

Changes in General Education and Their Benefit to Business Education

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Abstract

This study explores the general education curricula of schools accredited by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International (AACSB) and those without such accreditation during both the 1996/1997 and 2012/2013 academic years. In the sample business programs, differences are shown to exist between AACSB and non-AACSB universities as well as differences between curricula in the two time periods. Generally speaking, by the later time period, a shift can be seen toward more of an emphasis on soft skills within the general education curricula. More programs included requirements in humanities, oral communication, ethics, and diversity. A significant increase was also seen in international/global requirements. AACSB Standards revised in 2003 stressed specific general knowledge and skill areas (GKSAs). Results suggest that AACSB accredited universities were more likely to enhance the general education programs with the GKSAs implemented in the AACSB standards than non-AACSB accredited universities by the 2012/2013 academic year.

Keywords: general education, business education, accreditation, AACSB, soft skills

1. Introduction

The typical degree program at an United States college or university consists of a series of courses that constitute general education, major requirements, and electives. The portion of the degree that constitutes the general education is usually required of all students at the university regardless of major. The courses constituting the major are common for all students getting a particular degree, but vary with each degree. Electives are courses that each student is free to choose. The general education experience is different at each college or university. However, the aim of general education at each college or university is similar. The general education portion of the students' degree is to provide a common experience for all students at the university, exposing students to a coherent group of courses that defines the information that college or university considers to be what all educated individuals should be familiar with. This portion of a student's education ensures a broad education including the liberal arts and sciences (Boning, 2007).

More specifically, Zayed (2012) provides a definition of general education as follows:

A general education trains one to attack problems logically, to evaluate evidence intelligently, to meet unusual situations with poise, to mingle with diverse social groups harmoniously, and gives a sufficient acquaintance with environmental factors both social and physical to enable one to be reasonably intelligent concerning topics of conversation common to an educated person. (pp. 150)

The Association of American Colleges and Universities provides another definition of general education:

That part of a liberal education curriculum that is shared by all students. It provides broad exposure to multiple disciplines and forms the basis for developing essential intellectual, civic, and practical capacities. General education can take many forms, and increasingly includes introductory, advanced, and integrative forms of learning.

While these definitions possess differences, both definitions stress that general education is broad and provides intellectual skills that help the student become a more thoughtful citizen.

Scott (2014) does not define general education but provides elements that he believes are key to general education. These elements are that any liberal/general education should be liberating, emphasize questions more than answers, focus on the meaning of a global perspective, and make connections to extra-curricular experiences and engaged citizenship. Furman (2013) notes three resulting abilities that general education should provide students. These are the ability to think critically, express views with clarity, and grapple with ideas, views, approaches, and perspectives that are different from one's own. These ideas once again stress the importance of general education in providing students with both breadth of understanding and improved intellectual capacities. Boning (2007) notes that a coherent general education program is one where students make connections and integrate knowledge.

The above discussion notes that general education should be useful to all students in developing them as well-educated citizens. However, often times faculty hear students comment about not getting anything out of their general education experience that is useful to them. Students tend to focus on the courses that they believe will most directly apply to their future career. Faculty also expresses similar concerns when they make comments concerning the number of credits general education requires and the few credits available for major courses. These comments are probably most commonly made by students and faculty in the more vocational disciplines, such as business (Boning, 2007).

However, many of the areas of knowledge, skills and abilities that the general education program strives to instill in students are desired qualities in any employee. Concepts like clear communication, critical thinking, and global awareness are skills that all business professionals need to possess. Therefore, a well-developed general education program at a college or university is relevant even to students in vocational majors such as business. Johnson, Ratchiff, and Gaff (2004) note that approximately 80% of the universities responding to their survey were making changes to general education programs during the 2000s with the goal of making the general education programs more coherent.

The purpose of this study is to examine actual changes in general education programs between the 1996/1997 academic year calendar and the 2012/2013 academic year calendar. The changes documented will then be considered in terms of knowledge, skills, and abilities that are deemed important for business students, using The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International (AACSB) accreditation standards as a focus for what curriculum outcomes are relevant for business students to possess. If general education programs focus on the skills and abilities that business students should possess, then it must be concluded that general education is useful for business students, not just a box to check off on the graduation audit. Likewise, if the changes in general education programs are in alignment with changes in AACSB curriculum standards, then general education is becoming more relevant for and useful to business programs.

The next section of the paper will provide a historical background on the changes in general education. This will be followed by a section describing the methodology used in this study to examine changes in general education. The results of this analysis on changes will then be presented in terms of course requirement changes and general education focus and goal changes. These general components of general education and the changes in general education will be examined in terms of business curriculum outcome requirements. Conclusions will then be drawn regarding common changes in general education requirements and goals and the benefit that these changes may have for business education.

2. Development and change in general education in the United States

The earliest colleges and universities in the United States were modeled after those of Europe (Brint, Proctor, Murphy, Turk-Bicakci, & Hanneman, 2009). This European model focused on the classical liberal arts. A classical education focused on the seven liberal arts. These seven classical liberal arts were broken into two categories: the Trivium and the Quadrivium. The Trivium consisted of the literary arts of grammar (the mechanics of language), logic (the mechanics of thought and analysis), and rhetoric (the use of language to instruct and persuade). The Quadrivium consisted of the mathematical arts of arithmetic (numbers), geometry (numbers in space), music (numbers in time), and astronomy (numbers in space and time) (van der Wende, 2013). During the 1800s, a shift away from classical education, which focused on preparing leaders, to a more practical education,

which focused more on the advancement of knowledge occurred, leading the way to the modern research institutions of higher learning we know today (Boning, 2007).

Two noteworthy changes in college education in the United States during the 1800s are the passage of the Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862 and the movement of Harvard to an elective system (Boning, 2007). The Morrill Land-Grant Act established funds in each state for the establishment of at least one college that would teach agricultural and mechanical arts to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes. The resulting land-grant institutions developed curricula focusing on more vocational studies. The existence of such universities led to a broadening of the population that attended college. A higher education was no longer that of the wealthy white male, but also for women, the working class, and minorities (Cross, 1999).

Charles Eliot became president of Harvard in 1869. He strongly advocated the elective system, giving students more choice in their education. Other institutions followed Harvard's lead. As a result of the elective system, students were able to tailor their studies to their needs. Universities changed with the development of departments and more emphasis on research. Because of freedom of choice, the elective system was more appealing to a broader range of students. The elective system along with the Morrill Act increased the upward mobility of citizens within the United States (Boning, 2007). The disadvantage of the elective system was lack of a coherent education (Miller, 1988).

In the early 1900s, problems with the elective system were obvious and movements to restrict the numbers of electives started to occur at the University of Chicago and Yale University (Levine, 2000; Miller, 1988). In an attempt to increase the coherence of education, many colleges and universities developed a distribution structure where students had to take certain types of courses in fields of study, with most institutions requiring classes in humanities, sciences, social sciences, mathematics, and fine art (Cohen, 1988). These distribution requirements were a means of providing a common, coherent education to all students (Boning, 2007). The core distribution system of general education had thus been developed in United States higher education institutions by the 1920-1930s (Brint et al., 2009).

Another major change in general education occurred in the 1940s. In 1945, Harvard University published a report, *General Education in a Free Society*, which promoted a shared, coherent, and purposeful general education for every student. The report recommended that general education should provide a unifying purpose and idea and make up one-third of the undergraduate education. The concept of a common core curriculum was suggested (Boning, 2007). In response to this report, many institutions of higher education developed coherent general education programs that focused on citizenship and other social purposes (Zayed, 2012).

The term general education became associated with distribution requirements that had as their focus increasing the breadth of the student's education in the 1940s and 1950s (Brint et al., 2009). During this time, the familiar curriculum organization of majors, distribution requirements, and electives became popular (Rudolph, 1977).

Social changes in the United States during the 1960s brought about the next wave of general education reform. Students demanded more rights in their education. Structured general education restricted student individualism. General education was viewed as irrelevant to those students seeking a primarily vocational education. Also, student demographics were changing. The number of non-traditional students was increasing. This older demographic found general education to not be pertinent to their education. As a result of these changes in the student body, general education was reduced at three quarters of the universities during the late 60s to early 70s. Electives increased to roughly 50 percent of degree requirements. General education became an incoherent set of courses (Boning, 2007). General education tended to focus on cultures and ethics of primarily western civilization in the 1960s. Global aspects were added in the late 1970s to early 1980s (Brint et al., 2009).

The current wave of change in general education dates from the Carnegie Foundation report *Missions of the College Curriculum*, issued in 1977. This report blamed the lack of a common student experience for the devaluation of the baccalaureate degree (Boning, 2007). Many other reports on the state of undergraduate education and general education were published during the 80s and 90s. These reports noted that students knew too little about science, math, history, and culture and lacked the abilities to think and communicate effectively. The consensus was the need for a more coherent general education experience (Ratcliff, 1997).

Changes to general education started to become very common in the late 1980s through the 2000s. The number of credit hours devoted to general education in degrees increased by 5 on average and the number of prescribed courses within general education increased from 60% of the program to 69% (Brint et al., 2009). These changes once again increased the coherence of general education.

The current trend in general education reform during the 2000s is for the college or university to clearly articulate the philosophy of its general education program. These programs place greater emphasis on the personal, intellectual, and social abilities of students (Boning, 2007). Some universities have developed general education into one or more thematic bundles so that students better understand what the outcome of the general education program should be (Brint et al., 2009).

The reasons for a renewed focus on general education are many and varied. The commonly noted reasons are increased accountability of the university for the performance of students, shift in funding models and governing board assessments that focus on competencies of students, increased emphasis on assurance of learning by accreditation bodies, and support from philanthropic and non-profit groups to elevate awareness of diversification and representation of minority and non-western cultures (Brint et al., 2009). Colleges and universities are also encouraged to seek advice of outside constituent groups in the development of curriculum. Scott (2014) noted that based on such outreach, the skills needed from college graduates are the ability to speak and write clearly, listen carefully, analyze questions, propose approaches to find solutions to and solve problems, work in teams, tolerate ambiguity, and understand what is presentable dress and demeanor.

While these skills can and should be practiced in major courses, the student's introduction to these skills and initial development of these skills should take place in a well-developed general education program. Current reforms have resulted in the 21st century general education model consisting of a breadth of knowledge in science, culture, and society, awareness of social responsibility, and strong and transferable skills such as critical thinking, analysis, problem solving, and communications. This basic general education can then be utilized by the student in developing a depth of knowledge in a particular discipline (van der Wende, 2013).

Boning (2007), Brint et al. (2009), and Ratcliff (1997) have all documented a shift in the focus and content of general education. This shift has involved a movement to a more coherent model that focuses on the skills and abilities needed of a 21st century citizen. Based on a survey of chief academic officers in 2008/2009, Hart Research Associates (2009) noted that 78% of universities have a common set of learning outcomes for undergraduate students, delivered primarily through general education. This survey also determined that the distribution system of general education is still in use by 80% of institutions of higher education. However, it is used alone in only 15% of institutions. Most institutions use the distribution system along with a set of common experiences, thematic requirements, or common additional requirements. In the survey, 89% of respondents indicated that the general education programs at their institutions were being assessed or undergoing modification. Thus, general education programs are being evaluated and revised to try to meet the needs of current students.

3. AACSB Standards

AACSB is considered the leading accreditation for business programs in the world. Less than 5% of the world's business programs have received AACSB accreditation. Part of the accreditation process is a review of a university's curricula. Accrediting bodies set curricular standards to ensure that accredited institutions will provide students with the learning material that is most relevant to their field of study. A student graduating from an accredited institution should be prepared to become an effective leader in his/her chosen career. AACSB-accredited business programs teach students the knowledge and skills desired by businesses (AACSB website).

The 1991 AACSB curriculum standards for undergraduate programs stated:

The curriculum should include foundation knowledge for business in the following areas:

- accounting,
- behavioral science,
- economics, and
- mathematics and statistics. (Grossman, 2003)

These curriculum standards do not emphasize skills that are developed in general education courses.

The AACSB standards were revised in 2003. The curriculum standard is number 15 and it describes in more detail the learning experiences that business students should have as well as the management-specific knowledge that students should develop. The section of this standard that stresses the general knowledge and skills areas (GKSAs) states:

The standard requires use of a systematic process for curriculum management but does not require any specific courses in the curriculum. Normally, the curriculum management process will result in an undergraduate degree program that includes learning experiences in such general knowledge and skill areas as:

- Communication abilities
- Ethical understanding and reasoning abilities
- Analytic skills
- Use of information technology
- Dynamics of the global economy
- Multicultural and diversity understanding
- Reflective thinking skills. (AACSB 2003 Standards)

The 2003 standards include GKSAs which could be part of a university's general education program. These GKSAs have gained in importance over time as employers have seen that students too focused on business skills lacked the softer skills needed of all employees. In response to these concerns of the business community, these skills were added to the standards.

4. Methodology

To examine specific changes in general education requirements between the mid-1990s and today, actual college catalogs were reviewed. Both Johnson, Ratcliff, and Gaff (2004) and the Hart Research Associates (2009) studies utilized data reported by chief academic officers. This data is self-reported and as such may be biased to show the university making more changes than are actually occurring to stack up well with peer institutions. By examining actual catalogs, this study will report on changes that are actually adopted and required by students not just thought about.

Actual paper copies of catalogs were obtained from 50 institutions during the 1996/97 academic calendar year. The institutions were selected from a random sample of colleges and universities with business programs. For these same 50 institutions, copies of the catalog were accessed online for the 2012/13 academic year. All courses listed as required for "general education" or "graduation requirements" were collected. As discussed above, these courses were often listed in the form of a distribution list. When actual courses were listed, the authors categorized them based on the course description into categories typical of a distribution list such as humanities, social science, etc. The section of the catalog that discussed the "purpose/outcomes of general education" was also examined. The authors pulled from this discussion key expected outcomes or purposes of the university's general education program. If the general education program had a thematic name or focus, this was also collected.

To examine the relationship of these changes to business education, the AACSB curriculum standards for the 1991 and 2003 standards were obtained. The AACSB published revised standards in 2013. The authors thought that changes in these standards would take time to implement, but to ensure that they were not being considered, the 2012/13 academic year was chosen for the more recent period of analysis. Since universities that are accredited may be more likely to include the curriculum standards related to AACSB into their general education, data was collected on whether the university is accredited and if so what year the accreditation was granted.

Average number of credits for each disciplinary area was computed based on both catalogs. Averages were also computed for the purpose/outcomes of general education. These averages were then compared between the two periods to examine where changes in general education occurred. Changes for each university were also examined to see if any universities were unchanged between the two periods.

The AACSB curriculum standards were also categorized and a comparison of what requirements in these standards are addressed by general education was made at each of the two time periods. To examine the response to changes in accreditation standards, the changes in AACSB standards were compared to changes in general education to determine if the AACSB standards and university changes are consistent. Chi-square tests are used to

compare the changes in general education purposes between AACSB-accredited and non-AACSB accredited institutions. Johnson, Ratcliff and Gaff (2004) noted that changes in general education were influenced by specialized accrediting groups for 25% of their sample. Therefore, the hypothesis for the Chi-square test is that accredited institutions will have more changes that are consistent with the learning outcomes described in the GKSA's introduced in the 2003 AACSB standards.

These changes in general education course requirements are then used to examine how general education has changed between 1996 and 2013 and whether those changes are consistent with changes in AACSB standards. Since the 2003 AACSB standards include expected learning experiences beyond the typical business courses, general education courses that provide the GKSA's in these standards become important in developing the effective business leader that AACSB accredited universities are hoping to develop. If the changes observed in this analysis are consistent with the requirements of AACSB, accredited universities can rely on these general education courses to help satisfy the learning outcomes of accreditation. To the extent that these GKSA's are used in courses taught within the college of business, the general education requirements help prepare students for success in their business courses. Also, since these are skills that are important for business professionals, if general education requirements are providing these skills, the general education portion of the students' education is also helping them to become better business professionals at the same time that they are becoming a well-educated citizen, which is one of the stated goals of the general education requirements within the university setting. The difference in general education requirements and changes are examined for AACSB and non-AACSB universities to determine whether differences exist that are consistent with the GKSA's described in the standards, making the general education programs of accredited universities more useful to the business college than it would be for non-accredited universities.

5. Results

Table 1 summarizes the changes in general education courses required. This table summarizes the types of courses, number of institutions requiring the type of course, and the average number of hours required in both the 1996/97 and 2012/13 academic years. As can be seen from the table, the average hours to graduate have decreased by two hours and the average hours of general education have decreased by three hours.

Examining the classes required between the two time periods indicates a clear shift toward more emphasis on soft skills. Nearly all universities required science, English, social science, and math in both time periods considered. Fewer universities are requiring fine arts, physical education, religion/philosophy, and business/economics. There has been an increase in the number of programs requiring humanities, oral communication, ethics, and diversity. These changes in the number of universities were generally accompanied by little change in average credits. International/global requirements were the exception being required by more universities and the average number of credits is also higher in 2012/2013. A required first year experience changed from being required by 15 universities to just over a majority at 26 universities. No requirements were eliminated. However, a number of life skills-type courses became required by one or two universities (financial literacy, leadership, etc.). The number of universities allowing electives as part of general education also declined significantly, making the general education experience more homogenous for all students.

Besides requiring certain classes, many universities require that certain experiences be included in the student's studies while at the university. These experiences may be in any course work, but are often satisfied with general education. The most common example of these types of experiences is student demonstration of writing proficiency often called writing across the curriculum. Table II summarizes the types of experiences required showing again the number of universities and average credits required, if credit based. Some universities do not list a given number of credits, but require a designated course while other universities require proficiency exams in these areas. As can be seen from the table, the number of areas of experiential exposure has increased as well as increases in the number of universities requiring the experiences with the exception of writing proficiency, which has declined. The types of experiences included in Table II are generally soft skills, thought development (quantitative reasoning, critical thinking, ethics), or exposure areas (diversity, international, events).

One other area of change with regard to general education is in the stated purpose of general education. In the 1996/97 catalog, only 31 universities listed expected learning outcomes or purposes of the general education program. In the 2012/13 catalog, 42 of the 50 universities described outcomes or purposes. The outcomes/purposes are listed in Table III. The number of universities listing each outcome increased with the

exception of personal responsibility. Also, the data shows that no university listed global awareness in 1996/97; and in 2012/13, 20 universities listed global awareness. The outcomes listed are similar to items in Table II focusing on soft skills, the thinking process, and awareness of oneself and others.

Examining the changes in Tables I through III and the changes in AACSB standards to stress GKSA's shows many similarities. The AACSB standards started requiring communication abilities. All three tables show an increase in the emphasis on oral communications in particular. Ethical understanding is also an item with increased focus in all three tables. Analytical skills are generally not the topic of a class but Table II shows the addition of quantitative reasoning and critical thinking to the required educational experiences and Table III shows increases in the universities listing outcomes of critical thinking/reasoning/analysis, mathematical competence, problem solving, logic, and understanding the scientific method. Table I shows some inconsistency with the AACSB requirement of information technology with a decrease in the number of universities requiring courses in computer literacy and information literacy. This competency is being shifted to a graduation/experience requirement as demonstrated by the increase or addition of information literacy and computer literacy requirements in Table II. Information and computer literacy are also shown in Table III as expected outcomes for a significant number of universities in the study in the 2012/2013 academic catalog. Global, multicultural, and diversity understanding showed the largest changes between the two periods considered. International/global was the only general education requirement to increase by more than one credit on average in Table I. Diversity was required by more than twice as many universities in 2012/13 than in 1996/97. A similar result is noted in Table II with international/global/multi-cultural being required as a graduation/experience requirement by more universities and those with a credit requirement increased the average by over one credit. Again, diversity was required by twice as many universities in 2012/13. As noted in Table III, no universities listed global awareness as an outcome of general education in 1996/97 while 20 now list it as an outcome of the general education program.

The last AACSB GKSA's requirement is reflective thinking. This is harder to discern from classes or traditional education outcomes, but capstone experiences, internships, service learning, and life skills focused classes would likely involve such activities. These types of classes would potentially involve reflective writing assignments or other activities to synthesize learning from the classroom with real experience or across various classes.

Tables I through III show that universities as a whole have increased requirements of general education in a manner consistent with AACSB standard changes focusing on GKSA's. This would indicate that universities can utilize general education to achieve some of these learning outcomes. However, this data includes both AACSB and non-AACSB accredited universities. To examine whether changes were more consistent with AACSB requirements at AACSB universities, the information presented in Tables I through III will be examined for AACSB accredited and non-AACSB accredited universities.

Table IV examines the general education requirements of the 25 AACSB accredited and the 25 non-AACSB accredited universities in the 1996/97 year. Non-AACSB accredited universities required on average 49.9 credit hours of general education, which is 5 more credits on average than AACSB accredited universities required. For non-AACSB accredited universities, general education represents about 40% of the total hours to graduate. AACSB accredited universities have an average of 44.8 credits of general education required, which represents 36% of the total credits to graduate. The two samples are similar in the requirements for English, social science, natural or physical science, and mathematics with nearly all universities requiring those courses with similar average credits required. One course in oral communications is required by approximately half of the universities in both samples as well. There are a larger number of AACSB accredited universities requiring humanities and international/global courses in general education programs. For those universities requiring them, the number of hours required for ethics or capstone courses are 50% higher at AACSB accredited universities than non-AACSB accredited universities. More non-AACSB accredited universities require fine arts, physical education, religion/philosophy, first year seminar, business/economics, interdisciplinary, and personal development. Non-AACSB accredited universities require more than twice the elective hours as AACSB accredited universities in the general education program.

While the AACSB accreditation standards at that time focused on business education, the differences in general education documented are somewhat consistent with the learning experiences that the 2003 standards require.

AACSB accredited programs were requiring more ethics hours. International/global classes were also more likely to be required by AACSB accredited universities than non-AACSB accredited universities. With respect to information literacy/library resources and diversity, three times as many universities that are AACSB accredited require courses in these areas. The number of universities requiring courses in these areas are small, but the requirement is more likely to exist at an AACSB accredited university.

Between 1996 and 2012, seven universities in the sample obtained AACSB accreditation. Table V examines the difference in general education requirement between AACSB accredited and non-AACSB accredited universities in 2012/13. The percentage of the degree program devoted to general education for non-AACSB accredited universities fell to 38% and also fell for AACSB accredited programs to 34%. The differences noted in the prior period for humanities, physical education, international/global, and capstone experience were eliminated. Non-AACSB accredited universities are still more likely to require first-year seminar, business/economics, and interdisciplinary courses. AACSB accredited universities are now more likely to require computer literacy and diversity courses, although only a few universities require these courses. While the relative percentage of universities requiring international/global courses is similar between AACSB accredited and non-AACSB accredited universities, the average hours required for AACSB accredited universities is higher.

The 2003 AACSB standards focus on GKSA is met by general education through communications abilities as all 32 accredited universities require English (most requirements were a composition course) and over half require oral communications. Analytical skills can in part be met by the mathematics requirement. These areas are not different, though, for AACSB accredited and non-AACSB accredited universities. Information technology through computer literacy was required by five more AACSB accredited universities than non-AACSB accredited universities. International/global credit hours are 50% higher for AACSB accredited universities and diversity courses are more likely to be required by AACSB accredited universities. Thus, differences in general education between the types of universities do follow AACSB GKSA requirements, providing accredited universities with the ability to satisfy these GKSA within the standards through the university general education program.

Table VI summarizes the graduation/experience requirements for AACSB accredited and non-AACSB accredited universities for both periods studied. In the 1996 period, a larger number of non-AACSB accredited universities required writing proficiency. This difference was eliminated by 2012 when the GKSA were part of the standards. While the number of universities requiring international/global/multi-cultural experiences is higher for AACSB accredited universities, non-AACSB accredited universities require more hours of international/global/multi-cultural experiences in both periods considered. Diversity, information literacy, and oral communications are required more frequently by AACSB accredited universities. Comparing these requirements to AACSB GKSA shows that oral and written communication is required for some accredited universities. Information literacy is also more likely required by AACSB accredited universities. In reflective thinking, the AACSB requirement is most likely met with a service learning requirement. More AACSB accredited universities require this activity than non-AACSB accredited universities.

Table VII examines the outcomes/purposes of general education listed by universities. The table breaks down AACSB accredited and non-AACSB accredited universities and the two time periods. In 1996/97, 18 AACSB accredited and 13 non-AACSB accredited universities listed purposes. In 2012/13, 27 AACSB accredited and 15 non-AACSB accredited universities listed purposes. The 1996/97 sample shows few differences between AACSB accredited and non-AACSB accredited universities. AACSB accredited universities more frequently mentioned life-long learning, understanding the scientific method, and self-assessment as purposes of general education. More differences are apparent in the 2012/13 general education outcome and all involve more frequency for AACSB accredited universities. The differences are also consistent with the changing AACSB accreditation standards focus on GKSA. No proportional changes were documented for communication ability or ethical understanding. Analytical skills can be developed by critical thinking, reasoning, and analysis as well as through understanding the scientific method. These topics are listed more frequently by AACSB accredited universities than non-AACSB accredited universities. Information literacy and global awareness were listed by over twice as many AACSB accredited universities, both areas of AACSB GKSA. The AACSB GKSA of diversity understanding is more often listed by AACSB accredited universities as a purpose of general education at 21 to 11. The listed expectations of life-long learning and citizenship/community service could give rise to reflective thinking on the part of students. These two areas are more than twice as likely to be listed by AACSB accredited as non-AACSB accredited universities as learning outcomes/purposes of general education.

Taken as a whole, Tables V through VII show that AACSB accredited programs have required general education requirements and/or course content requirements and learning outcomes of general education that are consistent with the changes in AACSB standards. These differences have generally been more pronounced in the period after these areas were required by the AACSB. Thus, general education can be used by accredited universities in satisfying these AACSB required GKSA learning experiences.

Observed differences are not always significant differences. To examine whether these changes between AACSB accredited and non-accredited universities are significant, Chi-square tests were used. The first test considered was to compute the Chi-square statistic for each purpose of general education using the results reported in Table VII. The hypothesis being tested was that AACSB-accredited institutions were more likely to adopt the purpose/outcome of general education between 2003 and 2012 than non-AACSB accredited universities. None of the individual Chi-square statistics were significant, even at the 10-percent level.

The lack of significance in the statistics representing individual purposes of general education may be due to the small sample size and lack of statistical power. All of the data in Table VII was combined into one Chi-square test with a resulting significance of 0.0069. This test was then repeated using only purposes with each cell greater than or equal to 4 ($p = 0.0281$), 5 ($p = 0.0153$), 9 ($p = 0.0324$), and 10 ($p = 0.0732$). These results show that for all tests on the combined outcomes/purposes, AACSB-accredited institutions were more likely to develop these purposes/outcomes of general education during the time period of this study. Therefore, AACSB accredited universities found the GKSA required by the accrediting body more important to be included in the general education outcomes of their university than non-AACSB accredited universities. This implies that AACSB accredited universities can rely on general education to provide the GKSA considered important for business leaders more than universities that are not accredited.

6. Conclusion

General education requirements are important components of business program curricula. They can be used to impart skills and knowledge beyond the scope of business-specific courses. This study explores the general education requirements of fifty business programs in place during the 1996/97 academic year as well as those requirements in place during the 2012/13 academic year. Results indicate some interesting changes in general education requirements over time. By 2012, fewer schools required fine arts, physical education, religion/philosophy, and business/economics as part of general education. On the other hand, there was an increase in the number of programs requiring humanities, oral communication, ethics, and diversity. Also, more universities included a common first year experience as part of general education.

During both time periods examined, the majority of programs offered statements outlining the intended outcomes, purposes, or goals of their general education programs. The top five most often cited outcomes in 1996 were still among the most popular in 2012: understanding cultural heritage, written communication, oral communication, critical thinking, and moral/ethical thinking. By 2012, others began to be commonly cited as well: diversity awareness, mathematical competency, information literacy, citizenship, and understanding the scientific method. In 1996, none of the fifty programs identified global awareness as a desired outcome for general education, but by 2012, twenty of the programs specified it as such.

AACSB standards changed significantly in 2003. In those standards, specific knowledge and skills that should be included in business programs were described. Many of these attributes could be acquired by students through general education requirements. Results indicate that in several ways, AACSB accredited schools developed general education requirements that were more closely aligned with those described in the standards than did non-AACSB schools. An obvious limitation of this study is that the authors were required at times to make judgments regarding how to classify a course and what topics to list as the purpose/outcome of the general education program. The authors made every effort to be consistent in these judgments. While this is a limitation, it also reflects what a potential student would consider in examining the published general education requirements. If these published requirements were not clear or listed a course that seems multi-disciplinary, a student when comparing universities would be forced to make similar judgments regarding the nature of the general education requirements. In spite of this limitation, results of this study should still be considered valid.

Requirements of general education constitute a significant portion of business curricula. Many of the skills acquired through this part of a business program are important attributes for future business leaders. As business

curricula are evaluated, it should be remembered that the components of general education can impart skills and knowledge relevant for graduates of business programs. In documenting alignment with accreditation standards, the skills students obtain through general education requirements should be pointed out and relied upon in meeting the learning outcomes required by accreditation. The entire education of the student, not just the business education, should be considered useful and relevant to achieving the goals of both the university in its desires to create educated citizens and the accrediting body's goal to ensure the development of strong business leaders.

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Table I General Education Requirements

	Number of Universities 1996/97	Average Credit Hours	Number of Universities 2012/13	Average Credit Hours
Hours to Graduate	50	125.8	50	123.6
Hours of General Education	50	47.4	50	44.1
Natural or Physical Science	50	6.6	49	6.5
English	49	7.5	50	6.3
Social Science	49	9.5	48	8.2
Mathematics	45	4.0	46	3.8
Humanities	32	6.1	41	6.0
Fine Arts	31	3.8	28	3.1
Physical Education	30	2.6	25	2.3
Oral Communications	23	3.0	28	3.0
International/Global	22	4.2	24	5.7
Religion/Philosophy	17	6.8	12	7.3
First Year Seminar/University Orientation	15	1.4	26	2.0
Business/Economics	12	4.1	4	4.3
Computer Literacy	10	3.1	7	3.0
Ethics	5	2.6	9	2.9
Diversity	4	3.0	10	3.3
Interdisciplinary	4	5.0	4	5.3
Information Literacy/Library Resources	4	1.4	3	1.0
Capstone Experience	3	4.0	6	3.0
Personal Development	2	2.0	1	1.0
Logic	1	3.0	1	3.0
ROTC	1	2.0	1	2.0
Financial Literacy	0		2	2.0
Institutions	0		1	6.0
Internship	0		1	1.0
Leadership	0		2	1.0
Life Skills	0		1	3.0
Place in Society	0		2	4.5
Electives	20	9.1	9	8.7

Table II Graduation/Experience Requirements

	Number of Universities 1996/97	Average Credit Hours	Number of Universities 2012/13	Average Credit Hours
Writing Proficiency	15	6.5	12	6.6
International/Global/Multi-cultural	3	4.0	7	5.3
Diversity	3	3.0	6	3.2
Information Literacy	3	2.5	4	3.8
Events/Lectures	3	17.0	3	16.0
Historical Perspective	2	3.0	2	3.5
Interdisciplinary	1	12.0	2	3.5
Oral Communication Proficiency	1	6.0	3	5.0
Service Learning	1	3.0	4	3.3
Computer Literacy	0		5	3.0
Quantitative Reasoning	0		4	5.3
Critical Thinking	0		2	3.0
Foreign Language	0		1	12.0
Art	0		1	4.0
Ethics	0		1	4.0
Thematic Sequence	0		1	9.0

Table III Outcomes/Purposes of General Education

	Number of Universities 1996/97	Number of Universities 2012/13
Understanding Cultural Heritage	28	35
Written Communication	25	40
Oral Communication	21	39
Critical Thinking/Reasoning/Analysis	19	37
Moral/Ethical Thinking	19	27
Life Long Learning	15	21
Diversity Awareness/Appreciation	14	32
Mathematical Competency	12	33
Personal Responsibility	11	11
Creativity	10	23
Understanding the Scientific Method	8	30
Critical Reading Comprehension	7	23
Self-assessment	5	10
Problem Solving	4	15
Information Literacy	4	25
Citizenship/Community Service	4	22
Personal Wellness	4	13
Computer Literacy	3	12
Team Work	2	7
Logic	2	9
Religion	2	7
Justice	1	7
Leadership	1	4
Global Awareness	0	20

Table IV General Education Requirements AACSB vs Non-AACSB 1996

	Number of Non- AACSB Universities	Average Credit Hours	Number of AACSB Universities	Average Credit Hours
Hours to Graduate	25	126.1	25	125.4
Hours of General Education	25	44.8	25	49.9
Natural or Physical Science	25	6.6	25	6.6
English	25	7.6	24	7.4
Social Science	24	9.5	25	9.5
Mathematics	22	4.2	23	3.8
Humanities	20	6.1	12	6.2
Fine Arts	11	3.3	20	4.1
Physical Education	11	2.6	19	2.6
Oral Communications	11	3.0	12	2.9
International/Global	13	4.4	9	4.0
Religion/Philosophy	4	9.8	13	5.8
First Year Seminar/University Orientation	5	1.8	10	1.2
Business/Economics	4	3.0	8	4.6
Computer Literacy	5	3.0	5	3.3
Ethics	3	3.0	2	2.0
Diversity	3	3.0	1	3.0
Interdisciplinary	0		4	5.0
Information Literacy/Library Resources	3	1.5	1	1.0
Capstone Experience	2	4.5	1	3.0
Personal Development	0		2	2.0
Logic	0		1	3.0
ROTC	1	2.0	0	
Financial Literacy	0		0	
Institutions	0		0	
Internship	0		0	
Leadership	0		0	
Life Skills	0		0	
Place in Society	0		0	
Electives	10	5.8	10	12.4

Table V General Education Requirements AACSB vs Non-AACSB 2012

	Number of AACSB Universities	Average Credit Hours	Number of Non-AACSB Universities	Average Credit Hours
Hours to Graduate	32	123.7	18	123.3
Hours of General Education	32	42.4	18	47.2
Natural or Physical Science	32	6.5	17	6.6
English	32	6.3	18	6.3
Social Science	31	8.3	17	8.1
Mathematics	29	3.8	17	3.7
Humanities	27	5.7	14	6.5
Fine Arts	18	3.1	10	3.3
Physical Education	13	2.2	12	2.4
Oral Communications	18	3.0	10	3.0
International/Global	16	6.4	8	4.1
Religion/Philosophy	4	7.5	8	7.3
First Year Seminar/University Orientation	14	1.9	12	2.3
Business/Economics	0		4	4.3
Computer Literacy	6	2.8	1	4.0
Ethics	5	3.2	4	2.5
Diversity	7	3.4	3	3.0
Interdisciplinary	0		4	5.3
Information Literacy/Library Resources	2	1.0	1	1.0
Capstone Experience	4	3.0	2	3.0
Personal Development	1	1.0	0	
Logic	1	3.0	0	
ROTC	1	2.0	0	
Financial Literacy	2	2.0	0	
Institutions	1	6.0	0	
Internship	1	1.0	0	
Leadership	1	1.0	1	1.0
Life Skills	0		1	3.0
Place in Society	1	3.0	1	6.0
Electives	6	5.8	3	14.3

Table VI Graduation/Experience Requirements AACSB vs. Non-AACSB 1996

	Number of AACSB Universities	Average Credit Hours	Number of Non-AACSB Universities	Average Credit Hours
Writing Proficiency	4	6.0	11	6.7
International/Global/Multi-cultural	2	3.0	1	6.0
Diversity	3	3.0	0	
Information Literacy	2	3.3	1	1.0
Events/Lectures	0		3	17.0
Historical Perspective	2	3.0	0	
Interdisciplinary	0		1	12.0
Oral Communication Proficiency	1	3.0	0	
Service Learning	1	3.0	0	
Computer Literacy	0		0	
Quantitative Reasoning	0		0	
Critical Thinking	0		0	
Foreign Language	0		0	
Art	0		0	
Ethics	0		0	
Thematic Sequence	0		0	

2012

	Number of AACSB Universities	Average Credit Hours	Number of Non-AACSB Universities	Average Credit Hours
Writing Proficiency	7	5.1	5	8.6
International/Global/Multi-cultural	4	4.5	3	6.3
Diversity	4	3.3	2	3.0
Information Literacy	3	3.8	0	
Events/Lectures	1	16.0	0	
Historical Perspective	0	3.0	1	4.0
Interdisciplinary	3		2	3.5
Oral Communication Proficiency	3	5.0	0	
Service Learning	2	3.3	1	3.0
Computer Literacy	1	3.0	3	3.0
Quantitative Reasoning	1	3.0	3	6.0
Critical Thinking	1	3.0	1	3.0
Foreign Language	0		1	12.0
Art	0		1	4.0
Ethics	0		1	4.0
Thematic Sequence	1	9.0	0	

Table VII Outcomes/Purposes of General Education AACSB vs. Non-AACSB

	AACSB 1996	Non- AACSB 1996	AACSB 2012	Non-AACSB 2012
Understanding Cultural Heritage	16	12	22	13
Written Communication	12	13	25	15
Oral Communication	10	11	25	14
Critical Thinking/Reasoning/Analysis	10	9	24	13
Moral/Ethical Thinking	10	9	17	10
Life Long Learning	11	4	14	7
Diversity Awareness/Appreciation	6	8	21	11
Mathematical Competency	7	5	20	13
Personal Responsibility	7	4	9	2
Creativity	3	7	14	9
Understanding the Scientific Method	7	1	20	10
Critical Reading Comprehension	2	5	14	9
Self-assessment	5	0	8	2
Problem Solving	1	3	11	4
Information Literacy	2	2	17	8
Citizenship/Community Service	3	1	16	6
Personal Wellness	2	2	6	7
Computer Literacy	0	3	7	5
Team Work	2	0	6	1
Logic	1	1	5	4
Religion	1	1	3	4
Justice	1	0	4	3
Leadership	1	0	1	3
Global Awareness	0	0	14	6