

Applied Business Technology Program Review

Faculty of Access and Continuing Education

Dean's Summary

Submitted by:

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Applied Business Technology (ABT) Program Review

Dean's Summary, February 2020

The Applied Business Technology (ABT) program underwent a program review in 2018-19.

The ABT program is housed within the Faculty of Access and Continuing Education (FACE). It is a cohort program that was offered three times during the 2018-19 academic year at UFV's Clearbrook Centre: two (2) cohorts that ran from September 2018 to March 2019; one that ran from January to June 2019. It has two (2) full-time faculty members and three (3) sessional instructors. Because the program has no clerical support, the program head is given releases to screen and interview students, interview and hire sessional instructors, schedule classes, and assign courses.

In accordance with Policy 189 (Academic Program Reviews), the Program Review External Committee (Committee) conducted a site visit in May 2019 at the Clearbrook Centre where the ABT program is offered. The Committee's review was guided by the ABT self study as informed by the Dean's scope letter. Data provided by Institutional Research and collected from students and stakeholders through surveys provided valuable information that informed the self-study. During the site visit, the Committee met with several stakeholders, including current and former students, faculty, sessional instructors, several UFV senior administrators, and employers who take ABT practicum students and hire program graduates.

The External Review Report (Report) was received in June 2019. As the following excerpt from its Executive Summary shows, the Committee was very positive about the program:

The theme that emerged from our discussions with these various groups was a respect for the ABT department and the value the program brings to the university, to the community, and to students. Our discussions clearly highlighted the commitment and expertise that is demonstrated by the ABT. Employers and graduates speak highly of the skills developed as a result of completing the program and of their readiness for entering the workplace. Faculty were obviously engaged in the program and their level of commitment to UFV, the program, and the students was evident. (External Review Report, June 2019, p. 2)

In the Conclusion of the report the Committee states the following:

The ABT program has a number of strengths that were made evident as part of the review process. These are a:

- committed, experienced faculty who are dedicated to program success and that are innovative and forward thinking about the curriculum. Both permanent faculty members demonstrated commitment to UFV through their participation in a variety of internal and external committees. Students are well supported by faculty and expressed confidence in approaching them with questions or to discuss issues. Faculty evaluations identify that students are satisfied with their interactions with department faculty.
- supportive administration. The Dean plays an important role in supporting the department. It was apparent that the Dean values the ABT program and its faculty. It was also clear that the faculty recognize this support and have developed good communication and a strong working relationship with the Dean.
- strong connection with community employers. The employers spoke highly of the program and their responsive communications and interactions with the ABT faculty.

- demonstrated success in preparing students to become skilled employees. Graduates are actively recruited by local employers.
- high level of student satisfaction. This is demonstrated by high retention rates and the fact that many graduates go on to either apply for work at UFV or take other courses and programs at UFV as a result of their positive experience in the program.
- demonstrated commitment to Indigenization, including developing ties with Indigenous employers and the coordination of registration/program acceptance procedures across a variety of different Band offices that support students with specialized funding issues that can sometimes provide barriers for students. (External Review Report, p. 9)

These strengths speak to the value UFV's ABT program brings to its students, the University, and the broader community.

As stated in its report, "The External Committee's main recommendations revolve primarily around ensuring adequate supports are in place to sustain the program, as well as foster further program development needed to keep ABT current and meeting employer needs" (External Review Report, p. 2).

Contribution to the University's Strategic Goals, Vision, Mission, Plans, and Values

The Committee found that the ABT program contributes to UFV's strategic goals, vision, mission, plans, and values in a number of ways, including, "... providing accessible and challenging learning, fostering critical thinking, providing leadership development opportunities as well as practical skills that students require for employment" (External Review Report, p. 3). One program strength noted in the Report related to Indigenization; the Committee clearly appreciated the program's commitment to Indigenization. No gaps were identified by the Committee in its report.

Alignment with Institutional Learning Outcomes

The Committee's report identified how the ABT program aligns with each of UFV's Institutional Learning Outcomes (ILOs) through its learning outcomes, instructors' teaching strategies and practices, and support for learners. No gaps were identified; however, the Committee suggested that the program could expand its regional and global contribution "by establishing practicums with non-profit organizations" (External Review Report, p. 5).

Ministry, Professional/Industry and Academic Standards

The Committee indicated that, for the most part, the ABT program aligns with Ministry, professional/industry, and academic standards. It noted that "ABT faculty participate and collaborate with the provincial articulation group for ABT programs" and that the program's "Academic standards reflect industry expectations" (External Review Report, p. 6). Although no recommendations were made that related specifically to standards, the Committee suggested "Web 2.0 and Cloud technology access at UFV should reflect current practices at other BC institutions. As a result, it is recommended that UFV update its policy and help the ABT program meet the skill requirements employers are demanding" (External Review Report, p. 11).

Standards of Educational Practices

The Committee was positive about the standards of educational practices of the ABT program, noting the following:

The faculty take a varied approach to teaching methods and assessment practices that enable students to demonstrate a variety of skill competencies. There are theoretical, practical, and self-directed learning opportunities throughout the program. Student practicums allow for the integration of a wide variety of skill sets and provide unique experiential learning opportunities. Due to the small department size and the two permanent faculty member's strong commitment to communication and teamwork there is consistency across the delivery of the program. (External Review Report, p. 7)

It also noted that the program does not reflect some current practices evident in similar programs at other post-secondary institutions due to what the Committee viewed to be "outdated UFV policy" (External Review Report, p. 7). It was the Committee's opinion that current policy prevents instructors from incorporating Cloud computing into ABT coursework despite it "becoming normalized in the workplace" (External Review Report, p. 7). Although the Committee did not include this limitation in its recommendations, it did address this in its suggestions (External Review Report, p. 11).

Utilization of Resources

The Committee appreciated how the program shares both lab space and sessional instructors with UFV's Continuing Education department, which is also located at Clearbrook Centre, and acknowledged that this arrangement "is cost-effective and allows for collaboration of space and software licensing" (External Review Report, p. 8). That being said, the committee also noted the need for additional resources for the program, including providing a shuttle bus service to Clearbrook Centre, increased access to counsellors for students, and a dedicated administrative support person. The Committee's recommendations reflect the need for additional resources for the program.

Conclusion: Overview and Recommendations

The External Report included the following seven (7) recommendations, each of which is followed by the ABT faculty's response.

Other suggestions made by the Committee follow the recommendations.

Recommendation 1: Move ABT to a base-funded model

Consider moving ABT to a base-funded model. The cost-recovery model is not effective and potentially could have a negative impact on instructional practices because there is often overwhelming pressure to ensure that all registered students are retained to meet budget targets. ABT consistently produces solid FTEs and has a strong reputation for quality and enrolment. It is said to be a valuable program in the UFV offerings. It provides industry-relevant, employment training in a field identified as being in high demand (e.g., Labour Market Outlook 2025). ABT has clearly demonstrated that it is sustainable through a long track record of program delivery, student satisfaction, high retention rates, ongoing demand, and employer support. (External Review Report, p. 10)

Response

ABT faculty support this recommendation as it would allow for greater flexibility and risk-taking in programming and curriculum development. Faculty are always cognizant of the financial pressures of a cost-recovery model, which negatively impacts many of the decision-making processes undertaken in the program.

Recommendation 2: Addition of a third permanent faculty member

Another permanent faculty member would help to reduce the risks associated with current faculty taking time to do professional development, research, or program development. An additional position would also support mentoring of sessional faculty and could take on specific roles such as coordinating work practicums, developing stronger ties with employers, and teaching content-specific courses. Additionally, there are areas where faculty would like to develop more programming, including a post-ABT option; however, there is no time with current workloads to focus on this kind of development. (External Review Report, p. 10)

Response

ABT faculty support the addition of a third permanent faculty member as this would allow the program to explore opportunities for expansion, which could involve the reintroduction of a third cohort or the development and implementation of the aforementioned post-grad certificate. A third faculty position would also support the development of a robust succession plan.

Recommendation 3: Business analyst review.

Consider providing ABT with the short-term services of a Business Analyst to review institutional systems and workflow so that the program can determine the most effective use of resources and faculty time. A Business Analyst could determine where the workload pressure points are and help the ABT faculty develop a sustainability plan. (External Review Report, p. 10)

Response

ABT faculty support this initiative, and it would be most effective if completed in 2020/2021 after one of the faculty members returns from sabbatical.

Recommendation 4: Develop advisory committee

Develop and maintain an advisory committee with local employers. This will support the program in staying current with curriculum development and will allow for deeper connections in the community, which in turn benefits practicum placements and job opportunities for graduates. (External Review Report, p. 11)

Response

ABT faculty support the implementation of an advisory committee. Faculty will identify potential members and initiate the implementation of an advisory committee in the 2019/2020 academic year. Current close ties with the business community will allow for ready implementation of this recommendation.

Recommendation 5: Dedicated clerical support

Provide dedicated clerical support on-site to the ABT department. If resources are limited, consider even two days a week of dedicated on-site support. This level of support would free up valuable time for the Department Head to focus on program development. This could also help to streamline certain work processes, including student information sessions and assessment testing. A closer working relationship with the Office of the Registrar (OReg) and admissions staff could reduce the communications work involved with prospective students. (External Review Report, p. 11)

Response

ABT faculty has arranged with the dean's office for part-time clerical support from the assistant to the dean. The assistant will continue to support the program with clerical tasks as identified by faculty. On-site

support will be trialed in the 2019/2020 academic year. (Currently clerical assistance is delivered remotely.)

Another option is to provide an additional course release to the Department Head. This may provide an opportunity to hire another permanent faculty member, thereby helping to create a succession planning process. (External Review Report, p. 8)

ABT faculty support an additional course release for the program head going forward; building extra capacity to allow the recruitment of another faculty member would help ensure the long-term sustainability of the program.

Recommendation 6: Strategic marketing plan

Develop a strategic marketing plan for increasing enrolment diversity. Specifically, encouraging enrolment from a diverse population that is reflective of the Abbotsford population would be a goal. This could include, for example, actively trying to increase the male population and/or the South Asian population to reflect more closely the make-up of the Abbotsford community. (External Review Report, p. 11)

Response

ABT faculty support this recommendation as student diversity would strengthen the program and protect it from decreased enrolments in certain demographics. Increased recruitment and support of Indigenous students would also be a priority.

Recommendation 7: Prioritize succession planning

The department should strive to recruit sessional instructors with the ability to teach across a variety of content areas in the ABT program rather than having sessional instructors with only one area of expertise. (External Review Report, p. 11))

Response

The addition of a third permanent faculty member would help ensure faculty can teach across the curriculum. Sessional faculty hired for 2019/2020 (to cover a sabbatical leave) were recruited for their ability to teach a range of courses.

Additional Suggestions

In addition to the above recommendations, the Committee included the following suggestions based on discussions with faculty, former and current students and employers. The faculty's response follows each.

Shuttle bus for ABT students

The shuttle system for ABT students should be made a priority. ABT students are paying shuttle fees as part of their tuition; however, the shuttle does not actually come to the Clearbrook campus. The External Committee recommends that the Clearbrook campus be added to the schedule; perhaps having two drop offs in the morning and two pickup options in the later afternoon. This would increase opportunities for people in the Chilliwack area to attend.

Response

ABT faculty support this initiative, as increased public transportation options would benefit the students and reduce strain on the limited parking available at Clearbrook Centre.

Web 2.0 and Cloud computing

Web 2.0 and Cloud technology access at UFV should reflect current practices at other BC institutions. As a result, it is recommended that UFV update its policy and help the ABT program meet the skill requirements employers are demanding. (External Review Report, p. 11)

Response

ABT faculty have repeatedly requested access to technologies that can only be implemented through institutional policy change. For example, introduction of G Suite would be a useful tool within the program as would the availability of an institutionally-run WordPress instance (vs the current setup which is organized by a faculty member via a Canadian service provider). Additional examples are Microsoft's One Drive, MS 365, and various social media platforms. Faculty currently demonstrate many cloud-based examples within the classroom but are constrained by privacy legislation and institutional policy and are unable to require students to use/learn these platforms.

Outlook

Add explicit instruction and skill development on Outlook. Employers and students both report this is an important piece of software that is missing from the curriculum and that needs dedicated instructional time. (External Review Report, p. 11)

Response

ABT faculty have tried for years to have student access to the Exchange network, possibly through the use of temporary or reusable dummy accounts. Currently students are provided with Outlook workshops and are encouraged to explore (and implement) Outlook at home through their personal email. This is not the ideal solution, but until the program has access to fully robust (Exchange-networked) Outlook in the classroom, students will be unable to experience Outlook in its optimum form.

Accounting Software

The accounting curriculum should be updated to include Sage or QuickBooks. The Committee acknowledges that students must learn manual procedures, but having skill development in the area of computerized accounting would round out their experience. It should be noted that changes like this require curriculum development and delivery restructuring, both of which require someone to have dedicated time to focus on the implementation. (External Review Report, p. 11)

Response

The ABT program's bookkeeping course introduces students to bookkeeping principles and the language of accounting but is not intended to replace more comprehensive accounting training. The bookkeeping instructor has built a Sage introduction into the course, and students who are interested in pursuing a bookkeeping focus are encouraged to pursue Continuing Education's Bookkeeping for Small Business (BSB) program. ABT graduates only need to take four of the six BSB courses, as two of their ABT courses can be applied toward their BSB certificate (ABT 143: Bookkeeping and ABT 137: Spreadsheets).