Mission / Purpose
The mission/purpose of the Business Foundations Graduate Certificate program is to meet the needs of students who do not have undergraduate degrees in business, but are seeking (in need of) graduate education in the foundational areas of business in order to enhance graduate education in other fields, or contribute to career development in their current employment fields. The Business Foundations Graduate Certificate program seeks to eliminate barriers to graduate foundational business education; the program consists of 4 online graduate courses and has no prerequisite requirements. The certificate program was developed after a 3 year process of development within the College of Business and included a review of regional competitors and national trends in graduate business education at AACSB-accredited institutions. In addition, a current database of prospective graduate students (for the MBA program) revealed that over 50% of current prospects did not have an undergraduate degree in business. The certificate program supports such external needs and also meets internal needs at the University to support other graduate programs on campus with business courses/electives at the graduate level. After approval in the College of Business in accordance with all curriculum approval processes, the certificate program was approved by Graduate Council in September of 2013 and was offered for the first time in the Spring semester of 2014.

Student Learning Outcomes/Objectives, with Any Associations and Related Measures, Targets, Findings, and Action Plans

SLO 1: Basic Knowledge of the Behavioral Areas of Business
Students will demonstrate basic knowledge of concepts, theories and practices in the behavioral areas of business (management and marketing)

Related Measures:

M 1: Examination questions in BA 600
Students will demonstrate basic knowledge of management concepts, theories and practices on a summative examination in BA 600 (Foundations of Management) assessed with 20 multiple choice questions and 12 essay questions covering individual behavior, leadership, motivation, and teamwork.

Source of Evidence: Writing exam to assure certain proficiency level

Target:
Eighty percent (80%) of students will meet or exceed expectations on exam question performance.

Findings (2013-2014) - Target: Met
Findings are reported for the Spring, 2014 semester offering of BA 600, as an 8 week online course. Seven (7) students were enrolled in the new graduate course and completed the examination. The class average score was 86.2% across the examination questions. Three students (n=3) exceeded expectations (43%), three students met performance expectations (n=3, 43%) and only one student failed to meet expectations (n=1, 14%). Therefore, 86% of students met or exceeded expectations for their basic knowledge of management concepts, theories and practices.

M 2: Article summaries and applications in BA 650
Students will demonstrate basic knowledge of marketing concepts, theories and applications in BA 650 (Foundations of Marketing) by completing article summaries of classic academic articles in marketing and then answering application questions about each article.

Source of Evidence: Written assignment(s), usually scored by a rubric
**Target:**
Eighty percent (80%) of students will meet or exceed expectations on classic marketing article summaries and application questions.

**Findings (2013-2014) - Target: Met**
Findings are reported for the Spring, 2014 cohort enrolled in BA 650, an 8 week online course in Marketing Foundations. Each article summary was assessed using a 3 part "summary" rubric that evaluated: capture of the main point, restatement of and expansion of ideas and organization. The student's ability to apply the classic article was assessed using a 3 part "reaction" rubric that evaluated: statement of opinions, support of opinions and degree of reflection. A total of 5 students were enrolled in the course. For the first article summary 2 students (40%) exceeded expectations on the main point and 3 students (60%) met expectations; four students (80%) exceeded expectations for restatement of and expansion of ideas and 1 student (20%) met expectations. Four students (80%) exceeded expectations for organization and one student (20%) met expectations. No student failed to meet expectations on any dimension of the ability to summarize a classic article. The ability to apply the classic article and react to the concepts was more challenging for the students on the first article. All students (100%) met expectations on statements of opinion, and the ability to support those opinions; no student exceeded expectations or failed to meet expectations. One student (20%) exceeded expectations on the degree of reflection and the other four students (80%) met expectations. No student failed to meet expectations in any of the three reaction areas assessed on the first article.

Performance improved on the third classic article summary. All 5 students (100%) exceeded expectations on capturing the main points, restating and expanding ideas, and organization when writing article summaries. Results were similar on the ability to apply marketing concepts on the third article summary. All 5 students (100%) exceeded expectations on statement of opinions, 3 students (60%) exceeded expectations in ability to support those opinions and 2 students (40%) met expectations. All five students (100%) exceeded expectations on the degree of reflection expressed when applying the third article. Again, no student failed to meet expectations in any of the areas assessed; therefore, 100% met or exceeded expectations.

Students improved from the first to the third essay, especially in the ability to react to the articles. In future class offerings, the faculty member will place more emphasis on the need to support opinions expressed.

**SLO 2: Basic Knowledge of the Financial Areas of Business**
Students will demonstrate basic knowledge of concepts, theories and practices in the financial areas of business (accounting and finance).

**Related Measures:**

**M 3: Examination questions on final exam in BA 611**
Students will demonstrate basic knowledge of accounting concepts, theories and practices in BA 611 (Accounting Foundations) and will be assessed with a summative measure of 26 examination questions on the final examination.

Source of Evidence: Writing exam to assure certain proficiency level

**Target:**
Eighty percent (80%) of students will meet or exceed expectations for the ability to correctly answer 26 examination questions on the final exam.

**Findings (2013-2014) - Target: Met**
Findings are reported for the Spring, 2014 cohort enrolled in BA 611, an 8 week online course (n=7). The class aggregate average on the 26 questions assessed was 77.5% correct answers. Three students (43%) exceeded expectations on their ability to correctly answer the 26 questions.
and 3 students (43%) met expectations. Only one student failed to meet expectations (14%) when correctly answering the 26 questions; this student correctly answered 57.5% of the questions. Therefore, 86% of students met or exceeded expectations in this assessment.

**M 4: Homework assignments in BA 670**

Students will demonstrate basic knowledge of financial concepts, theories and applications in BA 670 (Finance Foundations) and will be assessed with 8 different homework assignments. These assignments will cover bond valuation, stock valuation, capital budgeting and the cost of capital.

Source of Evidence: Academic direct measure of learning - other

**Target:**

Eighty percent (80%) of students will correctly answer questions on 8 finance homework assignments, assessed as a summative measure.

**Findings (2013-2014) - Target: Met**

Findings are reported for the Spring, 2014 cohort enrolled in BA 670, Finance Foundations, an 8 week online course. Thirteen students were enrolled in the course and completed all 8 assignments. Across the 8 assignments, 8 students (62%) exceeded performance expectations and 3 students (23%) met expectations. Only 2 students (15%) failed to meet expectations across the 8 homework assignments. The most challenging assignments dealt with stock valuation and the cost of capital. Therefore, 85% of students met or exceeded expectations in this assessment measure.

**Analysis Questions and Analysis Answers**

What specifically did your assessments show regarding proven strengths or progress you made on outcomes/objectives?

Our assessments for the first offering of the Business Foundations graduate certificate program show that non-business graduate students can meet or exceed expectations in the four essential business disciplines (accounting, finance, management and marketing). These results were consistent across the two learning outcomes established for the program, and across the four specific in-class assessments of performance.

What specifically did your assessments show regarding any outcomes/objectives that will require continued attention?

Our assessments do show a need for continual course development in this online certificate program. While all the targets were met, some students struggled in two of the courses (accounting and finance). As we continue to develop the certificate program, attention should be directed to better approaches for grasping financial concepts in an online environment.

**Annual Report Section Responses**

**Program Summary**

The Business Foundations graduate certificate was offered for the first time in the Spring, 2014 semester. The certificate consists of 4 online graduate courses in the foundational areas of business: accounting, finance, management and marketing. All courses were "piloted" as 8 week online courses during the term. For the initial semester of offering, the enrollment response was encouraging. At least 5 students completed two of the courses (Management Foundations and Marketing Foundations); 7 students completed Accounting Foundations and 13 students completed Finance Foundations. The initial assessment results indicate that the performance targets were met for each of the four assessment measures and two student learning outcomes.

As with all new program offerings, there is a learning curve. None of the faculty members involved in the spring classes had ever taught an online course (either undergraduate or graduate level). So, the professors learned during the semester just as student learning evolved in the four courses. Professors used a variety of assignments and learning techniques to convey the course material and to capture and assess student learning in the courses. All involved with the new certificate program agree that course delivery will improve in
subsequent semesters. That being said, all involved agree that the program launch was successful.

The Spring semester, 2014 also documented market response from multiple external and internal markets; this was the intent of the new program and the logic behind the certificate program’s design. Some students enrolled in the courses to earn the graduate certificate; currently 7 students are enrolled in the certificate program as of Fall, 2014 and none of the students have completed the certificate yet. These certificate students come from a variety of undergraduate degree fields, and are using the certificate program for career advancement purposes. A number of the students enrolled in select courses to meet prerequisites for the MBA program. Two of the courses (Accounting Foundations and Finance Foundations) can be used for that purpose, and enrollment in those courses was higher during the spring term. Therefore, these certificate class students hope to become MBA students in the future.

The certificate program also met internal needs within the University. During the Spring 2014 semester two students enrolled in classes to use them as electives in the Medical Laboratory Science masters degree program. During the spring term, the College of Business formalized a partnership with that program and expects this enrollment trend to continue. Also during the spring term, the College of Business formalized an agreement with the College of Nursing. The College of Nursing restructured the old Nurse Executive graduate program into the new "RN to DPN Leadership in Nursing" program, and the 4 certificate courses will be required in that degree program. We expect the courses to serve other graduate needs at USM; as of this writing, Sports Management masters students and Science Education Ph.D. students have enrolled in Fall 2014 certificate courses and are using those courses to enhance their graduate degrees.

Continuous Improvement Initiatives
The primary continuous improvement initiative is to continue development of this new graduate certificate program in business. While all four online courses were offered in the spring, 2014 semester by experienced full professors in business, none of these professors had taught an online course before. As the program develops, the faculty will discover better methods for enhanced learning in the online environment. This will be critical for the future success of the Business Foundations graduate certificate program. The faculty members involved should continue to seek creative learning approaches and best practice, since the goal of the program is to extend graduate education in business to individuals without formal business education.

Closing the Loop
The first phase of loop closing for this new program has been at the faculty level. Of the 4 courses offered in spring, 2014 students reported positive comments for 3 of the courses. Students were generally dissatisfied with, and frustrated by the faculty member’s approach in one of the online classes. Sensing a poor fit between the faculty member and the course goals, this course will be taught by a different faculty member when it is next offered in 2015. On a micro level, the faculty members involved in the other 3 courses have been actively sharing their experiences with learning approaches and methods for delivering course materials. For example, one faculty member had great success with videos and article summaries; so, other faculty members will experiment with these approaches when their course is offered again. In addition, one faculty member selected a textbook that will not be used in the next offering of the course (due to the text’s expense and lack of online, web-supported learning resources).

Therefore, the initial loop closing is focused on product improvement for this new graduate product offered by the College of Business.