

# WHY REVISED? HOW FAR OFF ARE WE IN OUR CURRICULA: AN EXAMPLE?

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## *ALIGNING CURRICULA WITH INDUSTRY NEEDS*

As Bob Dylan wrote in the 60s: *Times they are a-changin'*. Since the begin of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, changes in the US are evidenced by internationalization of the economy leading to labor market globalization and exponential growth of trade flow, fast catching up by developing and emerging economies. The perception that US workers lack skills becomes prevalent and many companies could not find the right staff even during periods of high unemployment rates.

In response to the above phenomena, President Obama, state lawmakers, and national higher education associations are calling upon educational institutions to not only fill the current gap but to reach aggressive goals set for educational attainment in the U.S. by 2020 (Barnett, 2011; National Skills Coalition, 2011). As articulated by Foskett (2005), educational institutions are particularly affected by these changing times and may have to modify how they operate as a result of intrinsic responses to a perceived need or extrinsic responses through stakeholder collaboration.

Additionally, in the face of the 2013 AACSB's standards for accreditation quality, many colleges have tried to revise their curricula to align the graduates' skill set with industry needs. This framework also helps these institutions to tell their stories to satisfy the guiding principles of the 2013 AACSB's standards which are summarized in three words: **Innovation, Engagement, and Impact** of their programs.

The alignment of curricula by business education programs is also a pro-active measure to protect their enrollments in the face of the new threats from Community Colleges. Community Colleges in some states are permitted to offer bachelor degrees. The logical choices for their program portfolios are in business disciplines. Cost wise, community colleges have a competitive advantage over four-year institutions - lower overall cost of tuition.

As mentioned, the objective of realigning learning outcomes with industry needs by higher education institutions is multi-fold, and encompasses multiple fronts of their operations. While some of the results of the aforementioned endeavors may take years to reveal their effectiveness or lack thereof, some challenges such as logistics of the process, and indications of relevancy of the curriculum can be assessed fairly quickly.

To this end and as an example, the remainder of this paper summarizes the process of a particular institution's effort to **align its marketing program's learning outcomes with industry needs**. This discusses the challenges of the process and differences between the existing and the revised curricula of a college of business at a four-year urban university, located in the fourth largest city in the US.

In the process of revamping its marketing degree to meet the needs of future graduates and their employers, the college invited a select group of industry professionals in the city to form a working group. The industry professionals helped to directly shape the new curriculum to better meet the needs of the businesses. During these meetings, group members brainstormed--with the assistance of a designated group facilitator from industry--the competencies, skills and abilities they wanted to find in their ideal candidates hired from the college's marketing program. These competencies were recorded and then sorted into groups that became outlines for a new curriculum. Before adjourning, working group members drafted learning objectives ("The student will be able to...") which guided faculty as the courses and program were developed.

Faculty built courses around these outlines to meet both identified industry needs and rigorous academic standards. Before these rebuilt courses went through the university approval process, a second meeting was called with industry members. In this meeting, a progress report was provided to ensure that the courses were developed in line with the expectations initially laid out by the working group. The proof of ability to meet industry's needs will be

the students. So, in the years to come, the discipline will assess students against the competencies that the industry professionals helped identify, and report those results back to the industry to bolster the placement of its graduates.

Table 1 summarizes the new required courses, other new courses, retained old courses and deleted courses as the result of the alignment of the learning outcomes of the marketing program with industry needs. As suggested by the new required courses of the program and newly developed courses, the industry needs seem to gravitate toward buyer behavior, marketing analytics, and application of technology to the marketing discipline. Difficulty in reconciling the industry suggestions and the academic learning outcomes, selecting the right industry professionals to form the working group, and soliciting faculty buy-in were the three major challenges encountered in the process. Finally, as compared to the current industry needs, the old marketing program of this college was pretty far off.

**Table 1**

<i>Required Courses</i>	<i>Elective Courses</i>		<i>Deleted Courses</i>
<i>5 Courses-15 hours</i>	<i>9 New Courses</i>	<i>10 Retained old Courses</i>	<i>4 Courses- 12 hours</i>
3305: Integrated Marketing.	3305: Integrated Marketing.	MKT 3302: Personal Selling.	MKT 3303: Business Marketing.
MKT 3308: Digital Marketing.	MKT 3308: Digital Marketing.	MKT 3304: International Marketing.	MKT 4302: e-Marketing.
MKT 4305: Buyer Behavior.	MKT 3350: Web, email, and Mobile Marketing.	MKT 3310: Marketing Channels.	MKT 4304: Supply Chain Logistics Management.
MKT 4306: Marketing Research.	MKT 3360: Product Innovation Management	MKT 3320: Social Media Marketing.	MKT 4308: Exporting & Importing.
MKT 4309: Marketing Strategy.	MKT 4305: Buyer Behavior.	MKT 3330: Retail Management.	
	MKT 4309: Marketing Strategy.	MKT 3399: Directed Study in Marketing.	
	MKT 4320: International Business Development.	MKT 3340: Customer Relationship Management	
	MKT 4330: Understanding the Digital Consumer.	MKT 4306: Marketing Research.	
	MKT 4340: Marketing Analytics.	MKT 4380: Field Experience.	
		MKT 4390: Special Topics in Marketing	

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