

# UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, RIVERSIDE



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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE:  
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES, ARTS, AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA 92521-0132

February 11, 2019

TO: Dylan Rodriguez, Chair  
Academic Senate

FROM: Ad Hoc Committee appointed by the CHASS Executive Committee  
John Briggs  
Kim Yi Dionne  
Shawn Ragan  
Andrews Reath  
Lucille Chia, Chair

RE: Review of the Proposal by SoBA to Convert the Business Administration Major (BSAD) from a Two-Year Upper-Division Major to a Four-Year Major (Document of February 17, 2017; Addendum 1 of May 8, 2018; Addendum 2 of November 13, 2018)

After long and serious discussion of SoBA's proposal for a four-year undergraduate major in Business Administration, the ad hoc committee appointed by the CHASS Executive Committee wishes to emphasize the paramount importance of the educational welfare of all students at UCR, regardless of college or major. The following points reflect that concern.

## **The Proposal**

Many of the arguments and aspirations in SoBA's proposal for a four-year BSAD undergraduate major are laudable. SoBA argues that a four-year program would foster a greater sense of community among business students, and that advisors in a four-year Business major would be able to direct first- and second-year students to activities and programs in SoBA (Business learning communities, peer mentoring, mock interview workshops, job shadowing, etc.), to help them find internships earlier in the program, and encourage students to plan study abroad sooner. However, we have serious concerns about the proposal. First, it is not clear that moving to a four-year Business major housed in SoBA is the only or the best way to achieve these goals. Second, we see serious drawbacks for many students who would be in the program.

### **Options Listed by the External Review**

First, we note that the SoBA proposal of February 17, 2017 cites the External Review of SoBA from 2014, which identified four possible models for restructuring the undergraduate program going forward: 1) maintain the status quo; 2) take over the advising of Pre-Business students during their first two years; 3) directly admit freshmen into the Business School; and 4) pursue a hybrid approach that, e.g., could admit the best students into a SoBA Honors program. We find it notable that the External Review does not take a position on which of the four options is best. We agree that option 1 is not desirable, but as far as we can see, options 2 and 4 could achieve the same aims as option 3. For example, dedicated Pre-Business advisors in CHASS coordinating with BSAD advisors could give first- and second-year Pre-Business students the same advising and steer them to all the opportunities that are described in the SoBA proposal. In fact, many such benefits are already available to the Pre-Business students in CHASS, where the pre-existing organizational infrastructure for instruction, advising, learning communities, and connections with other campus resources can be more easily and more economically modified and expanded than for SoBA to expend valuable resources to develop its own program anew. Furthermore, a hybrid model would better use the established strengths of the university by ensuring that Pre-Business students receive the most qualified skills of advising in CHASS and SoBA and helping the latter to develop a premier undergraduate BSAD program.

### **Academic Principles and the Welfare of UCR Students**

Second, we are concerned about the likely impact of option 3 on the liberal arts education of a large number of UCR undergraduates. Under the current system, there are approximately 1200 UCR students in Pre-Business, and approximately 50% are accepted as Business majors. In this respect, the current Pre-Business program serves as a *de facto* filter for the major. The SoBA proposal projects that its proposed major would raise the percentage who advance from second to third year slightly, to 55%. The new major would therefore not do away with the fact that hundreds of students who initially aspire to become Business majors would need to find a new course of study every year. Almost half of the students in the first two years of the proposed four-year Business major, even if they were more selectively admitted as freshmen, would still leave the major and therefore need advising to move to a workable alternative.

In the proposed four-year Business major, what would happen to the first- and second-year students who did not advance to the third year and had to find a new major? What would be the effect on their progress toward graduation, and UCR's much-lauded progress in raising graduation rates? Redirecting a student who originally is highly invested in the BSAD major adds time and ultimately requires more resources to graduate the student and may result in lowering graduation rates. There are currently over a thousand lower-division students in CHASS whose Pre-Business program gives them full access to the breadth of options should they change their major. Pre-Business students housed in CHASS are in contact with CHASS advisors who are knowledgeable about the range of studies they might undertake. Entering students are keen to enter the BSAD major as juniors, but while they are lower-division students they have the opportunity to become familiar with available alternatives if their plans were to change.

The proposed four-year BSAD major would create a concentrated professional major in which freshmen and sophomores were advised throughout by advisors dedicated to that professional track, even though close to half those students leave the major. Those advisors would not provide comparable guidance and encouragement to the population of students who we know is likely to change majors – a population in fact likely to become CHASS majors. Just as important, the students who did not advance to the third year of the major would be forced to enter a new College without any substantial contact with CHASS advisors or the knowledge of alternative majors such contact would give them. How many of these students would not be in a position to transfer to any major (e.g., because they had not satisfied that major’s lower division requirements) and would be forced to withdraw from UCR?<sup>1</sup> And a student who is dismissed or discontinued from SoBA (or any other UCR school) must get into good standing through UCR Extension or a UC Summer Session before being readmitted into CHASS. This could mean at least a year of concurrent coursework and causes quite a disruption to the student financially and delays time toward graduation. Even a more highly qualified student in the proposed four-year major would be likely to encounter registration barriers and other challenges upon leaving Business as an advanced freshman or sophomore. Without guidance about actively maintaining options for alternative majors, their prospects at UCR would be diminished. What burdens would be imposed on CHASS advisors and resources by the large number of students leaving SoBA? Would a reduction of the number of CHASS advisors, a likely result of the Business proposal, serve those students? A buildup in SoBA advising would reduce CHASS staffing for advising, where the student-to-advisor ratio is already much too low.<sup>2</sup>

The Provost has made it clear that program changes “should be driven by firm academic principles, that are built upon the foundation of what is in the best interest of the academic program involved and the students we serve...” (Letter of June 22, 2018). Here is a way to look at the current issue. Under both the current configuration (a two-year Pre-Business plus third- and fourth-year Business major) and the proposed four-year Business major, the first two years are likely to serve as a de facto filter. Under which system are the students best served? In our judgment, it is not by the proposed four-year Business major.

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<sup>1</sup> Figures for 2014 (the latest available giving four-year retention and graduation rates) show that out of a freshman cohort of 658 Pre-Business students, 381 (58%) successfully transitioned to the BSAD major. Of the remaining 277 students (42%), 104 graduated by the summer of their fourth year, which gives a graduation rate of 37.5%, far lower than the overall CHASS fourth-year graduation rate of 86.4% for 2014. We suggest that for a four-year BSAD program, those students who do not advance beyond the second year will be even less prepared to switch to a new major and quite possibly be even less likely to be retained or to graduate in four years (source: Institutional Research office).

<sup>2</sup> The CHASS student:advisor ratio is currently about 431:1; the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) recommends a ratio of about 296:1. <https://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Clearinghouse/View-Articles/Advisor-Load.aspx>

Indeed, timely guidance provided by CHASS advisors in the current arrangement increases the likelihood of higher retention at the university, whether they are accepted into the BSAD major or end up in another major. It also contributes to students' satisfaction with their experience on campus, their success after graduation and, in the long run impacts alumni support.

### **The Questionable Professionalization of Lower-Division Education**

Although SoBA's proposal indicates that breadth requirements will not change with the four-year plan, we note that in Fall 2018, SoBA created nine minors for its BSAD program ("Majors with Administrative Studies Components" in the UCR General Catalog, p. 156).<sup>3</sup> These minors mirror many of the nine tracks of Administrative Studies, thereby creating some redundancy. Does this mean that in a future program review SoBA will recommend phasing out Administrative Studies, which is housed in CHASS? Does this suggest that in the future SoBA will propose that its students' breadth requirements be satisfied by taking courses offered mainly by SoBA? A professionalization of breadth offerings would run counter to the liberal arts tradition that informs UCR's lower-division breadth requirements.

An ambitious expansion of SoBA's undergraduate program should not be viewed as a zero-sum game. The June 22, 2018 letter from Provost Larive to Deans Peña and Wang states that program changes would be revenue neutral and that CHASS would be "held harmless." However, the Provost also says in that letter, as we have noted, that any such change "should be driven by firm academic principles." We are skeptical that the expansion would take place without creating inefficient and questionable duplication of courses (e.g. Business versions of basic Economics offerings) and an ever-stronger tendency to professionalize undergraduate education.

As a case in point, we are concerned about the idea put forward in a recent memo from the SoBA Executive Committee: that the Administrative Studies Program (ASP) in CHASS be transferred to SoBA. Given that Administrative Studies is an interdepartmental program in CHASS involving Art History, Economics, History, Political Science, and Sociology, and that it currently enrolls approximately five hundred students who are majors in those departments, it is difficult to understand SoBA's suggestion that the AS program would be more appropriately housed in Business. The largest population of AS is in Economics, where the program includes very few Business courses. Similarly, the Art History/Administrative Studies major

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<sup>3</sup> Historical perspective: When Business Administration was housed in CHASS, the descriptions of Administrative Studies and Business Administration programs were located in the same part of the catalog. When Business Administration split from CHASS and became part of SoBA, the catalog did not reflect this change. Instead, Administrative Studies remained under the Business Administration heading. It should have been removed from that location and moved into its own location in the catalog. Presently, the CHASS Executive Committee is trying to clarify the catalog copy by making it stand alone under its own subject code (ADST) in the catalog.

requires that art history courses be taken every year of a student's career, while business courses only appear in years 2 and 4. While that department forcefully acknowledges that the business-aspect of the major to be a significant added value, the foundation of the degree is strongly and specifically situated in Art History. A recent memo from the co-chairs of Sociology strenuously objects to the notion that its ASP students would be better served in Business. A similar response is likely from other ASP departments. Senate deliberations about any such changes would be likely to elicit additional opposition. How would UCR's undergraduates, whatever their majors, be served by such a change?<sup>4</sup>

### **The SoBA Ranking in Comparison with Local and National Schools**

Finally, we strongly suggest that SoBA's aspirations to elevate the standing of its undergraduate program would be better served if it looks beyond other schools in Southern California, most of which are ranked far lower than UCR's undergraduate BSAD program. The highest ranked programs in the country (see <https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/rankings/business-overall> ) such as Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, MIT's Sloan School of Management, and UC Berkeley's Haas School of Business, all emphasize interdisciplinary, interdepartmental pathways for their undergraduate business students, rather than a program that narrowly focuses on courses and activities offered by the business school itself. Perhaps SoBA's undergraduate program should consider this approach? A number of recent publications in the business press recommend it.<sup>5</sup>

### **Conclusion:**

Several committees, departments, and faculty groups have voiced serious concerns about the BSAD proposal. We strongly recommend that SoBA address these concerns before submitting it for the full Senate's consideration.

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<sup>4</sup> Based on the Fall 2018 enrollment figures, if all the students in Pre-Business (1,234), Business Preparatory (79, for transfer students) and Administrative Studies (488) were transferred to SoBA, this would mean that CHASS enrollment would lose 17.1% of its students (source: Institutional Research).

<sup>5</sup> Bennat Berger, "How Humanities Degrees Cultivate Marketable Business Skills," *Entrepreneur*, July 11, 2016.

Tracy Carlson, "Humanities and business go hand in hand," *The Boston Globe* (op-ed), April 24, 2016.

Ken Makovsky, "The Difference Humanities Makes In Business," *Forbes*, July 3, 2013.

Jon Marcus, "How the Humanities Can Train Entrepreneurs," *The Atlantic*, September 20, 2017.

Gianpiero Petriglieri, "Business Does Not Need the Humanities — But Humans Do," *Harvard Business Review*, November 2, 2018.

Oliver Staley, "If you majored in the humanities, you really should apply to Harvard Business School," *Quartz*, March 9, 2016.