



Minnesota State Colleges & Universities

TO: Presidents of Colleges with Farm and Small Business Management Programs
FROM: *Linda Baer*
Linda Baer, Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs
DATE: October 7, 1999
SUBJECT: Implementation of Farm and Small Business Management program Final Task Force Recommendations Report, July 13, 1999

Over the past year a special management program task force, appointed by MnSCU, has met to consider and recommend policy and procedure changes to provide statewide consistency and uniformity for management education programs.

The task force was created as a result of the MnSCU Farm & Small Business Management Program Quality Improvement Project Study, Phase 1 Findings and Recommendations Report, October 2, 1997. Tom LaForce of Team Creations conducted this study.

The Task Force consisted of faculty and management and was facilitated by Tom LaForce, a private consultant. Included were representatives of business, financial aid, academic affairs, and student services functions; regional deans of management education; MnSCU system office staff; management education program instructional staff and UTCE state level representatives. As a part of the decision making process, the task force requested written input on preliminary recommendations from the colleges with management education programs. After reviewing this input, the task force revised and adopted the recommendations needed to provide statewide consistency for improving instruction and operation of management education programs.

The task force has completed its work. The final report, with recommendations, is included for your review and implementation.

I am requesting that colleges with management education programs develop a plan for implementing the recommendations. The plan should reflect how your college will implement the recommendations (found in sections 1 through 6 of the task force report). Recommendation 7 will be considered in MnSCU and UTCE negotiations.

Enclosure

cc: Deena Allen
John Murray
Regional Deans of Management Education

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| MnSCU Management Education Program Summation of Final Task Force Recommendations |
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| <u>Recommendations</u> | <u>Responsible for Implementation-?</u> | | |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|-------|------|
| | College | MnSCU | UTCE |
| <u>I. Introduction</u> | NA | | |
| <u>II. Instruction Recommendations</u> | | | |
| A. Use the established statewide curriculum..... X..... X (Exempt from Gen. Education Requirement) | | | |
| B. Deliver management education on a credit basis and design an enrollment option for a business..... X..... X (State Curriculum Committee, Current Issues Certificate) | | | |
| C. Make terms longer than the standard semester..... X..... X (Two 26 week terms, 16 week delivery) | | | |
| <u>III. Evaluation Recommendations</u> | | | |
| A. Provide management students with: Letter grade (A-F), Pass/No Credit, or audit visitation..... X | | | |
| B. Evaluate programs/sites on an annual basis X..... X | | | |
| <u>IV. Policy/Administrative Recommendations</u> | | | |
| A. Exempt management students from assessment tests..... X..... X | | | |
| B. Provide flexible registration options. X | | | |
| C. Develop and implement a uniform billing process..... X | | | |
| D. Provide students with flexible tuition payment options. X | | | |
| E. Maintain financial aid procedures & eligibility..... X | | | |
| F. Customize fee policies..... X..... X | | | |
| <u>V. Funding/Support Recommendations</u> | | | |
| A. Improve communication between MnSCU & institutions. X | | | |
| B. Change funding model to better reflect the characteristics of the management programs. X | | | |
| C. Assess and develop small business education in the Twin City Metropolitan Area. X | | | |
| D. Better define the authority of the state director and of the regional deans to facilitate consistent policies. X | | | |
| <u>VI. Instructor Resources Recommendations</u> | | | |
| A. Develop marketing materials and a state marketing campaign for the management programs. X | | | |
| B. Provide administrative support for remote, off-campus locations. X..... X | | | |
| <u>VII. Instructor Workload Recommendations</u> | | | |
| A. Establish a minimum workload on a program by program basis within the management programs. X..... X | | | |
| B. Use a combination of overload and extended days for time worked beyond the base..... X..... X | | | |
| C. Develop workload policies that are flexible enough to accommodate special circumstances such as those faced by an instructor new to a program site..... X..... X | | | |

Management Education Program Task Force - A brief summary of intent and recommendations

Prepared by DelRay Lecy (12-02-98)

Overview

- ❖ Spring of 1997, concerns regarding college process and instructional delivery were identified at Northland College.
- ❖ Summer of 1997, a statewide program review was conducted to determine the scope of the issues raised at Northland.
- ❖ One of the review recommendations was to establish a task force to address the process and delivery issues.
- ❖ As a result of the UTCE contact negotiations this spring, a management instructor MOU was added to the agenda.
- ❖ The task force consists of 5 Management representatives and 6 UTCE representatives. Tom LaForce is the facilitator. 3 others also attend.
- ❖ Meetings began in September. There have been 6 days of meetings and numerous assignments between meetings.
- ❖ Recommendations have been prepared and are being formalized for final review and dissemination.

Highlights of Process/Procedure Recommendations:

- ❖ Continue as credit based programs
- ❖ Develop a state curriculum committee for management programs
- ❖ Design options for businesses to enroll, as well as individuals
- ❖ Establish two unique instructional terms: July 1 to Dec 31 and Jan 1 to June 30.
- ❖ Continue access to financial aid for management students that meet criteria and follow the process.
- ❖ Management students should be exempt from admissions testing (except with financial aid)
- ❖ Allow use of P/N grades for students with financial aid. Enable greater use of audit grade.
- ❖ Increase flexibility of registration timelines for continuing students
- ❖ Identified tuition payment options available to management program students
- ❖ Standardize which fees should be charged to management programs statewide
- ❖ Use a weighting factor for management program FYE to increase non-instructional funding
- ❖ Separate management programs from other programs for direct instructional allocation purposes
- ❖ Consider moving all management programs under 6 regional colleges and consider a set-aside for Regional positions.
- ❖ Develop materials for a statewide marketing campaign

Highlights of MOU Related Recommendations

- ❖ Incorporated the state ratios
- ❖ Incorporated both extended days and overload into contract time above base

Possible Issues for Central Lakes College

- ❖ Do new processes result in more work for existing support staff?
- ❖ Can the new student record system handle these recommendations?
- ❖ What are the funding implications?
- ❖ Will the MOU result in added instructional costs?

Timelines for Recommendations

- ❖ Up to January 1: Task force members review final recommendations and potential cost information
- ❖ Mid January – Mid February: Initial approval at MnSCU to go forward and secure input from college administration
- ❖ Mid February: Task force meeting to review suggestions, issues, and concerns from colleges
- ❖ Up to June 30: Secure final approval and build an implementation plan
- ❖ July 1: The suggested date to implement.

Task Force Membership

Management:

Larry Lundblad, South Central College
Diane Paulson, Hennepin Technical College
Chris Halling, MnSCU Financial Aid Representative
John Murray, State Director of Mgmt. Programs
DelRay Lecy, Central Lakes College
Attending: Deena Allen, MnSCU Associate Vice Chan.

UTCE:

Jerry Bartel, Riverland FBM instructor
Dean Otto, South Central SBM instructor
Ron Dvergsten, Northland FBM instructor
Joanne Simons, Hennepin Tech SBM instructor
Cliff Vrieze, Minnesota West FBM instructor
Chuck Stranburg, Ridgewater FBM instructor
Attending: Bruce Hemstad, state UTCE
Norm Halsa, UTCE, Northland

MnSCU
Farm & Small Business
Management Program
Quality Improvement Project

Phase 1 Findings &
Recommendations Report

October 2, 1997

Team Creations

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Executive Overview

Purpose

MnSCU has begun an initiative to review and improve its farm and small business management programs throughout the state. This report is a summary of the work completed in phase one of this initiative.

The goal of this first phase was to gather data about the current situation. This involved meeting with program administrators and instructors, interviewing support staff, and conducting a random phone survey of students. It also included an on-site visit at one of the six colleges that offer the management programs.

Findings

After completing the data gathering work, I offer the following major findings:

1. The operating policies associated with credit-based instruction inhibit the effective delivery of small and farm business management instruction.
2. Instructors typically do what makes sense from the student's perspective. As a result, there may not be consistent compliance with all the college's policies. Although this may not negatively impact student satisfaction, it does put MnSCU at risk in the areas of academic and financial accountability.
3. Policies and procedures vary from college to college. Instruction varies from instructor to instructor. This has resulted in inconsistent program quality across MnSCU.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the data gathering, I offer the following recommendations:

1. Identify, document, standardize, and improve all core processes, including instruction.
2. Develop and implement a set of quality measures. The measurement system should include minimum standards and goals.
3. Develop and implement a state-wide customer satisfaction feedback process.
4. Build stronger relationships between the student and the college.
5. Investigate the impact of using instructors for instruction only; leaving recruiting, billing, registration, financial aid, and other activities to specialists.
6. Consolidate databases and develop a stronger information system to support the management programs.
7. Investigate the impact of using a pass/no pass grading system for management programs in all colleges.
8. Investigate the impact of making this a non-credit based program.
9. Explore the impact of making this a stand-alone, centrally managed program.

Project Background

Project Purpose & Overview

The primary purpose of this project is to improve the satisfaction of farm and small business management students throughout the state. To accomplish this goal, the project has been divided into the following four phases:

| Phase | Name | Description and Output |
|-------|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I | Data Gathering | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the current situation at Northland and at other institutions. • Compile findings and recommendations into a report. • OUTPUT: Decision on the recommendations. |
| II | Design | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assign resources to design and develop solutions for each of the approved recommendations. • Prepare written description and presentation for all solutions. • Evaluate solutions. • OUTPUT: Decision on which solutions to implement. |
| III | Implementation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an implementation plan. • Implement new processes. • Implement quality measures. • Work through process glitches. • OUTPUT: Stable processes. |
| IV | Follow-up | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review measurements on periodic basis. • Make improvements as required. |

Phase One Activities

The following is a summary of the work that was completed during Phase One.

- Schedule meetings at Northland and with regional deans.
- Review background information about the management programs.
- Develop telephone client satisfaction assessment survey.
- Develop letter for farm and small business management students.
- Develop letter for college presidents.
- Visit Northland Community and Technical College.
- Send out letter to presidents, copies to deans and John Murray.
- Select survey sample.
- Send out client satisfaction assessment survey request letters to representative farm and small business management students.
- Meet with regional deans and John Murray, State Director of Management Programs.
- Conduct approximately 60 client satisfaction assessment surveys by telephone.
- Speak with a sample of administrative staff from management program colleges.
- Analyze client satisfaction assessment survey data.
- Develop findings and recommendations report.
- Present findings and recommendations to appropriate stakeholders.
- Make decision on next steps.

Findings

Management Programs Overview

MnSCU has approximately 6000 students enrolled in its Farm and Small Business Management Programs. These students are served by approximately 150 instructors located in over 100 sites across the state. The program is administered by six regional deans and a state director. Most of the deans and instructors are employees of one of the following six colleges:

- Central Lakes College
- Minnesota West Community and Technical College
- Northland Community and Technical College
- Ridgewater College
- Riverland Community College
- South Central Technical College

Three additional colleges also provide a limited amount of management program instruction. They have informal ties to the regional deans of the other six colleges. These include:

- Alexandria Technical College
- Lake Superior College
- Saint Cloud Technical College

The state management program director is an employee of Rochester Community College, a result of the outplacement of state functions implemented by Chancellor Judith Eaton. Previously the management program director was a MnSCU central office employee. He does not have formal authority to direct the activities of the regional deans.

The following mission statements summarize the purpose of these programs:

| Farm Business Management (FBM) | Small Business Management (SBM) |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The Farm Business Management education program provides student focused education to assist students in meeting their family and farm business goals. | The mission of the Small Business Management Program is to improve the management skills of the present and potential entrepreneurs through individualized and classroom instruction. |

In general the programs emphasize three things:

1. Business and personal goals
2. System records and analysis
3. Individualized education plans

The programs value the following:

- Student centeredness
- Access
- Focus
- Accountability
- Quality

The programs have the following five goals:

1. Exceed student expectations.
2. Expand and improve staff empowerment for educational effectiveness.
3. Focus and strengthen relationships and build partnerships.
4. Improve effective use of resources.
5. Focus and strengthen educational resources to meet change.

Although the diploma program outcomes vary slightly between SBM and FBM programs, the following is a summary that should capture the essence of those outcomes.

The student will be able to...

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the functions of management.
2. Establish goals.
3. Exhibit record keeping skills.
4. Analyze and interpret records.
5. Apply economic principles.
6. Use data to improve organization and efficiency.
7. Appreciate the long term effects of current and future decisions.
8. Understand fundamentals of human resource management.
9. Tie business to other organizations and influencing systems. See the big picture.

Major Findings

In phase 1 of this project, the goal was to discover potential improvement opportunities within the small and farm business management programs. After meeting with and interviewing instructors, program administrators, college support staff, and students; I offer the following major findings.

1. The operating policies associated with credit-based instruction inhibit the effective delivery of small and farm business management instruction.
2. Instructors typically do what makes sense from the student's perspective. As a result, there may not be consistent compliance with all the college's policies. Although this may not negatively impact student satisfaction, it does put MnSCU at risk in the areas of academic and financial accountability.
3. Policies and procedures vary from college to college. Instruction varies from instructor to instructor. This has resulted in inconsistent program quality across MnSCU.

Northland Visit

On September 28 and 29, I interviewed members of Northland College's staff at the college's facility. I met with the following people:

- Becky Holthusen, Director of Human Resources
- Dennis Bendickson, Registrar
- Kelsy Blowers, Financial Aid Director
- Donna Quam, Acting Business Office Manager and other members of business office staff
- Tom Risdal, Regional Dean of Management Programs (Former)
- Orley Gunderson, President

I also interviewed five current and former management program students who had recently voiced a complaint to the college. I was scheduled to meet with a group of management program instructors; however, the instructors were unavailable for that meeting. I followed up with phone calls to several instructors and was able to talk with three of them. Two instructors provided written input.

The purpose of my visit to the college was to gain a better understanding of the problems the college has experienced in its management programs so that I could then make recommendations for improving the programs. Based on my interviews, it would appear that there has been a significant number of customer complaints over the past 4-5 months. There also appears to be a fair amount of discord between support staff and management program instructors. The following is my understanding of the major events that have occurred since these problems were identified.

| Time Frame | Event |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| March '97 | Student invoices began going directly to students. Prior to that the instructors delivered invoices to students. |
| April - May '97 | Northland began receiving many complaints from students, disputing invoices. |
| June '97 | Northland conducted an internal investigation of the problems. |
| July '97 | Tom Risdal was terminated from his position as Regional Dean for Management Programs. Bob Bollesen was assigned the responsibility of acting dean. |
| July '97 | At the request of Orley Gunderson, John Murray visited Northland to provide assistance. |
| July - August '97 | College administrators held meetings with management program instructors. The purpose of these meetings was to implement several process changes meant to correct the problems. |
| August '97 | I conducted an on-site visit. |
| September '97 | Fall quarter enrollment was down over 30% from the same period last year. |

Based on my discussions with staff at Northland, I offer the following observations:

- The instructors have always been the primary college contact for the management program students.
- Based on the way they are paid, instructors have a strong interest in making sure students stay registered for the program.
- Lower enrollment may create increased recruiting pressure. This might lead to even more problems if students who don't really want to be in the program are pressured to enroll.
- The switching of accounting systems resulted in some incorrect bills.
- Account receivables had increased significantly. Students were refusing to pay the bill because they said they did not receive the service.
- Students have been sent a letter asking them to choose one of three possible resolutions to the outstanding balances: 1) Pay the bill, 2) Negotiate partial payment. 3) Cancel grades and outstanding balance.
- Some students received grades for courses they claimed they never took.
- Most students received "A's."
- Some students did not know they were taking courses from Northland College.
- The change associated with the merging colleges and the integration of the management programs has been hard on Northland's staff and on the students.
- The management programs do not seem to fit the normal processes.
- The instruction is often provided to multiple family members (i.e., other employees of the business), even though only one person might be the registered student.
- The support staff feels like it doesn't have enough resources to make process exceptions. Staff members think the management programs must fit the established processes.
- The support staff feels like it has been "beaten up" by instructors in the past. The relationships appear to be improving.

- Management instructors have had to handle an unusually diverse range of responsibilities in the past. This has included recruiting and instructing students, along with being involved with registration, billing, financial aid, and collections.
- Students like to stay in the program to have access to on-going help. Some repeat classes many times.
- Some farmers have been required to take courses as a condition for securing a Farm Service Agency (FSA) loan.
- Some farmers wanted to register and pay for a year in advance. This proved to be unworkable for the college's business office.
- Instructors want the program to be education rather than service oriented.

Northland College has implemented changes to address the problems. Since most of the changes had been in effect for less than one month, I was unable to assess whether these changes were being implemented successfully. It seems that Northland's administrators directed the instructors to comply with these changes; however, they did not provide much assistance in helping the instructors figure out how to comply. As a result, I believe it will be very difficult for the instructors to adhere to the new policies and procedures. The following is a list of the changes:

- Instruction must be provided to the student who has registered for the course. In the past, other members of the farm or small business may have received the instruction.
- The course syllabus must be provided to the student.
- The course objectives must be delivered. Sometimes the instruction has strayed from the course objectives in order to address current student needs.
- Instruction must be provided in the quarter in which the student is registered. This hasn't always been the case in the past.
- Registration will only be accepted on a quarterly basis.
- Instructors are not to "push" students who have received an FSA loan into the program. Apparently some instructors have been proactive in registering prospective students for the program.
- A confirmation letter of registration will be sent to all students.
- All registrations must be made by the 5th day of the quarter with the only exception being students new to the program. They can register up to the middle of the quarter.
- Regular billing statements will be sent on a monthly basis. Statements had not been going out on a regular basis in the past.

Regional Dean Meeting

On September 4, 1997, I met with the state director for management programs and five regional management education deans. We worked to address three questions during the meeting:

1. What would the program look like if it was to fulfill its vision of being the "provider of choice?"
2. What problems exist within the program?
3. What global solutions might we develop?

Vision

Several years ago, the regional management deans developed vision statements for the FBM and SBM programs. The following is what they developed.

| SBM | FBM |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The Minnesota Small Business Management Programs will be the source Minnesotans turn to for business management education. | MnSCU will be the first place Minnesotans turn to for Farm Business Management Education. |

We used the vision statement as the basis for our day's work. We brainstormed the characteristics of management programs that would best fulfill the vision statements. The group determined the following to be the most important characteristics:

- Student centered.
- Education oriented.
- Hassle-free processes. Processes don't get in the way of education.
- Good image.
- Confidentiality.
- Able to provide information that is neutral. For example, the college cannot be perceived as promoting one fertilizer supplier over another.
- Can back up education with historical data.

Other characteristics include:

- Able to fulfill FSA requirements.
- Be accessible by being in many small towns.
- Able to help customer achieve higher levels of profitability.
- Able to provide students with options; helping them decide, not deciding for them.
- Instructors viewed as experts.
- Instructors have access to other experts to complement their skills.
- Strong relationships with other agricultural and small business agencies.
- Other agricultural and small business agencies understand MnSCU's value and will refer students.
- Viewed as a "forward thinking" program.
- Program serves students with similar situations so that ideas can be shared between students.
- Instructors must have right personality.
- Program timeline must match student's timelines.

Problems

The group addressed problems at a process level. The following is a summary of the main problems the group sees associated with each process.

Registration

- Doesn't match the student's calendar.
- The information system doesn't provide the information that is needed.
- Doesn't flex to handle late registrations.
- Inconsistent course numbers from college to college.
- Students often want to register for the whole year, but aren't allowed to do so.
- Data are not entered in same place from college to college (Sometimes it's entered in the register's office, in other colleges the management programs do their own data entry.)
- Instruction time period doesn't always match registration time period.

Billing

- Billing processes and late fee policies vary from college to college.
- Students often want the instructor to take payment since the instructor is on the business site. In some cases colleges don't want instructor doing this.
- Students often won't pay the bill until they've seen and discussed it with the instructor.
- Students sometime will not pay because they are in financial trouble. They also don't always understand the bill or claim they have not received service.

Financial Aid

- Instructor is involved in the process, but doesn't have access to information due to Data Privacy Act.

- Students often miss deadlines because they don't understand the forms, or they are not timely in dealing with their mail.
- Colleges have different interpretations of whether or not students can qualify for financial aid if they take a course on a pass/fail grade basis.
- The level of financial aid support varies significantly by college and even geographically within a college's region. Best guess is that 10 - 30% of students receive some financial aid.

Instruction

- The actual instruction does not always match the registered course or the registered student.
- Attendance at group meetings is poor.
- Students sometimes cancel visits with little notice. This is sometimes treated as a "completed visit."
- Students often want to stay in the program after graduation; however, there is no mechanism for delivering post-graduate education.
- Distance between students makes it difficult to find central meeting locations.

Course Evaluation

- Students are not interested in grades (particularly letter grades), but yet in the case of three colleges they are assigned letter grades.
- Very few students are interested in working towards a diploma, but yet the program is structured like a degree program.
- Instruction period and evaluation period do not always match.
- Grades are not always given based on a student performance in a specific course. Rather they might be assigned based on general level of performance across several courses that are being taken simultaneously.
- Evaluation for this type of instruction is very difficult.

Miscellaneous

- Since rent often isn't free for management programs, the budgets for these programs are even tighter than those for the rest of the college.
- Students are being asked to pay fees for services they will never use (e.g., student life and technology fees).

Solutions

The group arrived at several global solutions that would address many of the current problems.

- Use a pass/fail grading system at all colleges. Currently it's used in three colleges.
- Centralize program control in the system office, and let it operate under its own budget.
- Change timelines to better match student's timelines for registration and billing.
- Work to elevate program's importance within each college's support processes, so that problems receive the attention they require.
- Standardize the curriculum statewide.
- Eliminate student fees that do not benefit management students.
- Provide an information system that allows administrators to better manage the program.
- Work towards a more student-centered program.

Client Surveys

During the second and third weeks of September I conducted a telephone survey with a random sample of SBM and FBM students.

A total of 72 students (12 from each of the six participating colleges) received letters asking them to participate in a phone survey. The goal was to contact up to eight FBM and four SBM students from each college. Of the 72 students that received letters, 57 of them participated in the survey. Of the 15 that didn't participate, there were seven disconnected or wrong numbers, three that wouldn't or couldn't participate, and six that I failed to reach after four attempts. One person called me to inquire as to why I never called. The wrong telephone number was in the student's record.

The purpose of this survey was to determine whether SBM and FBM programs throughout the state were experiencing problems similar to those found at Northland college. It's hard to compare the extent of the problem from college to college since this wasn't a statistically accurate survey; however, it does appear that many of the colleges are experiencing similar problems. Below is my summary of the problems I uncovered during the survey process:

- There were a total of eight students who were no longer in the program. When this is combined with the seven wrong/disconnected numbers, it indicates a record keeping problem. This is particularly ironic since many students said they joined the program to learn better record keeping.
- There were at least seven instances where there wasn't a good match between the registered and actual student. In a couple cases, the registered student was receiving instruction along with other unregistered family or business members. In at least four of those cases, the registered student wasn't actively receiving instruction. Somebody else was receiving the instruction.
- The biggest area of complaint was centered around billing and "paperwork" issues. Some students received bills after they already paid or dropped out from the program. In many of these cases, it seems as if the student had a hard time resolving the problem through the school directly. Typically, the instructor has intervened on the student's behalf.
- Many students don't appear to have a clear idea about what they should expect from the program. Some don't even know they are in the program. The following is an extreme example I encountered. One farmer didn't know why I was calling him because he took a class many years ago, but hasn't been in the program since. He did say someone from the college does visit his farm once in awhile for a fee and helps him with some analysis work. He's been confused as to why he occasionally received credit reports from the school. Even if he was receiving credits for these farm visits, he felt like they weren't going to do him any good since he already has his degree.
- Some students expressed a concern with all the change. Some changes that have affected students are the transfer of these management programs from local high schools to the colleges. Some have been concerned by too many changes in instructors.
- Interestingly, the question students often had the hardest time with was the one that asked them when they joined the program. For many, they have been in the program a long time. Much longer than the expected completion lengths of three years for SBM and six years for FBM.

It should be noted, that in general the majority of the customers are satisfied with the program. 10 - 20% of the people I talked with were very happy with the program. Their enthusiasm for the program was such that their comments should be solicited for use in marketing materials. In some cases I told the student that his/her school should use their testimonial. In these instances, the students said they'd be willing to provide a testimonial.

There were several things that consistently came through as positives about this program. They include the following:

- Record keeping.
- Data analysis.
- Tax planning.
- Computer instruction.
- Comparison information.
- Responsiveness to questions and problems.
- Coaching and encouragement.

Students also made suggestions about how to improve the program. No clear themes emerged. There does seem to be a call for finding a way to address unique needs. Examples include information about safety and OSHA compliance and managing a unionized workforce.

From the comments of participants, my perception is that they think of their instructors as advisors rather than teachers. In some instances, interaction is driven by the student and not the instructor. In other words, when the student needs help, they call the instructor, and usually receive the help they need.

Staff Surveys

I talked with several people in the financial aid, registration, and business offices at the various schools. I had three questions for them.

1. Are FBM and SBM students treated any differently than traditional day students?
2. What problems (if any) do you see associated with these programs?
3. What ideas (if any) do you have for improving these programs?

In general this is what I discovered.

- In some schools these offices have minimal involvement in SBM and FBM programs because those programs handle their own administrative activities.
- The schools have all expressed a strong desire for these programs to fit the standard processes.
- In most cases, the standardization effort is fairly recent. There has been some resistance and strife as a result of the recent efforts to make the SBM and FBM programs comply with standard policies and procedures.
- Some relatively minor exceptions have been made for the SBM and FBM programs.

Recommendations

Primary Recommendations

In general it seems that students are happy with the service they are receiving; however, a lack of consistent execution throughout the state is generating problems that could impact student satisfaction and call into question the integrity of MnSCU. With this in mind, most of my recommendations focus on building a solid quality system based on consistent processes, regular measurement, and effective customer interaction. The following are my recommendations:

| Recommendation | Rationale |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Identify, document, standardize, and improve all core processes, including instruction. | In its current state, the program as a whole will be difficult to improve because of the wide variation in how things are done. There are differences between colleges and differences between instructors within the college. Currently the program has a state director; however, all formal control rests with the local college. If everyone agrees to standardize, specific problems can be addressed once on a state-wide basis, rather than six different times on a local basis. |
| 2. Develop and implement a set of quality measures. The measurement system should include minimum standards and goals. | The best way to prevent major process problems is by addressing problems before they become too large. This can be accomplished by having a good set of measurements that tell you how well the system is working. In addition to simply measuring "what is," it is important to let all the stakeholders know "what should be" by incorporating a set of standards and goals. |
| 3. Develop and implement a state-wide customer satisfaction feedback process. | One key component of any quality measurement system is customer satisfaction data. There is some measurement already occurring within these programs. Formalizing a process for collecting this information on a statewide basis could serve as fuel for an on-going improvement initiative. |
| 4. Build stronger relationships between the student and the college. | There has been a tremendous amount of change associated with these programs in the past few years. This has affected the program staff but it has also impacted the students. Students do not have a clear understanding of how being associated with a college benefits them. In some cases, the student appears to resent the tie to the college. They often have a strong relationship with the instructor, but not with the college. Instructors may be hindering the development of this relationship by creating a "me and you against the college" attitude. I suspect this occurs especially when the college has made an administrative error. For example, if a student complains about an incorrect bill to the instructor, in some cases the instructor tells the student that the business office doesn't really know what it is doing. He or she offers to take up the "battle" with the business office to resolve the problem. This behavior can have a |

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| | severe impact on the student's perception of the college. |
| 5. Investigate the impact of using instructors for instruction only; leaving recruiting, billing, registration, financial aid, and other activities to specialists. | Currently instructors are being asked to take on a tremendous amount of responsibility. They are probably being required to do things that don't match their skill sets (i.e. recruiting new students). This problem is compounded by the fact that an instructor's contract is tied to the number of paid credits he/she can generate per quarter. |
| 6. Consolidate databases and develop a stronger information system to support the management programs. | Consolidating information systems should give the program more clout in creating a system that will support its requirements. This system can be used to support program measurement, marketing, and other operational activities. |
| 7. Investigate impact of implementing a pass/no pass grading system in all colleges. | One of the major problems associated with this program is assigning grades. The program's application-based focus makes evaluation particularly challenging. Most students do not care whether or not they receive letter grades. Some schools are using a pass/no pass grading system, while others are using an A-F grading system. One reason for this difference is different interpretations of financial aid requirements. Since all schools are tapping into the same pool of financial aid funds, it seems that they could all be grading in the same way. |
| 8. Investigate the impact of making this a non-credit based program. | Receiving credit doesn't appear to be important to students. The rules associated with credit-based instruction don't appear to fit management students very well. The program hasn't always been run for credit. It seems that it has been shifted to credits to increase funding for colleges. A secondary benefit is the financial aid that students can receive. Perhaps there is another way of addressing the funding and financial aid concerns without having the programs be credit-based. |
| 9. Explore the impact of making this a stand-alone, centrally managed program. | Standardization has its greatest chance for success if the program is controlled centrally. Currently there is enough variation in college policies that standardizing processes across the state would be very difficult. |

Secondary Recommendations

There are several other recommendations that I think could make a positive impact on the management programs. These include the following:

- Work on creating more customer friendly forms, especially billing statements.
- Work on issues surrounding billing accuracy.
- Create and use standardized marketing materials that describe the program.
- Create and use a standardized program newsletter.
- Begin thinking of program participants as customers rather than students.
- Provide instructors with customer service training.
- If programs remain tied to colleges, provide problem solving training to program administrators and support staff. Help the two groups better resolve disputes by working together.

- Create a standardized process for communicating information to instructors and soliciting instructor ideas.
- Develop a formal process for the management deans to identify and resolve problems that are having a state-wide impact.

Next Steps

In order to keep the improvement process moving in the right direction, I offer the following recommendations for next steps.

1. Distribute this report to key program stakeholders, including management program deans and directors as well as college presidents who have management programs within their colleges.
2. Evaluate the recommendations and decide which if any you would like to pursue.
3. Decide whether to pursue improvement efforts locally or globally (I strongly recommend pursuing global solutions).
4. Identify people who can work on further developing the recommendations. The regional management deans should play a heavy role in the development process. College support staff specialists should also be involved.

Customer Letter

September 4, 1997

Dear {First Name},

We need your help. We would like to contact you by phone and ask about your experience with the farm and small business management program you are enrolled in at your local state college.

Minnesota State Colleges and Universities has begun work on improving the farm and small business management program. The first step is better understanding where we stand in the eyes of our customers. We'd like to know what is and what isn't working from your perspective.

We are only contacting a small sample of the 6000+ people that are enrolled in these programs. This means that in order to get information that reflects everyone's opinion, it is important that you participate if you are called.

Tom LaForce will be making the calls for us during mid-September. The calls will take less than 15 minutes. He will be asking for your opinions about the registration process, financial aid, the quality of instruction, the billing process, and other items that may impact your level of satisfaction. If Tom calls and catches you at a bad time, he will be happy to arrange a time that better fits your schedule.

We value your opinion and hope you will take the time to share your feedback with us. A few minutes on the phone will make a tremendous difference in our ability to meet your needs in the future.

If you have questions or would like to contribute your ideas to this process, please contact Tom directly at (612) 920-3313. If at any time you'd like to share your thoughts with me, please don't hesitate to call at (612) 296-8113.

Thank you for your help with this project.

Sincerely,

Deena Allen
Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs

cc: Chancellor Morrie Anderson

Regional Dean Meeting Agenda

Welcome (10 minutes)

- Purpose of the meeting: Identify improvement opportunities.
- Agenda
- Ground rules

Vision Definition (40 minutes)

- Provider of choice for farm and small business education.
- Brainstorm: What are the characteristics of a program that has a shot at vision?
- Summarize into categories.

Registration (15 minutes)

- What are the problems?
- Ideas for solutions?

Financial Aid (15 minutes)

- What are the problems?
- Ideas for solutions?

Classroom Instruction (20 minutes)

- What are the problems?
- Ideas for solutions?

Personalized Instruction (20 minutes)

- What are the problems?
- Ideas for solutions?

Course Evaluation (15 minutes)

- What are the problems?
- Ideas for solutions?

Billing Process (15 minutes)

- What are the problems?
- Ideas for solutions?

Other areas of the program (30 minutes)

- What are the problems?
- Ideas for solutions?

Next Steps (15 minutes)

Wrap up (5 minutes)

Survey Script

"Hi {NAME}. My name is Tom LaForce and I am calling from the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities. Deena Allen, who works in the college system's central office, sent you a letter that asked you to participate in a short telephone survey. Did you receive it?"

{IF YES} "Great! Would you be willing to spend a few minutes on the phone with me now?"

{IF NO} "It's probably still in route. We are working on improving the quality of the farm and small business management programs throughout the state. I understand that you've been enrolled in this program. Would you be willing to answer a few questions about your experience? It will take less than 15 minutes."

{IF REFUSE} "Is there a better time I should call?"

"First I would like to get some background information" {QUESTIONS 1-5}

"Thanks for providing me with that background. Now I would like to know what you think about a couple specific aspects of your program. For each, I'll ask you to give it a letter grade:

- A: Exceptionally good performance.
- B: Doing slightly better than I had hoped.
- C: Meeting my expectations adequately.
- D: Doing slightly worse than I had hoped.
- F: Exceptionally poor performance.

Do you have any questions?" {QUESTIONS 6-9}

Work through the list.

{IF "A"} "Glad to hear the college is doing so well. Is there anything else they could do in this area to make it even better for you?"

{IF "B" or "C"} "What would you change or improve to make it even better? Are there things we should not touch?"

{IF "D" or "F"} "I'm sorry to hear things are not going as well as you hoped. What do you see as the specific problems? Any ideas for making it better?"

"That's all the questions I have. Do you have any questions for me? Thank you for your time and have a great (EVENING/DAY)."

Survey Questions

| | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|-----|
| Name: _____ | SBM | FBM |
| School: _____ | Date: _____ | |
| 1. When did you enter the program? _____ | | |
| 2. What did you expect to get from the program? | | |
| 3. To what extent has the program satisfied your expectations? | | |
| 4. What have you liked best about the program? | | |
| 5. What have you liked least about the program? | | |
| What grade would you assign to the following aspects of the program? | | |
| 6. Program Content "What you were taught in the program" | Grade: _____ | |
| 7. Program Delivery "How you were taught in the program" | Grade: _____ | |
| 8. Program Administration "Registration, Billing, Financial Aid" | Grade: _____ | |
| 9. Overall College Performance | Grade: _____ | |
| 10. What else should we know that could help us improve quality of service to you? | | |