

Sloan-C Effectiveness Practice

Learning Effectiveness

Key Practice: Online Executive MBA Orientation

Institution: Centre for Innovative Management, Athabasca University, Canada

How this practice improved learning effectiveness: Students complete a one-week online MBA Orientation immediately before they start the Executive MBA program. By structuring the orientation like an online MBA course, students pace readings and assignments during the week the way they would for an eight-week course.

Students learn how to participate in asynchronous online discussions by reading a short article on case studies and discussing the merits and disadvantages of learning from case studies. Students practice writing assignments by reading a short article on Lotus Notes[®] and summarizing a 100-word response on it. Students also read an internet article on time management and submit the appropriate American Psychological Association reference for the article. Although the assignments are not graded, students do receive generalized feedback on their submissions. The orientation also introduces students to some key university policies (such as academic conduct) and students learn how to navigate library databases.

Evidence (or plan to obtain evidence): The results from the 2004 orientations (n=102) using pre- and post-orientation survey questions indicated that the orientation increased student confidence, academic skill development, effective time management skills, and the development of technology skill sets that promote and support successful participation in online learning environments. This was most evident in the results to the survey question where 98/102 students (96.1%) strongly agreed that *“Having completed the Orientation Week, I feel more comfortable starting the MBA program than I would have without the orientation.”*

Estimated costs associated with this practice: The cost is low because we have one MBA graduate function as the orientation coach for each intake. The cost to students is low because we do not charge students for the orientation yet it saves them considerable time and reduces their anxieties and concerns about the program.

Relation to other pillars: Learning effectiveness and student satisfaction are enhanced because students can practice using the databases, engage in online discussions, and ask questions about the program before they start their courses. This practice is innovative because we use orientation exercises to achieve two aims – the exercises allow students to practice their skills and gain informative content. The approach relates to the access pillar in that although we are using the orientation as an asynchronous learning technique, we have also used it as a self-study technique with students taking single MBA courses in our program (as credit towards another degree) and the orientation achieved its objectives in helping those students prepare to participate effectively in their single MBA courses as

well. The orientation relates to the faculty satisfaction pillar in that it reduces the amount of time faculty spend orienting students to how the courses work as well as some of the basic expectations. Finally, with respect to replicability, the orientation can be adapted to undergraduate as well as other graduate level programs.

References, supporting documents:

Kanuka, H., & Jugdev, K. (2006). Distance education MBA students: An investigation into the use of an orientation course to address academic and social integration issues. *Open Learning*, 21(1) (in press).

Useful links:

<http://klaatu-dev.pc.athabascau.ca:8080/dspace/handle/2149/296>

<http://www.mba.athabascau.ca/Titan/aucimwebsite.nsf/frmHome?OpenForm>

Summary: The orientation improve learning effectiveness because the content is geared towards learning important course navigation skills, practising online collaboration, and building student confidence as new graduate students. We are able to address student concerns and anxieties up front before they start their courses and we are able to ensure that students are set up properly in terms of the technology, so that they can start their first course (Strategic Management) and “hit the ground running.”

Other Comments: None

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