

Commerce and Administration Students' Association

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Strategic Planning Discussion – Experiential Learning & Beyond

CASA Board of Directors

PREAMBLE

Early in the winter 2015 semester, CASA was very pleased to be approached by the Office of the Provost to provide input on behalf of our students regarding the “Experiential Learning” component of Concordia’s strategic direction. The CASA Board of Directors (BOD) discussed this issue at length during their March meeting (for reference, the BOD is composed of the CASA Executive, as well as 7 representatives from all departments at JMSB, 7 representatives from special interest groups (sustainability, philanthropy, academic competitions, etc.), and 3 independent undergraduate representatives). The discussion was incredibly well received, and as such, CASA is pleased to present a summary of this discussion.

The discussion began along the lines of experiential learning, while also expanding to larger issues considered by our representatives to be of equal importance to students of our faculty. As such, the discussion was divided into six major components, each proposed by members of the BOD, as follows:

- 1) Enhancing Technical Skills
- 2) Developing Leadership Skills
- 3) Promoting Inter-Faculty Collaboration
- 4) Growing Co-operative Education
- 5) Encouraging Student Exchange
- 6) Recommending Curriculum Changes

1) ENHANCING TECHNICAL SKILLS

- Upon a comparison to other Montreal universities, it was noted that Concordia business students have experienced turbulence in recent years during recruitment events due to their lack of technical skills (excel modelling for finance students, IT coding for BTM students, etc.), especially when applying to fields related to **consulting**.
- It is our opinion that the University must explore which technical skills are in demand in the marketplace, and must develop hands-on opportunities for students to learn these skills (including the development of for-credit elective courses focusing on technical skills – whether online or in-class – as well as offering webinars hosted by industry professionals). In this way, Concordia will be better positioned to (1) provide a better “product” to its students, and (2) allow its students to compete in an ever-changing marketplace.

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2) DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP SKILLS

- It was noticed that Concordia business students do not have enough opportunities to develop proper leadership skills (a soft skill that has been shown to be critical for employers, even for entry-level positions). It was agreed that leadership (both of human resources, and of projects) is developed through experience, not through a chapter in a textbook.
- It is our opinion that the Faculty must implement additional leadership components into classroom activities (e.g. assigning “group leaders” for team projects with clear grading components, etc).

3) CURRICULUM CHANGES

- It was noted that, upon a comparison to the business program curricula of other universities, certain courses currently offered at JMSB are very sub-par in terms of the material that is taught, as well as skills developed (see Appendix 1). It was also noticed that certain COMM classes are “too easy” and should be modified to be better aligned with courses offered by other universities. It was also noticed that many of the courses offered at JMSB focus too much on theoretical knowledge rather than the development of marketable skills (including technical skills, as previously discussed).
 - It is our opinion that the University must consider combining some of the lower-level COMM classes in order to make them more valuable courses, all while allowing for the addition of more business electives, including for-credit technical-skills-based classes (excel modeling, DCF, DTM coding, etc), allowing students to benefit from more hands-on learning opportunities (a great example of this hands-on learning is FINA 455). It was noted that FINA 455 teaches students “the most of any other class at JMSB.” It is our opinion that the University consult the course objectives of this class to better understand what students expect from their curriculum.
- It was also noted that COMM 401 (Strategy and Competition) incredibly overlaps with the COMM 499 (Business Case Studies – i.e. the business elective taken as part of the case competition program at JMSB), to the point where students with case competition experience see no value in “retaking a minor variation of COMM 499W.”
 - It is our opinion that the University offer students who took COMM 499 an exemption from COMM 401. However, it is also our opinion that the COMM 401 model (case analysis, pitch presentation, etc.) is a perfect example of experiential learning,

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and thus, the University should evaluate the feasibility of replicating this model across other classes offered at JMSB.

4) INTER-FACULTY COLLABORATIONS / DISTRICT 3:

- It was noted that students from different faculties possess a variety of skills that can be leveraged by all Concordia students, regardless of field of study (for example, a marketing student may find great value in collaborating with a graphic design student, and an engineering student may find great value in building a budget for a project alongside a finance student). Unfortunately, invisible barriers between faculties make this difficult.
 - It is our opinion that the University must encourage inter-faculty collaboration through better promotion and funding like ECCC (Engineering and Commerce Case Competition), and other pedagogical activities.
- It was also noted that initiatives such as District 3 are becoming increasingly important to Concordia's success, but JMSB students feel that too few opportunities at District 3 are available to business students.
 - It is our opinion that the University must encourage the participation of business students in District 3 ideas (for example, having business students determine the financing, marketing, strategic dimensions of ideas created by engineers and other District 3 participants), and must involve business students in this planning.

5) GROWING THE CONCORDIA CO-OP PROGRAM

- It was noted that there are currently no opportunities for students in the department of Management to join the Co-Op program. This issue has already been discussed at the JMSB faculty council, but there do not seem to be any advances in establishing Co-Op opportunities for students in Management.
 - It is our opinion that the University must develop Co-Op opportunities for Management students (including opportunities in start-up companies, with the goal of encouraging entrepreneurship)
- It was also noted that some students currently in Co-Op do not see as much value in being part of the program as would be expected, given that many of the workshops currently offered (CV building, cover letter writing, etc.) are very introductory.
 - It is our opinion that the University must encourage the Co-Op management team to widen the variety of workshops offered

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to students in the program (including offering workshops that build technical skills, as previously outlined)

6) ENCOURAGING STUDENT EXCHANGE

- It was noted that the office in charge of student exchange at JMSB is **severely** under-staffed. The Board brought up that the current exchange coordinator, Ms. Amanda Holt, is the only person that students can speak for the most complete information regarding exchange. While she is an incredible asset to JMSB, the long waiting list to get a meeting with Amanda often presents a challenge to students going on exchange.
 - It is our opinion that the University must hire a second exchange coordinator to ease the exchange process. This will reduce many of the challenges associated with completing one's exchange application, in an effort to encourage experiential learning.
- It was also noticed that many world-renowned universities (Queens University, National University of Singapore, etc.) have a mandatory exchange component integrated into the curriculum of their international business programs (or their equivalents). Seeing as Concordia is consistently working toward improving its reputation, a student exchange provides future leaders a number of once-in-a-lifetime opportunities that are currently not being leveraged.
 - It is our opinion that the University work with the JMSB to establish a compulsory student exchange program as part of the IBUS curriculum, as well as the resource implications of such a program (for example, could the University fund such a program in future years, are their public subsidy opportunities above and beyond the MELS bursary currently offered, etc.).