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## **First-Year Curricula Review: Undergraduate School of Business, Maine Business School**

Undergraduate School of Business, Maine Business School

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**First Year Curricula Charge  
April 12, 2019**

Dean's Summary:

- MBS students are only required to take one Business course in their first year - Introduction to Business (BUA101). BUA101 was created a few years back and designed to serve two purposes. First, to provide an opportunity to explore business as a potential major in the first year. Second, to provide tools, cohort building, business knowledge and professionalism in order to making the transition to college easier.
- The first-year retention rate has improved over the last few years (2017: 82%; 2016: 81%; 2015: 79%) and we attribute some of this positive trend to BUA101.
- MBS students are recommended to take BUA235 during their first year; four courses if they are declared a major in accounting (BUA201 and BUA202).
- Our DFW rates in our BUA101 business course have generally increased during the last three years. We attribute this to students being held accountable to professionalism and on-time assignments.
- Our DFW rates in managerial accounting (BUA201) is higher than desired. More discussions about when our first-year accounting majors should take it while at the same time reach 150 credits for their CPA exam is needed. In the meantime, we plan on adding tutors for all our BUA201 sections. The DFW rates is also higher than desired in Information Systems and Technology for Business (BUA 235).
- Overall grade distribution across lower- and upper-division courses suggest that MBS students struggle in accounting and math-related courses.
- We plan to engage in a broader faculty conversation this summer/fall to explore alternative electives to help students consider non-MBS minors and concentrations.

**1. What is the required first-year curriculum?**

**a. Courses in the discipline**

- Introduction to Business (BUA 101)
- Information Systems and Technology for Business (BUA 235)

**b. General Education courses that meet major requirements**

During the first-year students are recommended to complete BUA 101, 235, ECO 120, 121, ENG 101, CMJ 103, PSY 100, and MAT 115 or 116. General education:

- Economics
- English
- Psychology
- Mathematics
- Communication
- Electives

### c. Other courses that meet major requirements

The courses we offer for first-year students are:

BUA101

BUA201 and BUA202 (accounting major only)

BUA235

## 2. What is the recommended first-year curriculum?

### Fall Semester (15 credits)

- BUA 101 Introduction to Business
- ECO 120 Principles of Microeconomics
- ENG 101 College Composition **OR** CMJ 103 Fundamentals of Public Communication
- PSY 100 General Psychology
- BUA 235: Management Information Systems **OR** Elective (general education)

### Spring Semester (15 credits)

- ECO 121 Principles of Macroeconomics
- MAT 115 Applied Math for Business and Economics (or MAT 126) Math placement test **MUST** be taken
- CMJ 103 Fundamentals of Public Communication **OR** ENG 101 College Composition
- Elective (general education) **OR** BUA 235: Management Information Systems
- Elective (general education)

### a. Courses in major

We require all our first-year students to take BUA 101. It is a core class that all students regardless of major need to take during their first year. The intent with the course is:

- Basic business content introduction
- Small classes to drive cohort building
- Exploring student fit with business as a major
- Providing tools to make the transition from high-school to college
- Start thinking about professionalism
- Leveraging resources on and off campus to build resume

Accounting students are recommended to take BUA 201 and BUA 202 during their first year.

We also recommend that our first-year students take BUA 235. This is another core business class that all students regardless of major need to take. The goal of this course is to familiarize students with basic principles of information systems and the effective use and management of information systems. This information is not covered in our BUA 101 course.

### **b. General Education**

Many of the courses that we require students to take are at least considered Social Context general education courses. When selecting a general education course for students in their first semester, we try to make sure that it covers at least one or two general education requirements.

### **c. Other recommended courses**

## **3. Why is this the required/recommended first-year curriculum?**

We want students to take BUA 101 to ensure that they are actually aware of what the business majors are (finance, accounting, marketing and management). The BUA 101 course is also meant to start students thinking and acting more professionally. BUA 235 allows the student to feel that they are making progress in the major while giving them exposure to relevant business information not found in BUA 101.

We also base the remainder of our courses on what the prerequisites are for sophomore and first-semester junior courses. We feel that this is a good start that helps to keep them on track for graduation, but does give them a little room to explore courses that may interest them.

Moving forward, we plan to conduct a broader faculty conversation this summer/fall to consider alternative elective courses outside MBS that could add opportunities for non-MBS minors and concentrations to our students. For example, adding courses in new-media, graphic design, webpage development as non-MBS electives to count possibly as Marketing electives could provide more flexibility to pursue both a Business major as well as a Non-Business minor. The thought is that this flexibility could potentially help with first-retention.

### **a. What are expected student-learning outcomes?**

In accordance with the full list of objectives of the Business School for student learning, BUA101 addresses and/or assesses several learning objectives that have been determined to be critical

to the development of all business majors. Specific learning goals addressed, reinforced, and assessed include:

- **General Business Knowledge.** Our graduates will demonstrate a mastery of basic business theory, principles, & knowledge in core business disciplines.
- **Business Communication.** Our graduates will prepare and present effective business communications using both written and oral applications. The course includes individual and team presentations and written deliverable. It also includes creating a resume and to attend a writing workshop provided by the Career Center.
- **Ethics.** Students will recognize ethical components of business problems and decisions, and understand and apply various ethical perspectives.
- **Multicultural Perspectives.** Students will know and understand the multicultural and international issues that impact business and operations in a global society.

**b. How successful is this curriculum at producing expected outcomes?**

Please keep in mind, we only “introduce” these learning goals (linked with AACSB) in BUA101; we later reinforce and assess these learning goals in upper-division level courses in their junior and senior year.

**4. What are the risks associated with this curriculum (e.g., multiple high DFW rate courses in the same semester; excessive options for fulfilling General Education requirements without guidance)?**

According to EAB, our first-year retention rate of fall 2017 was 82 percent (without pre-business). If we include pre-business, our first-year retention rate was 78 percent. When pre-business students were advised by explorations in 2016, the first-year retention rate was 65 percent. In contrast, when pre-business students were advised by the staff of the business school (2017), the rate increased to 72 percent.

We examined the last three years DFW data (EAB) and included all our first-year classes, total enrollment of first-year students and percent of DFW. The DFW data suggests a general increasing trend (see below). However, the BUA101 data is in-line with our past five-year MBS strategic plan to pursue work-readiness, professionalism and student accountability. Faculty have been pushing for higher standards (e.g., not accepting late assignments, deductions for misspellings) and viewed our first-year courses as key to set the tone and expectation early.

The DFW data suggest some risk with the current curriculum for our first-year accounting majors. Taking Principles of Financial Accounting (BUA201), which is a difficult course, could potentially discourage a student to pursue accounting as a major, or worse, decide to pursue a non-business major and transfer to a different unit or school. The challenge is that many of our Accounting majors are interested in sitting for the Certified Public Accounting (CPA) exam after completing their degree, which requires 150 credits. A solution that faculty have considered in the past is to raise the maximum internship credits allowed during a summer from 6 credits to 15 credits to make it easier to reach 150 credits. In the meantime, we plan on adding tutors to all our BUA201 sections. However, more conversations among our faculty are needed.

The high DFW numbers in BUA235 seems to be driven by inconsistencies between sections and instructors. We plan on encouraging MIS faculty to engage in a conversation regarding performance expectation, grading, rubrics, and pedagogy delivery for more consistency.

#### **Fall 2018**

BUA 101 (263 students) 27.0%  
 BUA 235 (169 students) 23.1%  
 BUA 201 (24 students) 16%  
 ECO 120 (312 students not all BUA) 29.5%  
 PSY 100 (693 students not all BUA) 25.5%  
 CMJ 103 (282 students not all BUA) 8.9%

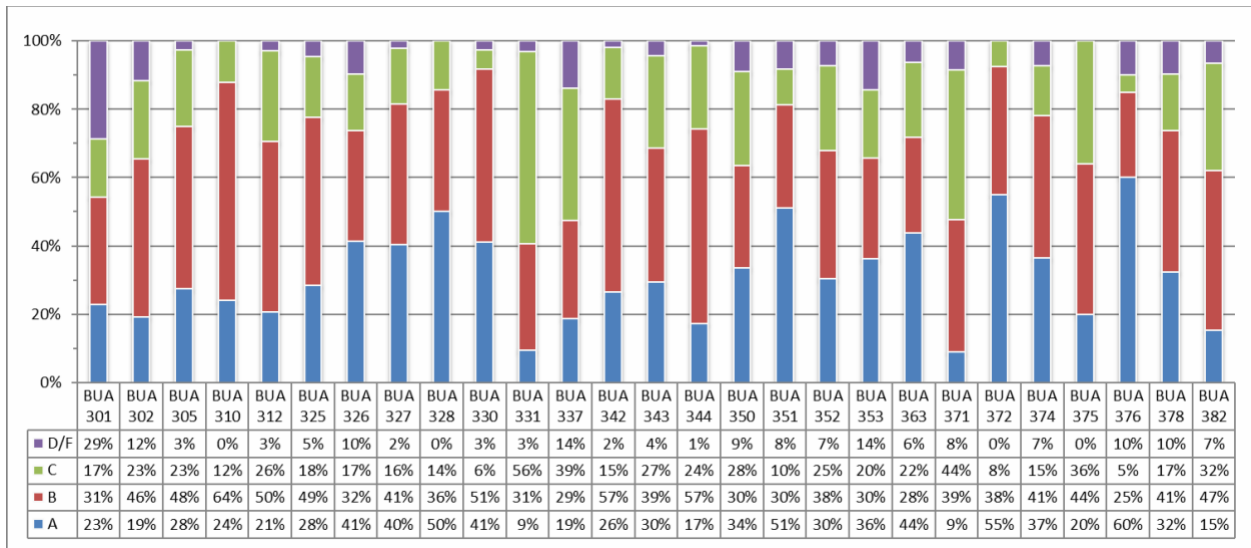
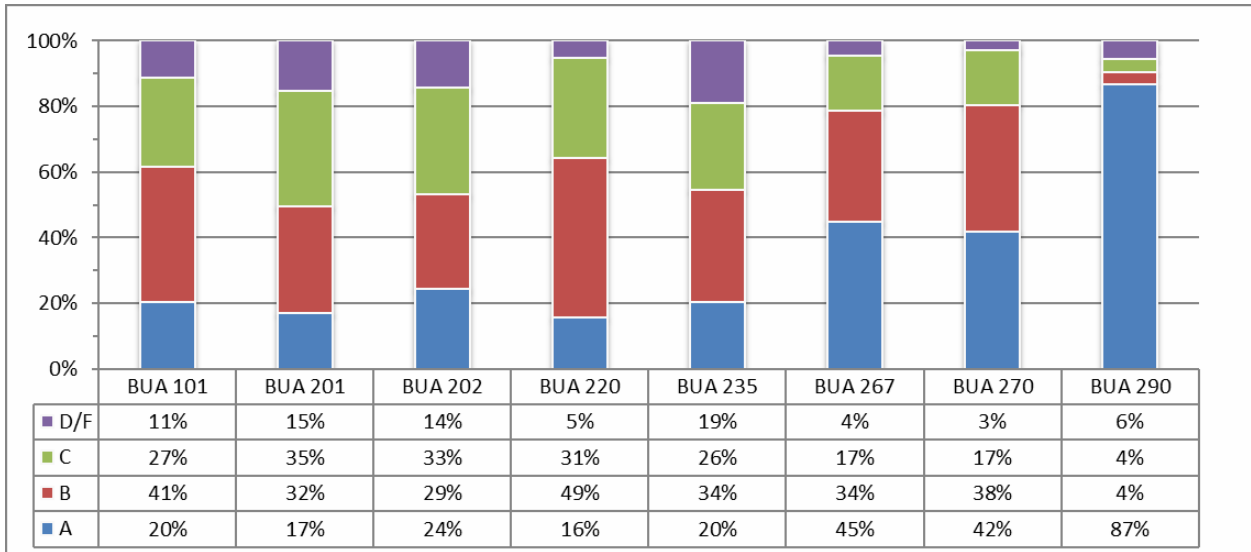
#### **Fall 2017**

BUA 101 (269 students) 13.8%  
 BUA 235 (181 students) 23.2%  
 BUA 201 (31 students) 38.7%  
 ECO 120 (298 students) 20.1%  
 ECO 121 (161 students not all BUA) 23.0% (spring 2018)  
 PSY 100 (816 students) 21.6%  
 CMJ 103 (260 students) 15.4%

#### **Fall 2016**

BUA 101 (223 students) 7.2%  
 BUA 235 (145 students) 7.6%  
 BUA 201 (22 students) 36.4%  
 ECO 120 (275 students) 19.6%  
 ECO 121 (152 students) 21.1% (spring 2017)  
 PSY 100 (720 students) 20.3%  
 CMJ 103 (276 students) 12.7%

Not surprisingly, OIR data on percentage of 2017-2018 letter grade by course at both lower-division and upper-division show higher rates of D/F (not including W) in accounting and math-related courses (see both tables below).



**5. In light of risk assessment, what are the alternative first-year curricula?**

Students are given a chance to change their schedules over the summer before classes begin. Students are also given their Professional Academic Advisor's name and contact information. When advising for spring semester, Professional Academic Advisors go into BUA 101 course (which are moved to our computer lab) to help them understand MaineStreet and to create their wish list. If students wish to meet one-on-one with their advisor, they are encouraged to do so by making an appointment.

With respect to DFWs in accounting, faculty could consider making our introductory accounting courses sophomore level courses only regardless of major. However, this would require alternative course offerings to our accounting majors (e.g. more generous summer internship credit maximums).

#### **6. What practices, resources, and/or tactics are in place to mitigate risks?**

The BUA 101 course is designed with the intent to minimize risk. We generally cap the BUA101 classes at 40. This provides basic business knowledge of majors, cohort building, opportunity for teamwork and presentation skill training, access and building relationships with the instructor, and early adoption of study habits and professionalism.

For non-business classes, we do not have any practices, resources and/or tactics in place to support our first-year students. We do, however, encourage them to visit the Tutor Center if they contact us when they feel that they are struggling with a class.

#### **7. What additional steps can be taken to mitigate risk?**

We are hoping that using the "at risk" student function in Navigate will help us to know when our students are struggling. We currently ask faculty to report to our Undergraduate Programs Office when students have been regularly absent from their course. We then check to see if the student is attending their other courses. If they are, we ask them to come to see the Associate Dean. If the student is found to not be attending any of their courses, we send them an email usually titled "Are you okay". If we receive no response to the email within 24 hours, we call the student's cell phone. If there is no answer, we contact the Dean of Students Office to alert them to a potential student in crisis. If our budget allows, we are also considering turning some of our adjuncts into tutors to help struggling first year students. Finally, we are considering capping enrollment and raising the GPA requirement for our incoming students.