

Ivanovski, Zoran; Milenkovski, Ace; Kozuharov, Saso

Article

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Preliminary communication
(accepted December 27, 2012)

DEVELOPMENT AND IMPROVEMENT OF BUSINESS HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH IMPLEMENTATION OF STUDENTS LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT PLAN (SLOAP)

Zoran Ivanovski¹
Ace Milenkovski
Nadica Ivanovska
Saso Kozuharov

Abstract:

This study presents new vision how to upgrade business higher education at the Faculty of Economics at University of Tourism and Management in Skopje (UTMS). This paper is result of analyses of best practices of leading higher education institutions as well authors experience in higher education and business education and practice.

The UTMS is orientated to introduce best practices and objective standards in order to offer high-quality business education for its students. UTMS has mission for permanent implementation of quality improvement measures as a way to achieve high professional and academic standards and become part of prosperous and respective Universities. In order to achieve this goal, UTMS plan to use additional measures, outcomes assessment as a way to measure institutional effectiveness, as well as effective technique for identifying where changes and improvements are necessary. UTMS has developed Students Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan (SLOAP) as a way to reach this goal.

Based on permanent analysis of students needs as well as business sector suggestions about desirable level of knowledge, skills and competence of the students from Faculty of Economics, gained from conducted evaluations, UTMS decide to make additional improvement and development of business education.

This process have 4 phases: 1) evaluation of students attitude towards curricula and the instructors efficiency, 2) preparation of the SLOAP (Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan) document, 3) implementation of two direct measures from the SLOAP through assessment analysis and action planning, and 4) monitoring changes and improvements made as a result of action planning.

The first phase was completed in spring semester 2012, as well as second one with development of Comprehensive Exam and Capstone Course as direct measures. Complete SLOAP also has indirect measures like student satisfaction inventory, course evaluations, alumni, and employers' surveys, and a variety of other student learning outcomes assessments.

¹ **Zoran Ivanovski**, Ph.D, Full Professor, University of Tourism and Management in Skopje, **Ace Milenkovski**, Ph.D, Full Professor, University of Tourism and Management in Skopje, **Nadica Ivanovska**, Ph.D, Centralna Kooperativna Banka, **Saso Kozuharov**, Ph.D, Full Professor, University of Tourism and Management in Skopje, Macedonia.

UTMS plan to use first two direct measures for Student Learning Outcomes Assessment as pilot project, and if it shows success whole process of SLOA can be implemented as permanent methodology for success improvement at UTMS.

This process will be also used to develop a strategy for improving the effectiveness and quality of the Faculty of Economics and its programs.

Key words: assessment, study, program, business, education.

Jel Classification: A2, A22

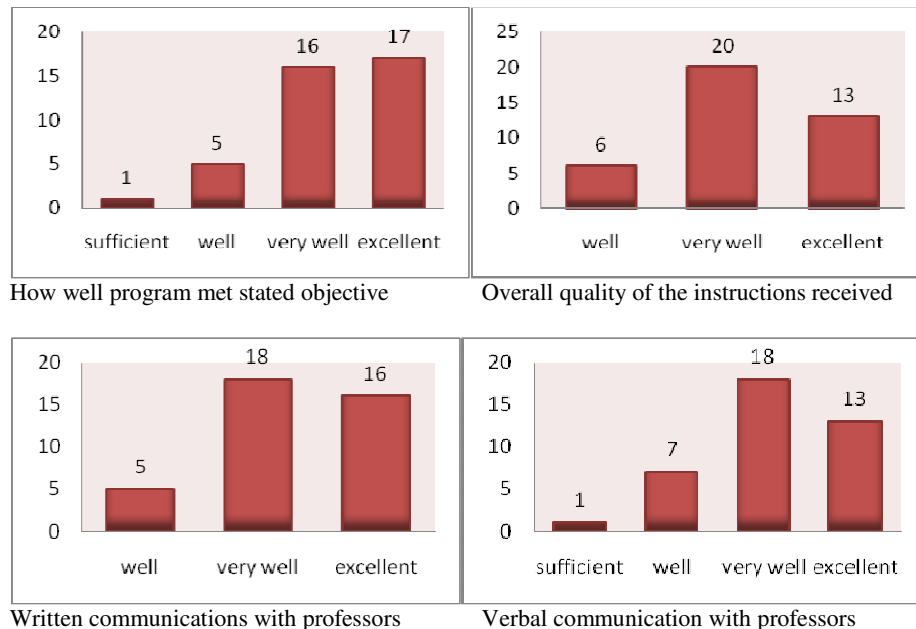
INTRODUCTION

University of Tourism and Management in Skopje (UTMS) has conducted evaluation in order to get perception of students from final year (3rd year) about their attitude towards curricula and the instructions efficiency, the skills acquired at the UTMS to be evaluated. The students were also questioned about existing subjects and possible curricula extension. The task of this research was also to receive information about student's attitude towards their business knowledge at UTMS as well as personal attitudes for curricula development in order to meet their expectation. The program for statistical quantity data processing for the analysis of the responses was used for this questionnaire. Since the student presence on classes was different, the questionnaire was given twice, and it was filled in by 40 students (both study groups: first, financial management, banking and finance and second, customs and insurance) participants in the questionnaire.

The figure reports with the results are presented as follows:

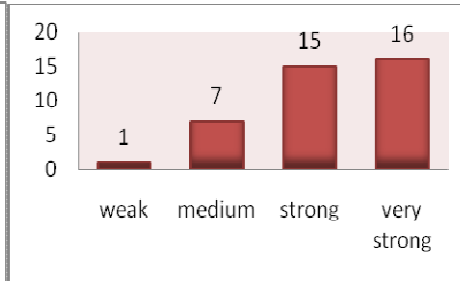
Figure 1-16

Instructions efficiency

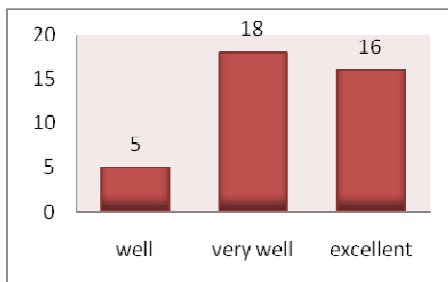




Interpersonal skills



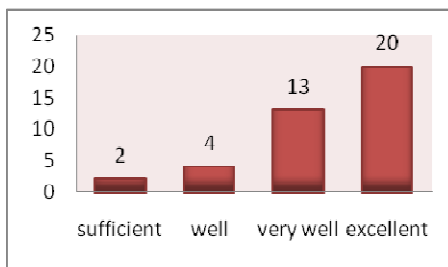
Leadership skills



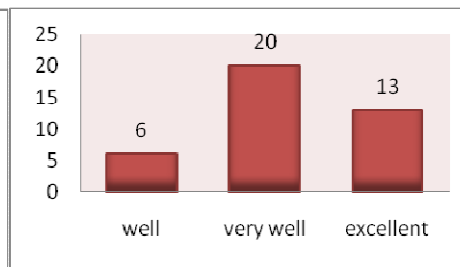
Critical thinking and problem-solving skills



Decision making skills



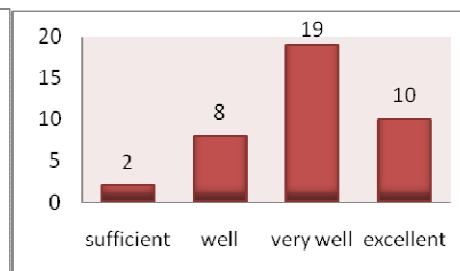
How well your program meet your needs



The helpfulness of your program to your work and interests



The knowledge and skills gained at your program



The content of course taken

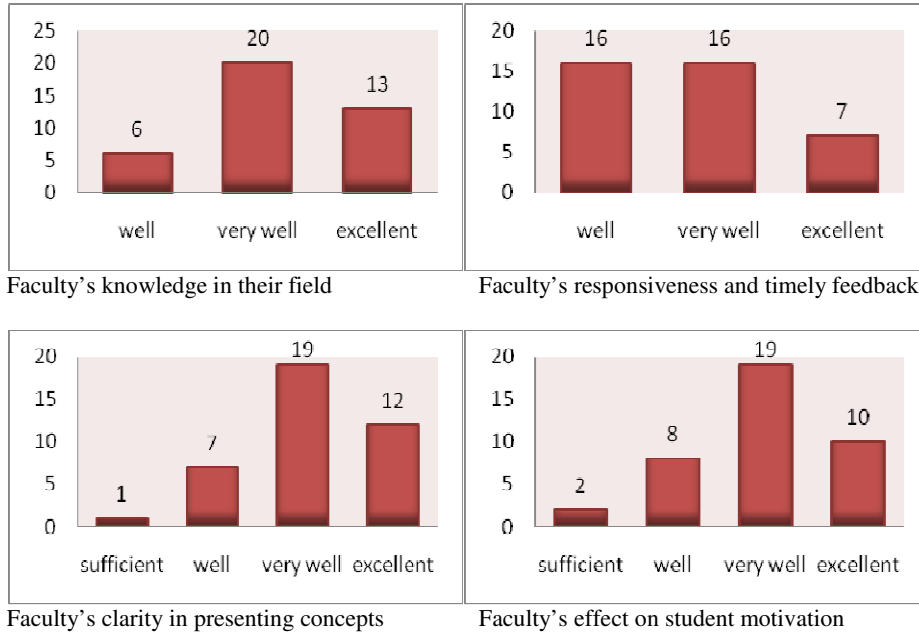
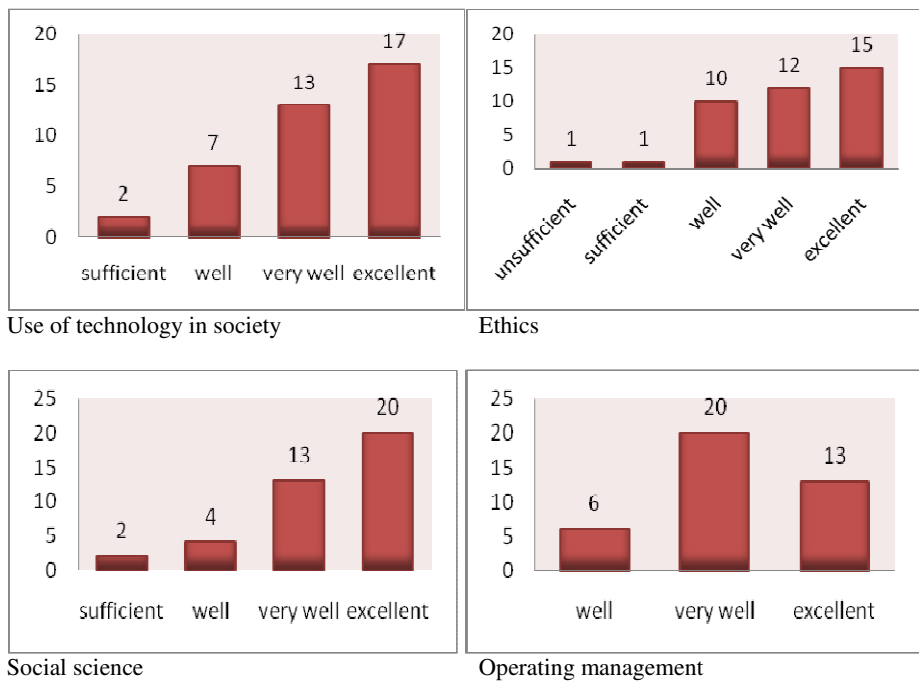
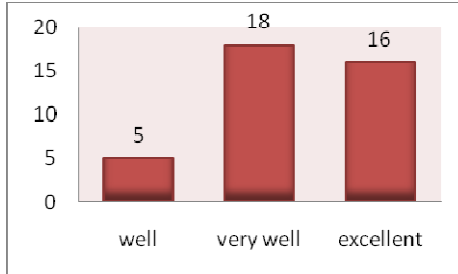


Figure 17-45

Skills acquired, curricula evaluation and possible curricula extension





Marketing



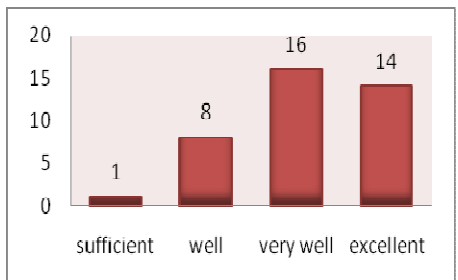
Finance



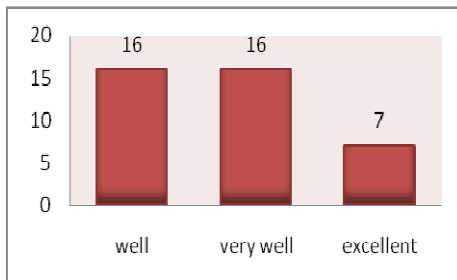
Economics



Social, ethical and legal business environment



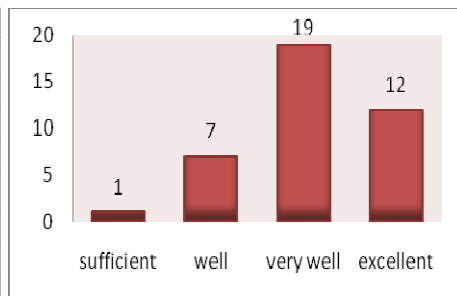
IT in business decision making



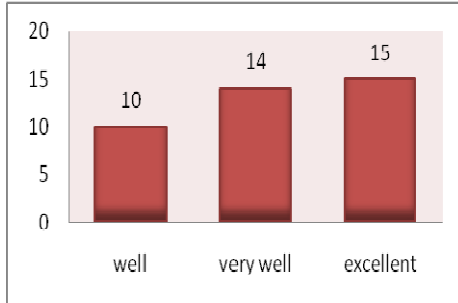
Quantitative techniques for business decision making



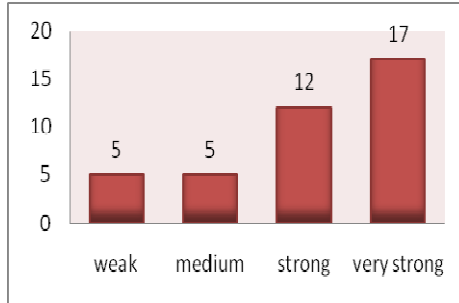
Organizational Theory and HR management



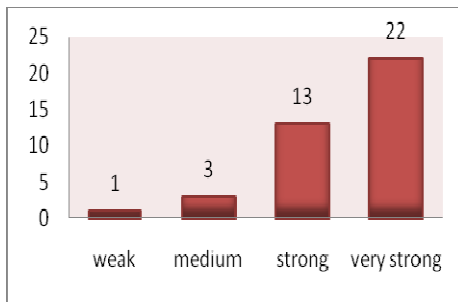
Global aspects of business



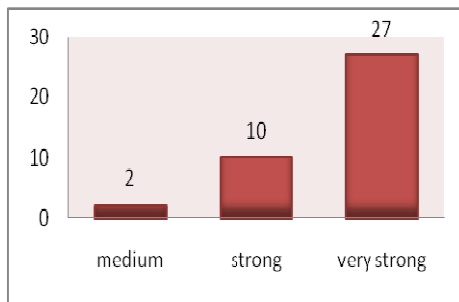
Strategic business planning



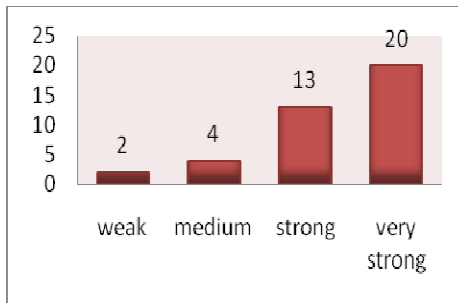
Critical Thinking



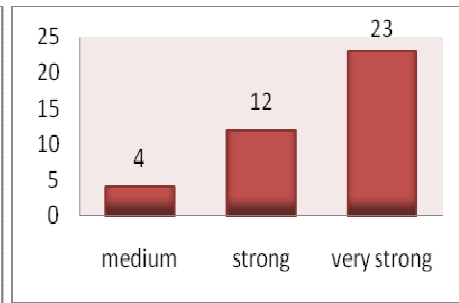
Conflict resolution



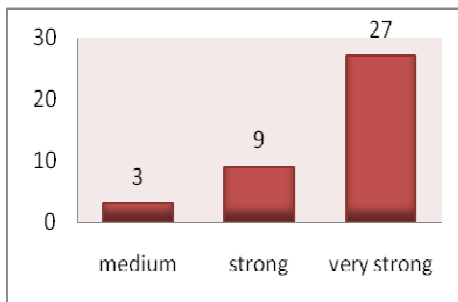
Decision making



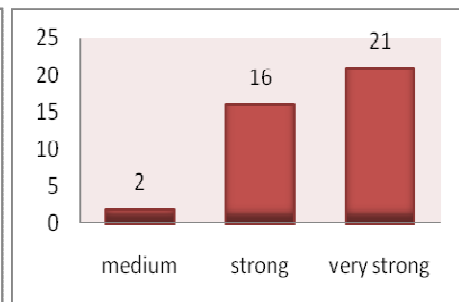
Effective writing



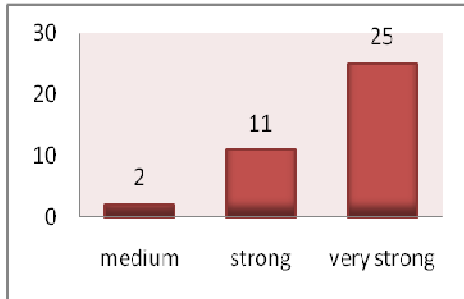
Effective oral presentation



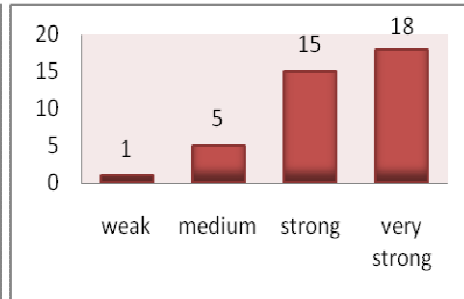
Effective listening



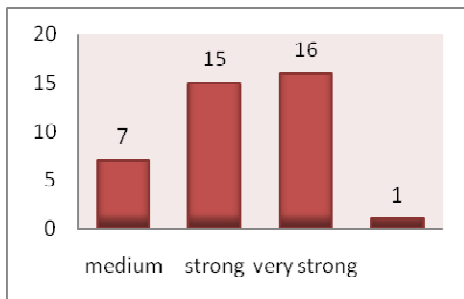
Critical opinion



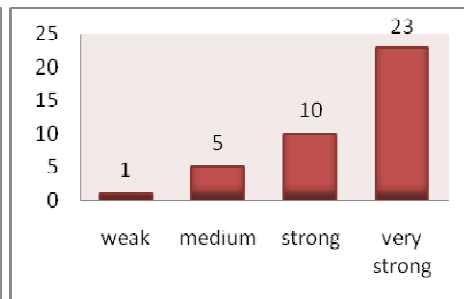
Understanding non-verbal communication



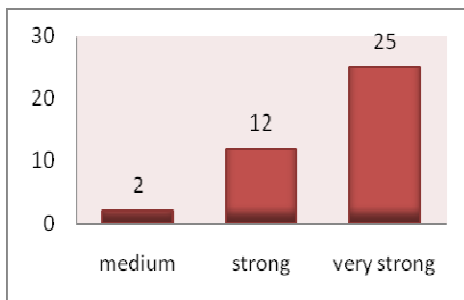
Locate important information



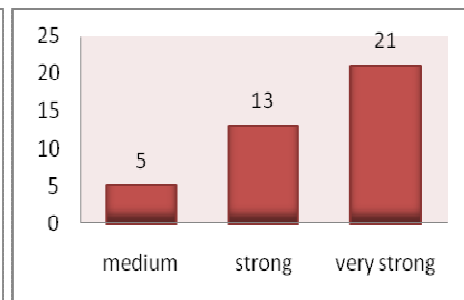
Use of IT technology in business



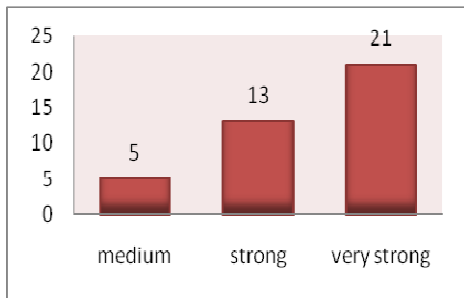
To adopt changes in business environment



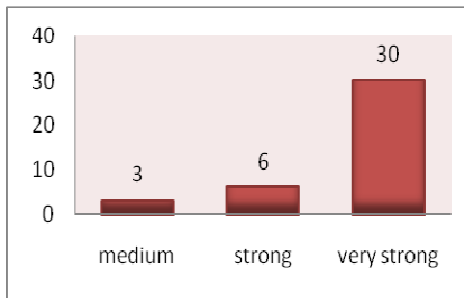
To have capabilities for team work



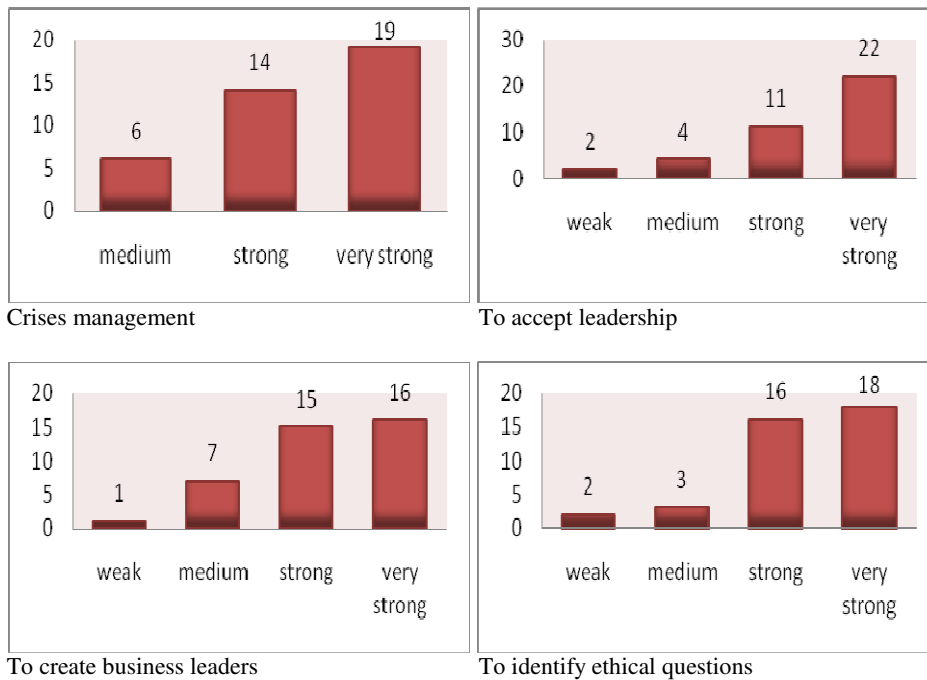
To influence others



Organize and delegate tasks to other people



To motivate other people



After evaluation results analysis and conclusions where students as well as business community expect additional curriculum and instructor works improvement, UTMS develops organizational approach towards business education improvement and made some concrete steps and changes. There is no doubt that students emphasize their needs to gain more leadership competences, as well better tools for management and business leadership, like IT, quantitative technics, effective writing and oral presentation skills.²

In order to achieve excellence in business education it is not necessary to have good education, in terms of well developed teaching process, but effective linkages with the “real world” of business. The students’ and faculty achievements comes exactly from the business and industrial interrelation.

One of the most successful things that The Faculty of Economics has achieved with the business and industrial area are as follows:

a) Advisory Boards

The advisory board works on guiding the students in their carrier and future profession. It is a team of people who will advise and guide the students during their studying.

b) Career Center

Career Center have significant role in sharing their experiences and knowledge acquired during their long work. They permanently guide students during their studies

² Hugs, Ginnett, and Curphy, *Leadership*.

and contribute to their improvement and development of professionally competitive staff.

c) Guest Speakers

The faculty engages guest speakers and organizes lectures, presentations on certain professions, trendy profession, deficient professions, so that the students can have better perspective according certain questions. The lecturers are representatives from some well known companies and enterprises with which the Faculty has established mutual cooperation and they are leaders in their working area.

This past period, during the teaching process we could note visits and lectures of eminent experts from different areas, who on their great pleasure contributed to the improvement of the content of certain disciplines.

Beside above mentioned UTMS has developed Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan (SLOAP) at the Faculty of Economics (system of two direct and three indirect measures) as methodology for assessment, in order for evaluation of students, but same methodology can be implemented on whole University on other six faculties (Tourism, Sport Tourism, Marketing, Public Relation Management and Human Resources Management). This type of assessment (Student Learning Outcomes-SLO) can be considered as a single, standardized process for the whole institution.

UTMS will use reactive mode of outcomes assessment, which means that results take place first, and it is the results that are assessed followed by a determination of whether changes and improvements are needed. After analyzing the information gathered from the assessment of the outcomes, UTMS will prepare Action Plans to address the changes and improvements that are needed. UTMS is aware that successfully executed action plans will result in desired outcomes.

STATEMENT OF NEED FOR SLOAP, DEFINITION, PURPOSE, GOALS

The Faculty of Economics at the UTMS, will use SLOA plan to ensure additional control of the quality of study that offers to its students, and to foster its accountability to its students, faculty, support staff, and business community. This will help to check and compare student academic results performed at each course with additional measures that analyses whole study program and student effectiveness to use received knowledge at University on practical situation and case studies. Students will also be fully aware that they will have additional check of their individual knowledge at the end of each academic year (instrument - Comprehensive exam) as well team work (instrument - Capestone). This will enhance their responsibility not only for passing individual exams, but also to remember passed courses longer and to generate practical experience for solution of practical problems.

This will also have strong impact among the public's expectations of higher education. This can also be strong marketing instrument for enrollment of new student, because public in Macedonia and neighbor countries will be aware that UTMS use comprehensive methods to check what the students learn, and additional measure that students will learn what they need to know to obtain personal success and fulfill their public responsibilities in the twenty-first century.

UTMS has declared mission that want to provide the highest quality learning experience for its students within its means. UTMS focus on achieved student learning

is critical not only to promoting and improving effective curriculum and co-curricular learning experiences and programs, but also to enhance the public perception of the value of higher education.

This new improved SLOA Methodology will be also positively perceived from business community, because it is in accordance to their expectations to receive strongly qualified graduates and to employ only employees with strong academic and professional knowledge. Additional measures planned with SLOAP will also ensure that UTMS graduates have the skills and knowledge necessary to help their companies succeed in a competitive, global environment.

The process of implementation of SLOAP will help University to identify its strengths and weaknesses, guide us to increase effectiveness in achieving our mission, widen University accountability to own students, faculty, staff and business community, and to guarantee continued growth. The process involves making expectations explicit and public, setting due dates, setting appropriate criteria and high standards for quality learning, continually and systematically gathering, analyzing and interpreting data to determine how well performance matches the previously set goals.³

The core purpose of implementation of SLOAP is to enhance the functioning of the Faculty of Economics and to provide additional tools to check student learning outcomes. UTMS hopes that this will create a more unified and dynamic student body in accordance with the standards of the international business community. University goal is to accomplish three broad purposes of Outcomes Assessment: to assist learning, to measure individual achievement and to evaluate previously designed programs. It should also build a basis for the Business programs to evolve and improve with greater satisfaction from students, faculty, staff and business.⁴

CHARACTERISTICS AND ADMINISTRATION OF SLOAP

An Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan should determine the efficiency and effectiveness of the Faculty of Economics programs and the institution as a whole. The Plan should identify concrete measures for additional measurement of students learning outcomes as well changes and improvements that are needed at all levels, institutionally, pedagogically, administratively, and propose practical action plans for these changes.

There are several characteristics which are entailed in the Student Learning Outcomes assessment:

- Well planned systematic and ongoing process;
- It flows from and provides information and data into the university faculties and department's mission, goals and objectives;
- It is designed to improve the teaching and learning process;
- It provides evidence to support of changes and improvements;
- It is the responsibilities of faculty, staff, students and administration;
- Faculty in curriculum development, students in teaching quality;
- Staff in support services, and businesses in hiring and employer satisfaction.⁵

³ Tichy and Devanna, *The Transformational Leader*.

⁴ IACBE, *Accreditation Manual*.

⁵ IACBE, *Accreditation Manual*.

The Faculty of Economics has to provide several committees which are responsible for developing and administering the Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Plan:

1. Institutional Oversight of Academic Assessment and Program Review Committee. Membership includes: Vice-Chancellor for Education, Vice-Dean of the Faculty, and 3 professors and 3 assistants. This Committee will be responsible for the academic portion of the work and has the responsibility of assessing the institutional progress and the outcomes as a whole.

Responsibilities of the committee:

- Disseminating common information about assessment;
- Analyzes and reviews reports and provides feedback and suggestions on matters;
- Works with the committees of the Faculties;
- Reviews assessment plans to ensure their full implementation;
- Measures the direct and indirect outputs and incomes;
- Provides support for assessment.

2. Institution Education Committee (Assessment). Membership includes: one faculty member elected from each academic department (departments: economics, accounting and audit, finance and financial policy, marketing, management, public relations).

Responsibilities of the committee:

- Collaborates with Institutional Oversight of Academic Assessment and Program Review Committee about assessment;
- Measures the outcomes of learning (direct and indirect);
- Provides reports and measures on academic matters;
- Reviews programs for Business;
- Engages the faculty and students in review process;
- Monitors the effects of learning and its outcomes;
- Recommends changes to the education system;
- Designs measures to assess the education;
- Disseminates assessment measures for the education;
- Reviews, analyzes and makes decisions about the outcomes of learning, based on the data and reports collected.

3. Institutional Committee. Membership includes: Dean, Secretary General, Assessment representative from each department and three students from each program.

Responsibilities of the committee:

- Publication of assessment results;
- Provides assessment report to support curriculum revisions and proposals;
- Serves as a Faculty committee to respond to program viability reviews and questions;
- Organize wide forum for discussion of assessment activities;
- Develops and distributes guidelines and schedules to departments and programs for assessment and program review.

The Dean of the Faculty of Economics will request that the current staff and the academic advisors support the Dean in development, implementation and administration of SLOAP.

4. Institutional assessment Programs Reporting Guidelines and Processes:

The assessment data will be collected and completed by the end of the spring semester 2013. The committees responsible for each department should prepare annual assessment report by August 15.

The summary reports will be used to guide future planning decisions. The summary reports should cover the following points:

- Learning Objectives: learning objectives of each course
- Multiple Measures: Faculty of Economics has developed assessment measures to determine the extent to which each student has achieved the previously set objectives (students' presence at the lectures, students' activities during classes, essay writing, preparation of thesis or projects, permanent assessment of knowledge through three partial exams, final exam, and cumulative exam). Besides the above mentioned measures, there are other measures like Comprehensive Exam and Capstone. Through use of different methodology professors will be able to assess students results from different perspective.⁶
- Various assessment activities: Each professor collects data for students' presence at classes, activity, partial exams and final exam. Maximum number of points for knowledge, skills and competence is 100. Skills and competences provide 22 points. During the classes the teaching staff develops discussions with students and assesses their knowledge during classes, student papers and presentation, as well essay writing (maximum number of points for class presence is 2, for activity is 4% and for essay writing is 6). Students are encouraged to work on papers and their presentation and their effort can result in maximum 10 points (valuation is performed through standardized rubrics for assessment of oral and written capabilities). Students have partial exams (maximum number of points is 48, or 1 exams with 16 points, while final exam is 30). Maximum number of points is 100, whereas at least 40 points are necessary to pass the exam.
- Evidence to support goals and objectives: collection of data, analysis of the collected data, and the connection i.e. relationship and support of the goals set and their accomplishment. UTMS possesses platform - software which records the students results-software which records and permanently stores records on every student (their grades, in particular) which enables following their development throughout the years.
- Review process: At the end of semester, the Dean of the Faculty of Economics presents, analyzes and reports the findings concerning the level of knowledge the students get, measured by the unified standards previously set at the university. The collected and analyzed results of new two direct measures from SLOAP will be presented at the Rector Council with further analyzes of the previous results and offer of suggestions.
- Change as a result of the assessment: The suggestions and findings which have been previously recorded can be used in development of different measures that can be put forward as a way to enhance student results.⁷

⁶ IACBE, *Accreditation Manual*.

⁷ IACBE, *Accreditation Manual*.

STUDENTS LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT PLAN - DIRECT AND INDIRECT MEASURES

The Faculty of Economics has identified two direct and three indirect student-learning measures that will be used by the academic business unit in outcomes assessment of Business programs:

- A direct measure of student learning, that deals with actual learning that has taken place (e.g. a skill was learned or student learned how to do something).
- An indirect measure, that deals with characteristics associated with learning, but the results only imply that learning occurred (e.g. student's perceptions of learning experiences).

There are a number of different types of direct and indirect student learning measures that can be used however, the Faculty of Economics will use the following direct and indirect measures:

Direct Student learning measures:

1. Comprehensive Examination

The comprehensive examination (the first direct measure) is designed for whole degree program. In the development of internal comprehensive examination, all academic departments participated and created Major Field Test in Business which contains 120 multiple-choice items, grouped in major areas (Accounting about 16% of the questions, Economics, about 16% of the questions, Management about 17% of the questions, Quantitative Business Analysis and Information Systems about 16% of the questions, Finance about 12% of the questions, Marketing about 12% of the questions and Legal and Social Environment about 10% of the questions).⁸ Questions are formulated by identifying the most important learning objectives in each course as determined by the faculty and set forth in the course syllabus. The comprehensive exam includes questions from each of the required courses in the business core. For the required courses beyond the business core in a major, a similar procedure will be followed (e.g. identify the most important learning objectives in each syllabus for the required courses beyond the business core). This means that the comprehensive examination always has two parts:

- the first that deals with the business core curriculum, and it is usually common to all majors, and
- the second that deals with the required courses beyond the business core in a major.⁹

The Business Test is intended to¹⁰:

- Measure students' academic achievement in the multidisciplinary subject matter representative of undergraduate business education.
- Provide information to students regarding their level of achievement.
- Provide information to faculties regarding the achievement of their students; information that can be used by the institution to assess their performance relative to their specific mission objectives.

⁸ IACBE, *Accreditation Manual*.

⁹ IACBE, *Accreditation Manual*.

¹⁰ Wechsler, David. *The measurement and appraisal of adult intelligence*.

- Provide information to facilitate development of appropriate goals and educational programs, and to enhance the accountability of undergraduate business education.

2. Capstone Course¹¹

The second recommended direct measure of student learning, a capstone course, is an integrative course that utilizes the student's knowledge gained from the business core curriculum and the required courses beyond the business core in a major. The Faculty of Economics developed the capstone course, according to which students need to complete a course project. The groups will consist of students who will need to work on a team project. Frequently, the project teams compete with each other in project development and presentation.

The Faculty of Economics has prepared rubrics to evaluate the results for the two direct student-learning measures. UTMS has all assessment instruments, along with their associated rubrics, and they are included in the SLOAP.

Indirect Student learning measures:

1. Employer Survey

The employer survey will be used to gain information on the employer's perception of a student's abilities and skills in the workplace. In addition to the above, a representative sample of employers will be asked to complete a survey assessing the quality of the students who graduate in one of our degree programs.¹² This assessment instrument, along with its associated rubric, is included in the appendix of the SLOAP.

2. Alumni Survey

UTMS will use Alumni Survey as the second indirect student learning measure in order to gain a student's perception of his/her learning experience. Having in mind that this instrument usually is administered three to five years upon graduation of the students, the UTMS will use this instrument for generation that graduate in 2009 at Faculty of Tourism and students that graduate at Faculty of Economics in 2012. This assessment instrument, along with its associated rubrics, is included in the appendix of the SLOAP. Every 5 years a random sample of 30 alumni will be asked to complete a survey to assess the quality of their educational experience.

3. End-of-Course Evaluation¹³

Course evaluations are required for all courses every term. These findings will be compiled at the end of the year to help assess faculty effectiveness, quality of course delivery and content.

¹¹ IACBE, *Capstone Courses and Matrix*.

¹² IACBE, *Accreditation Manual*.

¹³ Wechsler, David. *The measurement and appraisal of adult intelligence*.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT PURPOSE

The purpose of students learning outcomes assessment is to review the results of an institution's operations (both academic and non-academic) and determine if the intended outcomes were realized.

Outcomes assessment includes examining the student learning results of the each functional units of University.

The Faculty of Economics makes distinction between: Intended Outcomes (objectives) and Realized Outcomes (accomplished objectives).

The learning objectives refer to the material that students should learn in the course (intended outcomes) and they can be found in the course syllabus. When intended outcomes are actually accomplished, the results are realized outcomes.

Student learning objectives (intended outcomes) generally address the following¹⁴:

1. Graduates of the Business program will possess an integrated knowledge of the functions and systems of business.
2. Graduates of the Business program will have developed strong interpersonal and communication skills necessary to succeed in the business environment.
3. Graduates of the Business program will have strong technological skills including the use of the Internet, word processing, spreadsheets, and presentation software.
4. Graduates of the Business program will be able to demonstrate the capability of applying business concepts to real world projects.
5. Graduates of the Business program will perform effectively and efficiently in business managerial positions.
6. Faculty, administrators, and staff of the Faculty of Economics create an environment that fosters excellence in learning.
7. The Business program provides the necessary education and experiences that enable graduates to be effective leaders in a global business environment.

An students learning outcomes assessment plan developed for the evaluation of the programs at the Faculty of Economics includes:

1. Techniques that will be used to measure whether the intended outcomes of student learning are realized, using both direct and indirect student learning measures.
2. Copies of the instruments will be used in measuring student learning outcomes, along with rubrics to evaluate the results.

CONCLUSION

Development of SLOAP is a valuable instrument and part of continuous process for measuring the effectiveness of a business unit and its programs. The whole process of SLOAP is based on definition, measurement, and continuous improvement of educational outcomes, understood as a process critical for the identification of necessary changes and improvements.

The Faculty of Economics develops and plans partial (only direct measures) implementation of this outcomes assessment process in spring semester of current

¹⁴ IACBE, *Accreditation Manual*.

academic year (2012/2013). This process includes an student learning outcomes assessment plan, identification of necessary changes and improvements, integration of those changes into the institution's planning process, and documentation of realized outcomes.

The first phase of Implementation of SLOAP is the development of written outcomes assessment plan and its Appendices. Implementation will be realized through execution of assessment tools/instruments in accordance with Action plan, external and internal assessment activity, analysis and evaluation of results of assessment activity.

After the analysis and the evaluation of assessment results as well as identifying changes and necessary improvements, Action plans for performing the identified changes and improvements will be prepared and necessary actions will be implemented.

There is a possibility that some changes of the SLOAP will be made over the first few years after its implementation provided some instruments or technique do not produce the assessment results desired by the institution.

UTMS expects concrete results from Realized Outcomes of Action Plan as Improved student outcomes (learning outcomes, skills development, personal development outcomes), enhanced operational effectiveness (learning environment, teaching effectiveness, etc.), achievement of strategic plan goals/objectives, increased student satisfaction, increased faculty and staff satisfaction.

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