

## ***CAN TRADITIONAL UNIVERSITIES IMPROVE THEIR OUTLOOK WITH NONTRADITIONAL METHODS?***

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### **ABSTRACT**

Universities are providing many ways of delivering their educational services including distance learning, intercessions and short-sessions. The purpose of this paper is to see if these program delivery forms are improving enrollment at the college of business in this study. A survey given to the students confirmed that the summer short-session (new to this university) has helped the college of business in an ongoing battle for enrollment. In fact, summer enrollment in the college of business is up by 24% at the same time that summer enrollment in the university has dropped by 5%.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Higher education enrollment is up and yet competition for students has never been greater. The traditional college student going full-time and graduating in four years is becoming the exception with the typical student being older, part-time and working. While enrollment has been flat in many elite private institutions and public institutions, enrollment in “for-profit” higher education institutions is growing. In order to survive, traditional universities are becoming more customer-oriented which includes being more assessment-oriented. It is more important than ever to track what is working, and why.

In order to meet the needs of nontraditional students, universities are providing new ways of delivering their educational services. Program delivery takes many forms such as distance education, including Web-supported instruction and videoconferencing, intercessions and short-sessions. The purpose of this paper is to see if nontraditional program delivery forms are improving enrollment. This paper also assesses one of these forms to see if it is meeting the needs of students.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Today, the student profile is very different than it was a number of years ago. U. S. Department of Education statistics indicate that the nontraditional student is becoming the new majority enrolling in higher education. According to the 1995 report by the U.S. Department of Education, 44% of all college students are over 25 years old, 54% are working, 56% are female, and 43% are attending college part-time [1, p.1-2]. According to McClenney [1, p.2] these older, part-time, working students are different from the traditional college student and want to be treated like customers, wanting service, convenience and quality control.

According to the College Board, adult students now account for nearly half of college enrollment. At Johns Hopkins University, more than half of the 16,000 students are in part-time post-baccalaureate programs [2, p.A51]. The increase in part-time students is one reason why distance education, Web-supported instruction and videoconferencing have grown rapidly in the last few years. Many business schools offer courses over the Internet, especially M.B.A. courses [3, p.27]. According to Carnevale [4, p.A60] distance education is becoming commonplace in higher education and hybrid courses are evolving that combine traditional and on-line education.

The past President of the University of Michigan, James Duberstadt, often talked about higher education evolving from a system serving traditional students from local communities to what he calls a “knowledge industry” [5, p.A31]. In order to survive, Duberstadt stated that universities must shift their focus from faculty members and their specialties to the needs of students, which means changing the delivery of their curricula [5, p.A31]. Universities must move from being faculty-centered to being student-centered.

The University of Michigan is one of many universities changing their traditional form in order to meet the market demand. According to Charlie Reed, Chancellor of the California State University System, his biggest concern is how to accommodate the projected 30% increase in the number of students in the California system over the next decade [6, p.A32]. Despite outcry from faculty, Reed stated that universities are not able to serve students by working seven or eight months a year and his solution is year-round classes [6, p.A32]. He is directing each campus to make student needs a focus of planning decisions and to design more flexible schedules, thus the term “corporate chancellor” is used in referring to Reed [6, p.A32-33].

In many states, such as California, college enrollment is expected to increase in the next decade, but not in Louisiana. As stated in *The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac Issue*, September 1, 2000, the enrollment in higher education in Louisiana is expected to decrease by 10% over the next decade.

The purpose of this paper is to examine ways that a Louisiana public universities’ college of business administration is trying to increase enrollment. While much has been written about ways to increase student enrollment, especially distance learning, very little is available that looks at the impact of summer offerings on enrollment. Even less is available that focuses on assessing student satisfaction as a way to increase summer enrollment.

## **BACKGROUND**

This southern university’s transition from open access to selective admission in the fall semester of 1999 has contributed to an enrollment decline. The university’s fall enrollment decreased by 3% the first year of selective admission and decreased an additional 4% the second year. The college of business administration has not seen a decline in its enrollment.

Distance learning has been very slow to catch on at this university and in the college of business administration. The first distance learning class, Business Systems, Analysis, and Technology (BSAT) 205, was offered beginning in fall 1999. Through spring 2001, only seven business classes have been offered with a total enrollment of 157.

Another type of course offering, new to this university, is the intercession course. These courses are taught in 3-week sessions between the longer, more

traditional terms. The college of business administration has only offered one intercession course, Accounting 201, with 15 students enrolled.

**Table 1**  
**University of Louisiana at Lafayette**  
**Enrollment History**

<b>Summer</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>
COBA	699	754	801	778	878	865
ULL	6,779	6,700	6,915	6,793	7,038	6,426
COBA as % of ULL	10.31	11.25	11.58	11.45	12.48	13.46
<b>Fall</b>	<b>1995</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>
COBA	2,060	2,196	2,239	2,230	2,311	2,301
ULL	16,902	16,742	17,020	16,933	16,351	15,742
COBA as % of ULL	12.19	13.12	13.16	13.17	14.13	14.62

The type of program delivery that has been successful for the college of business administration is the summer short-session. Whereas this type of program delivery is not new, it is new to this university. In the summer 1997 term, the college of business administration began offering 4½-week courses during the 9-week summer term. In 1997, nine 4½-week business courses were offered and by the summer 2000 term, forty 4½-week business courses were offered.

Over the past five years, the university's enrollment in summer school has decreased by 5%, however, not in the college of business administration where summer enrollment is up by 24% over the past five years. These summer school trends are also reflected in the fall enrollment figures. Over the past five years, the fall term enrollment in the university is down 7% and up 12% in the college of business administration. Five-year enrollment trends are shown in Table 1.

## **METHOD**

A survey was administered to students taking summer short-session courses in the college of business administration. In summer 2000, 25% of students enrolled in the summer were taking a 4½-week short course. Of the 1,624 summer school students taking a 4½-week course, one-half of these students were taking business courses. The goal of this survey was to see if the short-session format met students' expectations.

Of the 763 students taking business courses in the short-session, 60% of students completed a student satisfaction survey. Of the students responding, 80% listed the length of the term as what they most liked about the 4½-week summer term. In addition, 80% said they would take a short course next summer if offered. These answers are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2{tc "Table 2"}  
Summer 2000 Short Session Questionnaire{tc "Summer 2000 Short Session Questionnaire"}}**

Questions	Agree				Disagree
	1	2	3	4	
I was satisfied with length of term	364 80%	42 9%	16 4%	20 4%	4 1% -8 2%
If offered next year, I would take short summer course	364 80%	31 7%	15 3%	17 4%	3 1% 4 1% 20 4%
I would take 4½-week during second term if offered	295 65%	26 6%	40 9%	35 8%	22 5% 8 2% 29 6%
I would recommend taking 4½-week summer course to others	355 78%	33 7%	23 5%	28 6%	7 2% 0 -9 2%
I learned as much in 4½-week as I would in 9-week summer term	308 69%	58 13%	27 6%	22 5%	14 3% 8 2% 11 2%

I believe my grade will be \_\_\_\_\_ than I would have earned during 9-week summer course.

- a. Higher – 187 (41%)
- b. Same – 229 (50%)
- c. Lower – 41 (9%)

Students were also asked what they liked most about the short-term and Students were also asked what they like most about the short-term and answers varied by subject. While students in all courses listed the length of the term as what they most liked, percentages varied by subject. The lowest percentage was in accounting (44%) and the highest percentage was in a statistics course (68%). These figures are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3  
Summer 2000 Short Session  
What Students Liked Most about the Course**

Courses	Length of Term	Forces Students to Keep Up	Learn Only What is Necessary	Teacher	Small Classes	Total Responses
ACCT	71 44%	40 25%	20 12%	30 19%	1 -	162
BLAW	17 53%	5 16%	2 6%	6 19%	2 6%	32
BSAT	66 59%	31 28%	5 5%	9 8%	0 -	111
ECON	74 61%	25 21%	8 7%	11 9%	3 2%	121
MGMT	30 65%	8 17%	4 9%	1 2%	3 7%	46
MKTG	82 62%	21 16%	12 9%	14 11%	3 2%	132
QMET	27 68%	6 15%	1 3%	3 7%	3 7%	40
TOTAL	367 57%	136 21%	52 8%	74 11%	15 2%	644

## CONCLUSIONS

The data in this situation have helped demonstrate the "success" of the 4½-week summer session for this university's college of business administration. These data have confirmed that the short summer session has helped the college in an ongoing battle for enrollment, and the short-session is well established now.

The regional state university in this study serves local students in a state with declining population, and even maintaining relative enrollment levels becomes a major challenge. Increasing the college of business administration's relative share of summer school enrollment is an accomplishment. That is, however, what the college has done in the four years that it has taught short-session summer courses. The vast majority of students in the recent short-session courses who participated in a satisfaction survey stated that the length of the session was what they liked most about the course(s).

The short-session is becoming popular for courses offered in the first and second half of the full-length session. There seems to be a similarity between the enrollment in the short-session courses and the product life cycle curve. In the earlier years of the short session, enrollment figures were rather low. But recent enrollment has grown in the face of stable or declining summer school enrollments in several other colleges of the university. An interesting note is that few other colleges teach short-session courses in the summer term. This is in spite of the success of the short-session courses in the business and education colleges.

Whether the college of business administration would have considered short-session courses if it had not been at a low point in summer enrollment is another area for thought. The college's relative share of summer enrollment was down 50% the summer before the first short-session courses' appearance. Had this not occurred, the faculty might never have rethought its summer offerings to rearrange them to be more convenient or attractive to its customers, the students. College campuses have often been accused of being too traditional and not responsive enough to students' needs and wants. This certainly does not agree with literature on satisfaction of customers' needs and wants. Faculty members often, perhaps unfortunately, claim that they know better than students do what they need and want. This is currently working against the success of summer offerings in the more traditional colleges at the university in this study; they are generally experiencing relatively lower enrollments.

This leads to the final area for consideration: the general lack of published material in this area, especially with any data for use in analysis. Higher-level administrators have asked that the survey be continued because it provides insight into students' thoughts and preferences concerning this new type of program delivery. Students' preferences are being emphasized among upper-level university policymakers in this university and in several of the sources cited in this work. Finding data of any sort to use in analysis of the current status and trends is not, unfortunately, an easy task.

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