may have a two-hour commute as well as a 20-hour-a-week job and family responsibilities.

Schools around the country are evaluating various methods of providing education to their diverse student populations. For example, Cardinal Stritch University has met the need by providing accelerated classes, five to ten weeks in length. However, Jonas, Weimer, and Herzer (2001) indicated that it was critical to assess such programs frequently to ensure that students are receiving an education comparable to traditional programs.

Another approach to providing for the needs of nontraditional students is to offer off-campus programs. Baylor University (McClenahan, 1999) is located in Waco, Texas, but offers its executive MBA in Dallas to accommodate students. The University of Delaware provides an executive MBA program in Wilmington to meet the needs of students who work there. Off-site MBA programs are popular in many top business schools. In fact, Utah State University (USU) offers an MBA program and a graduate emphasis in accounting on the main UVSC campus. USU's program is delivered on campus on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings to accommodate the working students.

The data collected from the UVSC survey (see Figure 1) indicated that the seniors are more likely to be nontraditional than are students in other classes. The age range of the respondents was from 17 to 51, with a mean age of 23 and a median age of 22. However, the mean ages for individual classes were most interesting. In addition, the seniors were more likely to be married.

Other characteristics of nontraditional students are that they have children and they work full time. In the present survey (see Figure 2) only 58 (16.86 percent) reported having children, although 48.11 percent of the seniors reported having children. On the other hand, 304 (86.36 percent) reported that they worked full or part time, and more than half of the seniors (54.67 percent) reported working 40 or more hours per week. Although the range of the number of credit hours in which students were enrolled was 3 to 24, the mean number was 13.05 for each of the classes.

Figure 1  
Age and Marital Status of Students

Class Standing	Mean Age	Number Married	Number Single	Number Divorced
Freshman	20.274	14 (14.74%)	81 (85.26%)	0
Sophomore	21.739	33 (27.27%)	87 (71.90%)	1 (.83%)
Junior	23.778	18 (33.96%)	35 (66.04%)	0
Senior	27.474	55 (69.62%)	20 (25.32%)	4 (5.06%)
Total	22.948	120 (34.48%)	224 (64.08%)	5 (1.44%)

Figure 2  
Number of Children and Number of Hours Working

Class Standing	Number with Children	Number Working 20 to 29 Hours/Week	Number Working 30-39 Hours/Week	Number Working 40 or More Hours/Week	Number Working
Freshman	5 (5.83%)	34 (43.04%)	20 (25.32%)	12 (15.19%)	79 (83.16%)
Sophomore	9 (7.50%)	34 (32.69%)	31 (29.81%)	20 (19.23%)	104 (85.25%)
Junior	6 (11.54%)	19 (41.30%)	10 (21.74%)	9 (19.57%)	46 (83.64%)
Senior	38 (48.11%)	16 (21.33%)	16 (21.33%)	41 (54.67%)	75 (94.94%)
Total	58 (16.86%)	103 (33.88%)	77 (25.33%)	82 (26.97%)	304 (86.36%)

### Rigor and Quality of Programs

As students' interest in MBA programs and their need to obtain jobs across the country increases, the reputation of UVSC becomes more important. While UVSC School of Business graduates are being accepted into graduate programs in both business and law, the acceptance rate may be due to relatively high scores on admission tests. School reputation is more important for students with borderline scores.

Wallace (1991) reported on a survey of university presidents done in Canada to determine what makes a university great. The most important variables were academic qualifications and student-teacher ratios. UVSC students often comment on the ease of access to their professors on campus and the efficient class sizes. Other key variables were the reputation of the school and the quality of the students.

Braxton (1993) defined high-quality liberal arts colleges as those that taught and tested higher-level thinking skills. Braxton reported that the types of questions asked on examinations reflected the level of rigor of an institution and that the better schools asked questions that tested such skills as application, comprehension, and synthesis, rather than just testing how much students could memorize. Braxton also stated that schools with more selective admissions standards tended to have the most rigorous programs.

Norvall and Braxton (1996) suggested that the most important issue might be to add value to the students and noted that a college should make the curriculum challenging; at the same time, the college should provide the support necessary for students to meet the challenges. Norvall and Braxton concluded that it is more important to determine the best approach for the students rather than how outsiders who rank institutions can be impressed.

Daggett (1997) suggested that job-specific skills are important as well as such skills as "thinking, human relations, information systems, organization, and personal skills." "Rigor alone has not proved adequate. . . . Students must also have a curriculum that is both rigorous and relevant."

When asked to rate on a scale of one to six how likely they were to ever attend graduate school, 53.98 percent of the UVSC students marked five or six, indicating they were likely to attend. When asked to rate how likely they were to attend graduate school immediately after receiving a bachelor's degree, 36.75 percent marked a five or six. One issue on the survey was to determine if students wanted a more rigorous curriculum, and whether the students felt that this would lead to a higher probability for admission to a graduate school. In order to assess this issue, students were asked to rate a series of questions on a scale of one to six. For Table 3, the answers to these questions were collapsed.

Figure 3  
Questions about Rigor at UVSC

Statement	Disagree (1 & 2)	Neutral (3 & 4)	Agree (5 & 6)
Image is prestigious enough to allow me to compete for excellent employment opportunities.	42 (12.10%)	187 (53.89%)	118 (34.01%)
A more challenging curriculum would give more prestige.	48 (13.71%)	176 (50.29%)	126 (36.00%)
Classes in general are challenging enough for my academic needs.	12 (3.42%)	130 (37.04%)	209 (59.54%)
Business Management classes are challenging enough for my needs.	11 (3.15%)	97 (27.79%)	241 (69.05%)
I want the classes in Business Management Department to be more challenging.	126 (36.10%)	172 (49.28%)	51 (14.61%)
A more selective admissions process would provide more status.	42 (12.07%)	152 (44.25%)	154 (43.68%)
School of Business should be more selective when admitting students.	83 (24.06%)	185 (53.62%)	77 (22.32%)

The results indicate that only 12.10 percent of the respondents felt that UVSC did not have an image that was adequately prestigious for them to compete for employment, and 34.01 percent did feel that the image was adequate. While 36.00 percent felt that a more challenging curriculum would give UVSC more prestige, only 3.41 percent thought that UVSC classes in general, and 3.42 percent of the School of Business classes in particular, were not challenging enough to meet their academic needs. On the other hand, 14.61 percent said they would like UVSC business classes to be more challenging. It is interesting to note that a higher percentage, 22.32 percent felt that the School of Business should be more selective when admitting students. Surveying students after they graduate--to see what percentage actually did obtain an MBA and to determine why the others had not--would be valuable. Understanding why some of the applicants were not accepted may assist instructors and curriculum designers.

### After Graduation

The original assumption of the School of Business faculty was that students would come to UVSC from Utah County and would want to stay in Utah County after graduation. While 133 (38 percent) of the respondents did graduate from high school in Utah County, and another 100 (26 percent) graduated in Utah, 115 (33 percent) came from 31 different states, and 10 (3 percent) came from 8 foreign countries. In addition, while 48 (14 percent) reported they would like to stay in Utah County after graduation, and another 110 (32 percent) said they would like to stay in Utah, 89 (26 percent) said they would go wherever they find the best job. More than half of the graduates were willing to look outside Utah for employment. Students' willingness to relocate has implications for career and placement services and for internships. Relationships need to be developed with employers outside Utah as well as with local firms.

### Conclusions

Many of the students at UVSC, particularly the seniors, are nontraditional; the average age is 27, 69 percent are married, 51 percent work full time, and 95 percent work at least part time. The School of Business must provide instructional opportunities to meet the needs of these students, including early morning, evening, weekend, or online classes. Upper-level classes, in particular, should be offered at times when the seniors need them. Many such classes are already offered, and the selection continues to improve.

At the same time, the School of Business should consider increasing the rigor of the classes in order to prepare students for graduate school and employment. Rigor does not mean requiring more work, but rather, as Braxton (1993) noted, teaching and testing higher-level thinking skills. At the same time, as Norvall and Braxton (1996) suggested, support for the students is critical if they are to succeed in a more challenging educational experience. In addition, because approximately half of the students go directly into the workforce, the curriculum must provide information and skills that are relevant for both a graduate education and immediate employment.

\*Dr. Janice Gygi is the Reed and Christine Halladay Executive Lecture Professor at Utah Valley State College.

### References

- Braxton, J. (1993). Selectivity and rigor in research universities. *Journal of Higher Education*, 64, 657-675.
- Compton, M & Schock, C (2000). The nontraditional student in you. *Women in Business*, 52, 14-17.
- Daggett, W. (1997). Rigorously relevant preparation for real-world situations. *Community College Week*, 9, 4.
- Healy, P. (2000). Can City College restore its luster by ending open admissions? *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 44, 24-27.
- Jonas, P., Weimer, D. and Herzer, K. (2001). Comparison of traditional and nontraditional (adult education) undergraduate business programs. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 28, 161-170.
- McClenahan, J. (1999). On an campus near you. *Industry Week/TW*, 248, 25-26.
- Natalicio, D. (2000). Information technology: Focusing on improved teaching and learning. *Educause Review*, 35, 10-11.
- Norvall, R., & Braxton, J. (1996). An alternative definition of quality of undergraduate college education: Toward usable knowledge for improvement. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 67, 483-497.
- Wallace, B. (1991). What makes a university great. *Maclean's*, 104, 18-21.