

Business History as Capstone Courses

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Based on studies of history courses in Business Schools, this paper argues that history can be an alternative to the technically driven capstone courses used in many Business Schools.

Universities in general and Business Schools in particular are facing growing pressure to demonstrate that they have delivered the skills and academic content they state they do. Government funding bodies are becoming increasingly interested in what is being learnt at university rather than funding teaching. Within Business Schools, the US based AACSB through the introduction of *assurance of learning* standards require accredited Schools to address and measure student learning in ways that have not been required previously.

The Business School curriculum has grown significantly. The increase in the body of knowledge of individual disciplines and the establishment of new business disciplines, combined with the increased complexity of business, have resulted in an increase in the expectations of business graduates. At the same time concerns about the lack of generic skills in graduates, has resulted in increased calls for their inclusion in the Business School curriculum. Most Business Schools include communication, research and critical thinking skills as graduate attributes.

One way that Business Schools are responding to the requirement to demonstrate that they have delivered both the expanding academic content and the “soft skills” the market place demand, is through capstone courses. These courses are often in business or financial management strategy, with a focus on technical analysis using case studies. Within these courses students are expected to demonstrate a range of skills and academic knowledge.

This paper argues that business history courses offer an alternative to the technically driven capstone courses. Business history courses would be particularly relevant for students, staff and/or institutions seeking a more liberal business degree. The study of history is known to instil in students a range of transferable skills. The historian’s craft of data collection, selection, analysis, synthesis and communication are key skills desired in most Business School graduates. Business history requires the application and integration of core business knowledge as part of the historian craft. History with its acceptance of multiple frameworks and differing theoretical assumptions encourages faculty and students to approach issues from a variety of perspectives. History with its demand for context can provide richer insights than the often seen ahistorical case study; alerting students to the context and temporal nature of their studies. Courses in the existing literature can provide models for developing business history capstone courses that cover graduate attributes and their measurement in a manner that is aligned with a more liberal business education.

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