ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY BUSINESS SCHOOLS

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Introduction

To what extent are “business and environment” courses being offered in Australian university business schools? How many institutions provide such programs, and do they include these courses as an integrated suite of units, or simply as stand-alone offerings?

In recent years, the World Resources Institute (WRI) has surveyed environmental course offerings in MBA programs in the United States (WRI 1998, 1999, 2001a). These reports have attempted to evaluate trends within the MBA program in business schools, and have sought to identify if an institution provides coursework in environmental business management (EBM) and/or conducts research in this field. Their results identified a number of highly-rated institutions, such as Harvard University, Loyola University, University of Michigan (Ann Arbor), University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill), and Canada’s York University. Several other prominent business schools (such as Stanford, Wharton and Yale) also received high commendations for EBM teaching/research.

The authors of the study concluded that the three surveys indicated a number of trends in the field (WRI 2001a):

- There was a slow, but discernible, growth in the number of courses offered, in the number of student enrolments, in the level of faculty research, and in the number of professorial-level appointments;
- Despite this, the responsibility for introduction and growth of such courses still tended to remain in the hands of “individual champions” – dedicated staff who were committed to the field. Institutional support often lagged behind the activities of these isolated advocates; and
- Many courses essentially consisted of stand-alone units that were not integrated into the remainder of the course curriculum. This failed to recognise the role of the environment as a strategic business tool, and often marginalised the field.

Little evaluation along similar lines has been performed in Australia. Accordingly, the purpose of this paper is to provide an initial examination of EBM courses throughout the country, and to establish a baseline from which future developments in this field can be evaluated.

The study was confined to an examination of “environment and business” units and courses offered by business schools. For the purposes of simplicity, it deliberately excluded courses run by other divisions or faculties of each institution. It attempted to report on what business schools were offering and teaching in the field of environmental management (hence the use of the term environmental business management) (Hutchinson & Hutchinson 1998), and omitted all other material. For
example, development studies is a popular subject in several universities, but is excluded from the results where it was offered by a humanities school or other division (which is most usually the case); likewise for units in environmental issues offered by science, engineering and biology schools.

Furthermore, the study did not seek to look at the broader issues of “business and social responsibility” or business ethics, since it was not usually possible to determine how much content was given to environmental matters per se.

Information was collected in the last quarter of 2001, by consulting the web sites of all publicly-funded Australian universities, plus a number of private universities and non-universities that have degree-granting status. The survey results are by no means exhaustive, because many of the university sites were password protected and it was impossible to dig deeply. In many cases, even the public part of the university’s website did not provide enough information to discover if any EBM units or courses were actually offered. Differing web page formats, poor layout and site maps, and out-of-date links all contributed to difficulties in determining what was available in some institutions. Where this is the case, the organization has been marked as having no offering and, hence, the results may underestimate the presence of offerings.

Overview of the Australian Situation

The attached table provides a summary of the results obtained. Of the forty-three institutions listed, a total of twenty-five appeared to provide relevant individual undergraduate units, and eighteen offered postgraduate units in the field. Two universities (Curtin and Notre Dame) offered undergraduate business majors in the field, and six institutions offered postgraduate majors.

The most common topics on offer were units in eco-tourism, environmental law, and environmental accounting. Beyond these three areas, very few institutions offer specific environmental units in other aspects of the traditional core business curriculum. There are, for example, hardly any units in green management, and apparently none in marketing and the environment.

Moreover, in almost all cases the units offered are treated as options, electives or other forms of stand-alone units. Hardly any are compulsory units, except where a major in EBM is provided. This situation is similar to the phenomenon documented in WRI surveys, where it was found that the majority of course offerings were also optional units (WRI 1998, 1999, 2001a).

Although the content of individual mainstream units has not been examined, it would appear that business schools are still largely treating the environment as a specialist or “boutique” issue which is only of interest to a limited number of students. The failure to incorporate environmental considerations into compulsory core requirements also appears to indicate that there is little understanding of the environment as a strategic issue, and one that should be addressed in all the different aspects of a firm’s operations.

Future Directions

It is intended that this data will be supplemented in future years by a more detailed survey of institutional offerings, student numbers and staff research activity. Such information will ideally be collected by direct surveys of business school heads,
and comprise more information than a simple list of “yes” or “no” answers. One approach would be to conduct such a study on a biennial basis, so that over a time period of several years a comprehensive picture of the field, and of changes within it, can emerge.

The author would be pleased to hear from any readers if any institutions have been mistakenly classified in the attached table, or of new course proposals being developed.

References


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Table 1: Australian University Business Schools Offerings in Environmental Business Management, as at December 2001.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INSTITUTION</th>
<th>U/G Units</th>
<th>U/G Major</th>
<th>P/G Units</th>
<th>P/G Major</th>
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Do significant differences exist between the espoused environmental attitudes of small business (SME) owner/managers, and the actual environmental performance of their firm? Most prior research in this arena has indicated that there is a substantial gap between the environmental views and attitudes of small business owner/managers (which are generally positive and supportive) and the actual practices of their firms (which generally tend to lag behind).

The purpose of this Ph.D. study was to measure the current environmental attitudes of SME managers in one particular industry, and to assess whether significant links exist between the espoused environmental attitudes of such owner/managers and the actual environmental performance of their firms. The study also sought to determine if a number of personal (predictor) variables identified in the environmental business management literature (age, gender, and education level) could be used to identify...
small business owner/managers with a high level of environmental attitudes and performance. Finally, it also examined whether certain external variables (consumer demands, capital availability, firm size, time and information resources) have an impact on the translation of personal attitudes into business performance.

These issues were examined through a quantitative study of 156 retail (also commonly referred to as “community”) pharmacies in metropolitan and regional Western Australia, complemented by case study interviews. Pharmacies were chosen because they are limited under state law to a small size, and are relatively easy to locate and survey. Attitudes towards the environment were measured using a pre-existing scale, the Australian Environmental Attitude Scale (AEAS), developed by Ray & Hall (1995; see also Ray 1975). The environmental performance outcomes of firms was measured through so-called “Buying Green” behaviour (that is, the purchasing of environmentally-friendly products for in-store usage).

Most respondents showed a strong “green” (environmentally-friendly) attitude, but no statistically significant relationship between owner attitudes and their firm’s actual performance. In other words, there is no clear link between green views and green behaviour in small businesses. Small firm owner/managers with a strong environmental conscience do not always run the most environmentally-friendly firms.

The results also indicate that demographic features are not usually reliable indicators of green attitudes and behaviour. For example, neither an owner’s education level nor their gender have a statistically significant link to “green-ness” within the firm. Age is a good indicator of environmental attitudes (that is, younger owners tend to have greener attitudes), but fails to indicate reliably which firms actually behave in a more environmentally-responsible manner.

However, three external factors were found to have a significant relationship with a small firm’s level of environmental performance: the amount of time available for owners to undertake discretionary business activity; the number of owners working in the business; and the level of environmental information available to business owners.

Business owners/managers who have more free time, who have other partners who can help in their decision-making, and those who have greater access to environmental information tend to produce the greenest firms.

These results would appear to indicate that encouraging SMEs to become greener is not simply a matter of seeking out business owner/managers who conform to a particular type of demographic profile. Indeed, the evidence suggests that even strong green views of an owner are no reliable measure of the actual performance of their firm.

Instead, business advisers may be more effective if they concentrate on providing small firms with access to simple, easy-to-understand and easy to use environmental improvement ideas and tools. Checklists, best practice examples, “how to do it” guidelines, and referrals to specialist environmental services are all part of the tool kit which SMEs need if they are to become greener. In addition, such measures need to be simple to implement and require only a minimum amount of time.
For more information on the results of this project, or to obtain a summary in PDF form, feel free to email the author at schaperm@cbs.curtin.edu.au

References


PHD IN PROGRESS – BRONWYNN ADAMSON

Marketisation of Water in Australia

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Bronwynn Adamson is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the Graduate School of Public Policy at The Australian National University. She is nearing the completion of her thesis on the marketisation of water in Australia. Bronwynn’s thesis examines the issue as to the extent that marketisation is seen as providing efficient governance in the provision of the water services in Australia. She asks, does the marketisation of water services ensure effective control and accountability in the public’s interest.

“Marketisation is a generic term used to describe the various degrees to which market-based mechanisms have been adopted in the public sector. These mechanisms range from simply contracting out, to corporatisation through to privatisation. The term privatisation is in general use but it is lamentably imprecise there being both broad and very narrow definitions discussed in the literature at the same time. The foundations of marketisation are the ‘New Public Management’ reforms which emphasise management skills, performance targets, separation of policy, commercial and non-commercial functions, the use of private sector practices such as corporate plans, short term contracts, and monetary incentives and cost-cutting. New Public Management emphasises a preference for private sector ownership, the use of contracting out and contextability in the provision of public services.

The three main contexts of marketisation are:
1. opening up to competition of areas previously reserved to government eg water;
2. contracting out by the public sector to private suppliers of goods and services in areas such as employment services and information technology;
3. outright sale of part or all of government assets or businesses to private sector owners.

My thesis conducts a comparative case study analysis of reforms in South Australia, Victoria and New South Wales and water regulation in Queensland.