

An analysis of mission statements of tertiary institutions: Business colleges in UAE

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to analyze the mission statements of business colleges operating in the United Arab Emirates. To this end, written and visual documents in the websites of business colleges were surveyed to collect data on components of mission such as philosophy, contribution, markets, and distinctiveness. Content analysis was used to analyze the data and the components of mission were classified or measured on a simple scale. The cost of tuition was also examined as, considered together with other findings, it can help point to the business strategy followed by colleges. The findings reveal clusters of colleges sharing similar characteristics and following strategies of differentiation or cost leadership in a segmented and crowded business education market. Predominantly privately-owned and characterized by a market philosophy but often with little distinctiveness business colleges are essentially teaching-oriented institutions. The need for return on investment and profit in a competitive education market has resulted in high tuition fees especially among better-known and internationally-accredited colleges. International accreditation is becoming important as the quality of education receives more attention. One limitation of this research is that conclusions are drawn on the basis of material found in publicly available documents only. The framework used in this research to analyze organizational mission of colleges of business in UAE can be helpful in carrying out similar research of tertiary institutions elsewhere.

Keywords: Mission statement academia; business education

JEL Classification: L21

PsycINFO Classification: 3660

FoR Code: 1301; 1503

ERA Journal ID#: 35696

Introduction

This paper analyzes and discusses the mission of colleges of business in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). There are several reasons for focusing on the specific topic. In the first place, with just around 9.5 million inhabitants, approximately 86% of whom are expatriates, the country boasts over 130 private, public and federal universities and other institutions of higher learning. As for business education in UAE there are 59 business colleges including Australian, British, and American branch campuses, as well as American-styled and Canadian-styled institutions, the latter two offering academic programs based on the North American model. UAE has a higher or roughly the same number of business colleges as other far more populous countries with well-diversified economies such as Spain, Italy, Germany, Japan, or South Korea. The high demand for business education in the country is underlined by the doubling in the number of business colleges over the past 12 years or so and the continuing entry in the market of new local and international institutions. The rapid and still on-going increase in the number of business colleges within a relatively short period of time raises questions regarding possible saturation of the business education sector and the long-term survival of some institutions. At a broader level, the discussion of business education in the UAE is important as the country stands out in the region for its liberal policies on social and economic development. However, despite the proliferation of business colleges a literature review yielded fewer than a handful of studies focusing on business education in UAE and in particular studies discussing issues of business education from the perspective of strategic management.

As far as the concept of 'mission' is concerned there are important questions to consider. Indeed, what is meant by the term 'mission'? Is mission simply what is articulated in the few lines under the same name heading in websites and handbooks of institutions of tertiary education or, is it something broader? Additionally, is mission a single or a composite construct made up of several parts that guide the direction of an institution though they may not always be articulated in its 'mission statement'?

This paper aims to offer a deeper understanding of the mission of business colleges in UAE that goes beyond what one can read in mission statements. To this end, mission is considered a composite construct made up of several components that can be deduced from the examination of various written and visual documents. This is in sharp contrast to previous studies that have treated the mission of an institution as a single, undivided construct and equated it with what is found under that institution's 'mission statement'. In addition to helping understand what a business college is about, its mission, considered from a broader perspective and constructed by examining several documents, can shed light on the strategy followed by the college to establish a presence in the competitive marketplace of higher education. Developing an institution's strategy is crucial as the landscape of higher education is shaped by neo-liberal ideas viewing education as a commodity rather than a human right and a social good while stressing the need for institutions of tertiary education and colleges of business in particular to align, if not indeed to surrender, to market forces.

Literature Review

The inroad of ideas glorifying market forces into spheres of public life and pressure upon institutions of higher education to emulate management practices of private firms has resulted in a growing concern with issues of strategic management in universities (Hazelkorn, 2005; Yokoyama, 2006; Fumasoli and Lepori, 2011; Toma, 2012; Steiner et al., 2013; Sam and Sijde, 2014; Degn, 2015; Oertel and Söll, 2016). Such concern can be clearly seen in the development of a mission statement, considered one of the essential strategic variables in higher education nowadays (Palmer and Short, 2008; Leiber, 2016). Initially focusing on the US and UK, where mission statements in

educational institutions were first developed (Kosmützky and Krücken, 2015), studies on mission statements in universities in many other countries have been added to the literature (Kosmützky, 2012; Efe and Ozer, 2015; Giusepponi and Tavoletti, 2015; Metwally, 2015; Neamtu and Neamtu, 2015).

Within the context of the on-going introduction of practices originating in private firms to the administration of tertiary institutions the development of a mission statement in colleges of business in particular may be considered an absolute necessity, arguably far more crucial than in any other academic unit. This is because it is in the very same colleges that the importance of mission in business is repeatedly discussed in several courses, links with private enterprises are cultivated and highly valued while students are conditioned to demonstrate appropriate 'business' and 'professional' attitudes and behaviors and expected to be employment-ready right upon completing studies. As business colleges tend to emulate, quite uncritically at times, management practices of private companies it may naturally be expected that they too should have a mission statement. A further impetus for articulating a mission statement comes from AACSB's move towards mission-based accreditation that makes developing a mission statement a pre-requisite for those business colleges aspiring to become AACSB-accredited.

Save a small number of works that have discussed theoretical issues (Morphew and Hartley, 2006; Esi, 2016), most studies on mission in tertiary institutions are empirical using the term 'mission' in the same way that it is used in industry that is, to refer to a general statement describing a company's *raison d'être*, its aspirations and values, how it sees itself and how it wants to be viewed by others, the field(s) of business it intends to compete and customers it will serve, simply substituting college or university for company, students for customers, and programs for field of business (Stemler and Bebell, 1999; Boerema, 2006; Morphew and Hartley, 2006; Taylor and Morphew, 2010; Jager de, 2011). Content analysis has been widely used to analyze mission statements in tertiary institutions (Bastedo and Gumpert 2003; Palmer and Short, 2008; Taylor and Morphew, 2010; Efe and Ozer, 2015).

Mission statements in academic institutions are typically no longer than a few lines long lacking comprehensiveness while full of generic, vague and rhetorical content (Finley et al. 2001; Palmer and Short, 2008; Giusepponi and Tavoletti, 2015). Thus, relying solely on the contents of a mission statement would have been insufficient for the purposes of this paper that aims to offer as complete as possible an understanding of an institution's mission. Instead mission is considered from a broader perspective extending beyond what is publicly declared and this is entirely in line with the meaning of 'mission' in AACSB's accreditation criteria stating that:

'Mission is a single statement or set of statements serving as a guide for the school and its stakeholders. These statements capture the school's core purposes, express its aspirations, and describe its distinguishing features. The mission is not usually described entirely by the mission statement. It is more completely encapsulated in a set of statements that describe the school, including the mission statement, vision statement, and statements of values.' (AACSB, 2016:14)

Used initially in many studies on mission statement in private companies Pearce and David's (1987) original framework of components of organizational mission has also been used in some studies on mission statement in tertiary institutions (Palmer and Short, 2008; Genç, 2012; Fitzgerald and Cunningham, 2016). The framework includes eight items namely, specification of target customers and markets- identification of principal products/services- specification of geographic domain- identification of core technologies- expression of commitment to survival, growth and profitability- specification of key elements in the company philosophy- identification of the company self-concept- and identification of the firm's desired public image. In order to better reflect the context of higher education Pearce and David's framework was modified as follows:

Customers is replaced by students, markets and geographic domain are collapsed to markets, and degrees is used in place of products/services. Further, distinctiveness is the key to survival, growth and profitability thus it replaces these three elements while self-concept and public image are partly captured under philosophy and contribution. The item 'identification of core technologies' in Pearce and David's (1987) framework was left out as it is not considered appropriate for use in tertiary education.

The six components of mission that is, students, markets, degrees, distinctiveness, philosophy, and contribution are discussed and operationalized below.

Students

Foreigners account for around 86% of the population making UAE the country with the highest percentage of foreigners to total population. Many university-age foreigners have been living in UAE since birth. Students are classified as local, international and expatriate.

Local students (L) Emirati citizens and long-term foreign residents who have received pre-university education in UAE.

International students (I) Foreigners, mostly from West Africa, Central Asia and the MENA region who enter the country in order to enroll in an undergraduate program.

Expatriate students (E) Foreigners holding tertiary qualifications who, while employed in UAE, enroll in a graduate program of study to improve employment prospects.

Markets

This refers to geographical areas targeted by colleges to attract students.

Local market (A) The seven emirates making up UAE.

Regional market (R) Other GCC members plus countries in the region such as Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, etc.

Overseas market (O) Rest of the world.

Degrees

Undergraduate (U) BBA, BSc, BA.

Graduate (G) MBA, MSc., MA

Distinctiveness

Given the need to comply with requirements imposed by accrediting bodies and the trend towards standardizing course offerings within degrees and disciplines and even contents within courses a significant degree of uniformity is likely to be found across the colleges surveyed. On the other hand, however, survival in an increasingly competitive environment, highlighted by the mushrooming of tertiary institutions in UAE, makes it necessary for a college to develop and promote unique strengths differentiating itself from competitors. Distinctiveness is considered a means to an end contributing towards the survival, growth and, especially in the case of private colleges, profitability. The need for distinctiveness to be clearly spelt out in the mission statement of an institution is required by accrediting bodies.

In addition to accreditation value-adding features are used as measures of distinctiveness. For instance, offering a track in entrepreneurship, pioneering the use of e-learning tools to promote mobile learning and, aiming at producing graduates with skills of innovative thinking and entrepreneurship, is what each of three colleges respectively focus on. The three institutions receive a higher mark in distinctiveness as the use of technology innovation and entrepreneurship are considered valuable to the progress of the country and actively promoted by the UAE Government. Distinctiveness is measured on a scale 1-3.

1. Colleges that are only accredited by the CAA or, licensed by the KHDA when established in a free zone. Accreditation by CAA or license by KHDA is mandatory

for an educational institution to operate in the country. The same grade is given when a college has not developed its own mission statement but uses that of its parent university or when the college's mission statement does not extend beyond the basic minimum that is indeed expected from an institution of higher learning. Mission statements running along lines such as 'meet educational needs of students', 'offer educational programs', 'develop skills', 'develop business leaders', or similar, are given the lowest mark.

2. Colleges accredited by an international body such as IACBE or ACBSP but not AACSB. The same grade is also assigned when some unique feature is found either in the college's mission statement such as, 'pioneer e-learning', 'support Emirati students in becoming innovative', 'maintain Islamic and Arabian culture in higher education while keeping up with the most modern policies in European and American universities', 'promote a spirit of free and open intellectual inquiry' or in its operations for example multi-campus instruction and learning.
3. Colleges with AACSB, AMBA (for MBAs), or EQUIS accreditation. In addition to enhancing a college's prestige accreditation by one of the above bodies will likely strengthen its prospects with respect to survival, longer-term growth and profitability. In particular, AACSB accreditation is highly regarded by business deans and senior university administrators (Barhem, 2017).

Philosophy

Considering the very *raison d'être* of business schools in general along with the competitive environment business colleges in UAE operate in it may be expected that, to a significant extent, the philosophy of colleges will reflect the impact of market forces. A market-driven philosophy focuses on what a college is typically expected to accomplish in the first place that is, to develop academically qualified graduates possessing necessary skills and adequately prepared to work primarily in private firms. On the other hand, however, expectations of various stakeholders calling for the contribution of institutions of higher learning to the welfare and advancement of society may generate a philosophy leaning towards issues of social responsibility, graduates' ethical behavior and development of the whole person. The philosophy of a college is coded M, D, B.

M Philosophy biased towards the logic of market forces for instance, 'to educate students from diverse backgrounds in the fundamental skills, knowledge, and practice of business administration to become productive managers & leaders in their respective fields' or, 'to provide students with opportunity to develop & apply professional skills in areas critical to managerial leadership in today's competitive business environment'.

D Idealist philosophy emphasizing ethical and personal development and contribution to society for example, '...serve the community, UAE & region...prepare students to be ethical professionals & leaders... discover, disseminate & preserve knowledge...promote a spirit of free & open intellectual inquiry...engage in partnership with community organizations...address social & economic challenges of the UAE community & around the region' or, 'to fulfill the broad educational needs of a culturally diverse learning community.... excellence in teaching and scholarly endeavor...leading to...academic, personal, professional success.... advancement of society.'

B Philosophy balancing utilitarian considerations underlying the market philosophy and broader social and ethical concerns of the idealist philosophy. For instance, 'impart knowledge, develop professional skills and inculcate values at higher education level, enabling students of diverse backgrounds to achieve their academic goals and develop overall personality to become effective and socially responsible professionals in a dynamic global environment...' or, 'provide a career-oriented business education...foster critical thinking, ethical awareness and cultural sensitivity...'

Contribution

This is discussed with reference to its breadth and depth. Breadth of contribution (B) refers to the range of stakeholders a college aims at serving, for example one college aims largely at serving students, another includes the business community as well, while a third college aims at serving students, the local community and the region. Depth of contribution (D) refers to the impact a college aspires to have upon its graduates. For example, one college aspires to impart knowledge, another aims at having graduates develop certain skills in addition to acquiring knowledge, while imparting knowledge, developing student skills and graduating ethical and responsible citizens is what a third college aims at. Breadth and depth of contribution are measured on a scale 1-3.

In addition to the six components explained above mission is discussed with respect to the overall orientation it prescribes for a school that is, whether a school is oriented towards teaching or research -the two traditional roles of tertiary institutions- or whether a school exhibits entrepreneurial behavior, for instance by commercializing research, actively cooperates with business and contributes to socio-economic development. The latter orientation has been termed the 'third' mission (Wissema 2009; Sam and Sijde 2014; Pausits 2015; Abreu et al., 2016). Teaching, research, and the "third" mission are coded 1, 2, 3, respectively.

Method

Drawing on data published by the Abu Dhabi Education Council, the Center for Higher Education Data and Statistics in the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MOHESR), the Commission for Academic Accreditation (CAA), and the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), a total of 59 academic units offering degrees in business studies were identified. The units come under different names such as, division, department, college of business, or school of business, and they will be referred to as 'colleges' in the remainder of this paper. A number of documents were reviewed in each college in order to understand its mission.

A preliminary examination of websites revealed ungrammatical sentences, typing errors, inconsistencies and confusion in various documents in eight colleges as documents meant to refer to the vision, values or philosophy of a unit did instead refer to its mission and vice versa. In another five colleges there was a mismatch between the stated mission of a college and that of the university housing the college. Furthermore, information on a college's mission was often scattered in webpages containing messages from the Dean or the President, the institution's history and its values, or in the almost ubiquitous 'about us' page. Confusion was especially pronounced between an institution's mission and vision confirming what has been noted in previous studies (Giusepponi and Tavoletti, 2015; Esi, 2016).

Many 'mission statements' are quite similar to each other as though some generic template was followed in writing them while they appear to reflect some wish list of their author(s) rather than institutional competencies, realities, and constraints. During the data collection period, from October 2016 to July 2017, there were changes in mission statements in eight colleges following changes in their academic leadership. To get a more complete understanding of the mission of a college, it was necessary to go beyond its mission statement alone and review documents referring to philosophy, values, history, goals, handbooks, pamphlets as well as press releases. Visual material in promotional videos and photo galleries could sometimes provide useful clues to an institution's mission verifying the old adage 'a picture is worth one thousand words'. Understanding mission by drawing on several text and visual documents including the mission statement marks a crucial difference between this research and other studies as

in the latter the contents of an institution's 'mission statement' is taken to represent its mission (Kuenssberg, 2011; Holosko et al., 2015).

Data obtained from documents mentioned above, and in a few cases directly from institutions through personal contacts, were analyzed using content analysis, a method employed in similar studies (Hartley and Morphew, 2008; Taylor and Morphew, 2010; Kozmütsky, 2012; Phillips, 2013; Efe and Ozer, 2015; Fitzgerald and Cunningham, 2016). Content analysis allows the researcher to take cues from signals and investigate further towards a deeper understanding of an institution's mission. Given the nature of this study the option of using software to produce counts of words found in a mission statement and other documents, implicitly assuming that significant issues are likely to be indicated by a higher frequency of a word or cluster of words, was rejected simply because word frequency may not necessarily relate to the significance of an issue.

Results

The profile of colleges is presented in table 1. In subsequent discussion colleges will be referred to by using abbreviations appearing in the last column. Whenever no information was available on the year a college was established, the year the parent institution started operations was used in its place. PR, PU, and FED stand for private, public and federal institutions respectively. Except for three federal and five public institutions private institutions account for 86% of the total.

It is ironic that, although the importance of a mission statement is a topic of discussion in more than one course in a typical business college, over two thirds of colleges have not developed their own statement of mission and in such cases the mission of the housing university was taken as the mission of the college. However, absence of a mission statement may not necessarily indicate lack of a strategic vision but rather compliance with requirements of UAE educational authorities. For example, locally-established international branches, required to replicate home country programs and home quality to UAE, must adopt the mission of parent institutions.

Almost all colleges are teaching-oriented, coded 1. Although one quarter of colleges, mostly international branches, have been coded 1 and 2 that is, teaching and research-oriented institutions this is hardly an indication of a more or less equal balance between the two activities but rather that research is an orientation secondary in importance to teaching. Colleges oriented towards the 'third' mission, characterized by entrepreneurial activities, commercialization of research and close university-business cooperation are practically absent though some nascent forms of cooperation with industry and outreach programs exist.

Table 1.
Profile of colleges

No	Institution	Year established	Legal status	Orientation	School separate mission statement Y/N	Abbreviation
1	Abasyn University	2007	PR	1	N	ABASYN
2	Abu Dhabi School of Management		PR	1	N	ADSM
3	Abu Dhabi University, College of Business Administration	2000	PR	1-2	Y	ADU
4	Ajman University of Science and Technology, College of Business Administration	1988	PR	1	Y	AUST
5	Al Ain University of Science and Technology, College of Business Administration	2004	PR	1	Y	AAU
6	Al Dar University College	1994	PR	1	N	DAR
7	Al Falah University, College of Business Administration	2015	PR	1	Y	FALAH
8	Al Ghurair University/College of Business Administration	1999	PR	1	N	GHURAIR
9	Al Hosn University, Faculty of Business	2005	PR	1	N	HOSN
10	Al Khawarizmi International College	1985	PR	1	Y	KHAWARIZMI
11	American College of Dubai	1990	PR	1	N	ACD
12	American University in Dubai, School of Business Administration	1995	PR	1-2	Y	AUD
13	American University in the Emirates, College of Business Administration	2006	PR	1	Y	AUE
14	American University of Ras al Khaimah, School of Business	2009 (a)	PU	1	N	AURAK
15	American University of Sharjah,	1997	PR	1-2	N	AUS

	School of Business Administration					
16	Amity University		PR	1	N	AMITY
17	Birla Institute of Technology	2005	PR	1	N	BIRLA
18	Canadian University Dubai, School of Business	2006	PR	1	N	CUD
19	City University College of Ajman	2011	PR	1	N	CUCA
20	Cornerstone College	2011	PR	1	N	CORNERSTONE
21	Emirates Canadian University College, Department of Business Administration	2008	PR	1	N	ECUC
22	Emirates College for Management and Information Technology	2004 (b)	PR	1	N	ECMIT
23	Emirates College of Technology, Faculty of Business	2004 (c)	PR	1	Y	ECT/FB
24	European International College	2006	PR	1	N	EIC
25	Fujeirah University, College of Business Administration	2006 (d)	PU	1	Y	FU
26	Hamdan bin Mohammed Smart University, School of Business and Quality Management	2009	PU	1	N	HBMSU
27	Heriot-Watt University	2005	PR	1-2	N	HWU
28	Higher Colleges of Technology, Business Division	1988	FED	1	Y	HCT
29	Hult University	2008	PR	1-2	N	HULT
30	INSEAD	2007	PU	1-2	N	INSEAD
31	Institute of Management Technology	2006		1	Y	IMT
32	Ittihad Ubniversity	1999	PU	1	N	ITTIHAD
33	Jumeirah University		PR	1	N	JUMEIRAH
34	London American City College			1	N	LACC
35	London Business School	2006	PR	1	Y	LBS
36	Manchester Business School	2006	PR	1-2	N	MANCHESTER
37	Manipal University	2003	PR	1	N	MANIPAL
38	MENA College of Management	2016	PR	1	Y	MENA
39	Middlesex University	2005	PR	1-2	N	MIDDLESEX
40	Modul University	2016	PR	1	N	MODUL
41	Murdoch University	2008	PR	1	N	MURDOCH
42	Paris Sorbonne University	2006	PU	1-2	N	PARIS SORBONNE
43	Rochester Institute of Technology	2008	PR	1	N	RIT

44	Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology	2003	PR	1	N	SZABIST
45	Skyline University College	1990	PR	1	N	SKYLINE
46	SP Jain School of Global Management	2004	PR	1	N	SP JAIN
47	Synergy University/ Business School	2014	PR	1	N	SYNERGY
48	Syscoms College	2005	PR	1	N	SYSCOMS
49	The British University in Dubai	2004	PR	1	N	BUD
50	United Arab Emirates University/College of Business and Economics	1976	FED	1-2	Y	UAEU
51	University of Dubai	2006 (e)	PR	1-2	N	UD
52	University of Jazeera/College of Business Administration	2008	PR	1	Y	JAZEERA
53	University of Modern Sciences	2011	PR	1	N	UMS
54	University of Sharjah/College of Business Administration	1997	PR	1-2	Y	SHARJAH
55	University of Strathclyde	1998	PR	1-2	N	STRATHCLYDE
56	University of Wollongong Dubai	1993	PR	1-2	N	UOWD
57	Westford School of Management	2009		1	N	WESTFORD
58	Wisdom Business School	2010	PR	1	N	WISDOM
59	Zayed University/College of Business	1998	FED	1-2	Y	ZAYED

Notes:

- (a) Established in 2005 as George Mason University, Ras Al Khaimah campus.
- (b) Established in 1998 as Emirates Center for Management and Information Technology.
- (c) Established in 1993 as Emirates Institute of Technology.
- (d) Established as Fujairah College in 2006, granted University license in September, 2016.
- (e) Established in 1997 as Dubai University College.

Findings on students, markets and degrees are presented in table 2.

Table 2.
Students, markets, degrees

Institution	Students (L-E-I)	Markets (A-R-O)	Degrees (U-G)
ABASYN	L	A	U-G
ADSM	L-E	A	G
ADU	L-E-I	A-R	U-G
AUST	L	A	U-G
AAU	L	A	U-G
DAR	L	A	U
FALAH	L	A	U-G
GHURAIR	L	A	U-G
HOSN	L	A	U-G
KHAWARIZMI	L	A	U
ACD	L-E	A	U
AUD	L-E-I	A-R-O	U-G
AUE	L-E	A-R	U-G
AURAK	L-E	A	U-G
AUS	L-E-I	A-R	U-G
AMITY	L-E-I	A-R-O	U-G
BIRLA	L	A-R	G
CUD	L-E	A	U-G
CUCA	L	A	U-G
CORNERSTONE	L	A	U-G
ECUC	L	A	U
ECMIT	L	A	U
ECT	L	A	U
EIC	L	A	U-G
FU	L	A	U-G
HBMSU	L	A	U-G
HERIOT-WATT	L-E-I	A-R-O	U-G
HCT (a)	L	A	U-G
HULT	L-E	A-R-O	G
INSEAD	L-E	A-R-O	G
IMT	L-E	A-R-O	U-G
ITTIHAD	L	A	U-G
JUMEIRAH	L	A	U
LACC	L	A	U
LBS	L	A	G
MANCHESTER	L-E	A	G
MANIPAL	L	A	U-G
MENA	L	A	U
MIDDLESEX	L-E-I	A-R-O	U-G
MODUL	L-E-I	A-O	U-G
MURDOCH	L-E-I	A-O	U-G
PARIS-SORBONNE	L-E	A-R	U-G
RIT	L	A	U
SZABIST	L	A	U-G
SKYLINE	L-E-I	A-R-O	U-G
SP JAIN	L-E	A-R-O	U-G
SYNERGY	L-E	A	U-G
SYSCOMS	L	A	U
BUD	L-E	A	G
UAEU (b)	L-I	A-R	U-G
UD	L-E	A-R	U-G
JAZEERA	L	A	U-G
UMS	L	A-R	U-G
SHARJAH	L	A	U-G
STRATHCLYDE	L-E	A-R-O	G
UOWD	L-E-I	A-R-O	U-G
WESTFORD	L	A	U-G
WISDOM	L	A	G
ZAYED (c)	L	A	U-G

Notes (a), (b), (c): HCT accept Emirati students only and tuition is free. ZAYED and UAEU cater primarily to Emirati students with free tuition; however, both institutions accept fee-paying international students who make up one quarter of total enrolment in the latter.

While all colleges recruit students in the local and regional markets better-known ones such as HULT, INSEAD and the American-styled AUD attract students from countries in Central Asia and Africa as well. Some colleges including ABASYN, SZABIST, and SP JAIN operate in niche markets attracting students from the sizable Pakistani and Indian communities in UAE. Residents from the Asian sub-continent, the predominant expatriate segment in the country, are also targeted by many international branch campuses. With respect to degrees, two thirds of colleges offer both undergraduate and graduate degrees. About 15% of colleges including HULT, INSEAD and a few branches of UK institutions operate in the graduate degree market while 18% of the remaining colleges, mostly smaller size institutions and, often, without a separate mission statement, offer undergraduate degrees only targeting primarily the local student market.

Differences in type of market and students served notwithstanding the survival, growth and success of colleges, private ventures in most cases, hinges upon ability to stand out from competitors and value offered to stakeholders, namely distinctiveness and contribution. Findings on distinctiveness and contribution along with the type of accreditation are presented in table 3. The importance of accreditation, especially accreditation by an international body, can hardly be overestimated as it enhances the prestige of a college adding an air of exclusivity to the institution. Despite, however, the country's cosmopolitan environment and aspirations to serve as an educational hub in the region roughly two thirds of colleges have local accreditation only. The rank on distinctiveness for branches of foreign universities is based on the accreditation of parent institutions. The coding used is as follows:

- C Accredited by CAA. Responsible for accrediting universities outside Free Zones
- K Licensed by KHDA. Campuses of international universities within free zones are licensed by KHDA.
- R Used only for WISDOM in the free zone of Ras al Khaimah, one of the smaller emirates.
- F Federal institution.

In the past a few local branches of foreign universities were reported to lack accreditation though they were licensed (Masudi, 2008); this is a result of the country's educational system being the responsibility of different entities. More recently, failure to meet licensing and accreditation standards has led to the one-year suspension of three universities (Salama 2016). The presence, physical or online, of unaccredited institutions offering fake degrees has also been noted in the press (Al Jandaly, 2012; Swan, 2012; Nazzal, 2015).

Table 3.
Accreditation, distinctiveness, contribution

Institution	Accreditation	Distinctiveness	Contribution	
			Breadth	Depth
ABASYN	C	1	1	1
ADSM	C	2	1	3
ADU	C EQUIS AACSB	3	1	1
AUST	C	1	1	1
AAU	C	1	1	1
DAR	C	1	1	1
FALAH	C	1	1	1
GHURAIR	C	1	1	1
HOSN	C	1	2	1
KHAWARIZMI	C	1	2	1
ACD	C	1	2	2
AUD	C IACBE AACSB	3	2	3
AUE	C	1	1	1
AURAK	C	1	1	1
AUS	C AACSB	3	2	2
AMITY	K IACBE	2	1	1
BIRLA	K	1	1	1
CUD	C	1	2	2
CUCA	C	1	1	1
CORNERSTONE		1	1	1
ECUC	C	1	1	1
ECMIT	C	1	1	1
ECT	C	1	1	1
EIC	C	1	1	2
FU	C	1	1	1
HBMSU	C K IACBE	2	1	1
HWU	K	1	1	1
HCT	F	2	1	1
HULT	K AACSB	3	1	1
INSEAD	C AACSB AMBA EQUIS	3	1	1
IMT	C K IACBE	2	1	1
ITTIHAD	C	2	1	1
JUMEIRAH	C ACBSP	2	1	1
LACC	C IACBE	2	1	1
LBS	K AACSB AMBA EQUIS	3	1	1
MANCHESTER	K AACSB AMBA	3	1	1
MANIPAL	K	1	1	1
MENA	C	1	2	1
MIDDLESEX	K	1	1	2
MODUL	K	1	1	1
MURDOCH	K	1	2	2
PARIS-SORBONNE	C	2	1	1
RIT	C K AACSB	3	3	1
SZABIST	K	1	1	1
SKYLINE	C	1	2	1
SP JAIN	K	2	1	1
SYNERGY	K AMBA	2	1	1
SYSCOMS	C	1	1	1
BUD	C K	1	2	1
UAEU	C AACSB	3	3	3
UD	C AACSB	3	1	1
JAZEERA	C	1	2	1
UMS	C	1	1	1
SHARJAH	C	2	2	2
STRATHCLYDE	C AACSB AMBA EQUIS	3	1	1
UOWD	C K	1	3	3
WESTFORD	Unclear	1	1	1
WISDOM	R	1	1	1
ZAYED	C F AACSB	3	2	2

With only local accreditation or license just about 60% of colleges were given the lowest mark in distinctiveness. The remaining colleges were split almost evenly between, on the one hand, colleges accredited by IACBE, ACBSP, or AMBA or, else, those with some unique feature in their mission for example, emphasis on innovation and entrepreneurship at ADSM and HCT, e-learning at HBMSU and focus on Arabic and Islamic roots at ITTIHAD and, on the other hand, AACSB and EQUIS-accredited colleges that received the highest mark in distinctiveness.

Practically all colleges were ranked 1 or 2 in breadth of contribution as their aspirations do not extend beyond serving students and the business community. The UAEU, implementing a strategic plan to disseminate knowledge, transfer skills and enhance research capacity in areas of national importance, along with WOLLONGONG and RIT that aim at reaching out to industry, government, local and world communities, are a few notable exceptions. Nearly all colleges were ranked 1 or 2 in depth of contribution as the impact of intended contribution is limited to developing students' mental abilities and applied skills so that graduates are as work-ready as possible. WOLLONGONG, UAEU, and AUD received the top grade as in the three institutions depth of contribution extends to students' personal growth, cultural awareness and appreciation of diversity, importance of life-long learning and self-responsibility.

The cost of tuition and philosophy of colleges are presented in table 4. In conjunction with distinctiveness cost of tuition and philosophy can point to the market strategy followed that is, whether a college attracts students primarily because of lower costs or, alternatively, uniqueness (perceived or real) of education and degrees offered, reflecting cost leadership and differentiation strategies respectively. Tuition fees were rounded to the nearest 1000 AED and calculated on the basis of discounted tuition cost per semester or year, offered by many institutions, rather than by multiplying the number of required credit hours by the cost per credit; in the latter case the cost would have been higher. Fees for application, registration and the like, typically amounting to 2500-3500 AED, were excluded. Minimum credits required by education authorities are 120 and 30 for a BBA or a MBA degree respectively, however, 123-126 credits for the former and 33-36 credits for the latter are required in most colleges. Required credits are shown next to tuition fees.

Table 4.
Philosophy and tuition fees

Institution	Philosophy	BBA		MBA	
		Cost	credits		
ABASYN	M	53000	135cr	30000	
ADSM	B		-	135000	46cr
ADU	D	195000	120cr	94000	33cr
AUST	M	154000	123cr	83000	33cr
AAU	M	120000	126cr	72000	36cr
DAR	M	105000	123cr		-
FALAH	M	136000	123cr	80000	36cr
GHURAIR	M	148000	123cr	90000	36cr
HOSN	M	158000	126cr	72000	36cr
KHAWARIZMI	M	126000	126cr		-
ACD	M	114000			-
AUD	M	330000	123cr	134000	36cr
AUE	D	169000	126cr	99000	33cr
AURAK	M	184000	121cr	87000	36cr
AUS	M	367000	123cr	154000	33cr
AMITY	M	105000		106000	
BIRLA	M		-	62000	
CUD	D	260000	123cr	90000	36cr
CUCA	M	100000	120cr	54000	36cr
CORNERSTONE	M	45000			Unavailable
ECUC	D	98000	120cr		-
ECMIT	M	111000	124cr		-
ECT	M	116000	123cr		-
EIC	M	164000	126cr	83000	36cr
FU	M	108000	126cr	31000	30cr
HBMSU	D	98000	123cr	77000	36cr
HWU	M	162000	3 years 216000 4 years (Bhon)	88000	33cr
HCT	B	Free	(Emiratis only)	Free	(Emiratis only)
HULT	M		-	170000	36cr
INSEAD	M		-	320000	
IMT	M	132000	120cr	92000	36cr
ITTIHAD	M		Unavailable		Unavailable
JUMEIRAH	D	178000	120cr		-
LACC	M		Unavailable		-
LBS	M		-	380000	
MANCHESTER	M		-	155600	
MANIPAL		108000		78000	
MENA		148000	123cr		-
MIDDLESEX		150000	360cr 3 years	100000	180cr
MODUL		162000	180cr	97000	90cr
MURDOCH		156000	120cr	96000	36cr
PARIS SORBONNE	M	189000		146000	
RIT		186000			-
SZABIST		88000	144cr	24000	36cr
SKYLINE		155000	120cr	91000	36cr
SP JAIN	M	300000	120cr (multi-campus teaching)	96000	44cr
SYNERGY		147000		81000	
SYSCOMS		50000	66cr (associate BBA)		-
BUD			-	65000	
UAEU	D	336000	120cr (Free for Emiratis)	87000	48cr (Free for Emiratis)
UD	M	250000	129cr	146000	48cr
JAZEERA			Unavailable		Unavailable
UMS			120cr		
SHARJAH	B	201000	123cr	99000	36cr
STRATHCLYDE			-	130000	180cr
UOWD	D	218000	132cr	101000	36cr
WESTFORD		52000		44000	
WISDOM			-		Unavailable
ZAYED	B	300000	123cr (Free for Emiratis)	128000	36cr MA (Free for Emiratis)

Discussion

Unlike the experience of many other countries, where the establishment of tertiary institutions preceded, and often helped to spark the process of, modern economic and social development, higher education in UAE took hold following the start of the country's rapid economic transformation. Three quarters of business colleges were established in the last two decades, at times with little apparent consideration of existing educational needs and prospects of success as evidenced by downsizing operations in some institutions (Lynch, 2014), closure of others (The Chronicle, 2005; Bloomberg, 2012), and the precarious state of yet a few other institutions (The National 2017a). Amid the country's transformation and diversification of the economy along with a significant population spike, fueled largely by the influx of large numbers of expatriate economic migrants and their families, setting up a business college came somehow to be viewed as simply one of several profitable opportunities available. More tertiary institutions are set to start operations (The National, 2017b) although their number is already high relative to the size of UAE's population. At the same time though it is predicted that roughly one fifth of higher institutions will cease operations in the next few years (Hoke, 2015). Within this context there are calls for promoting innovation and enhancing quality in higher education (Barhem et. al., 2008; Soomro and Ahmad, 2012; Jose and Chacko, 2017) and, particularly, the establishment of purely research-based universities (Saklani, 2017).

The implications of a large number of business colleges established within a short period of time are two-fold. One implication is that, standing at 12 years, the average age of colleges is too short a period to allow progress from the traditional role of teaching to that of producing knowledge let alone move towards cultivating entrepreneurial behavior by commercializing research, transferring technology and engaging in ventures of academic capitalism (McClure, 2016; Jessop, 2017). Put differently, there has not been sufficient time for colleges to grow and build competencies that would enable them move along what is seen as the natural path of transformation in the life cycle of academic institutions from mission 1 to mission 2 and mission 3 institutions (Sam and Sijde, 2014; Pausits, 2015).

The second implication is the predominance of a market philosophy. Privately-owned, mushrooming within a short period of time and often with little to distinguish one from the rest, colleges are characterized by a market philosophy reflecting the need for growth and profit in an ever competitive environment as their number keeps increasing given low entry barriers in terms of setting-up costs. In a crowded business education sector uncertainty about the future gives rise to concern with quick return on investment resulting in high tuition fees. The level of tuition fees has become a major issue as, instead of a lowering of fees that might normally have been expected given the growing number of colleges, hence increased competition, tertiary education in UAE ranks among the most expensive in the world with tuition fees in an upward spiral (Maceda, 2013; Emirates 24/7, 2015; Nagraj, 2016; Richards, 2016; Maceda, 2017). Time of entry and perceptions, in addition to the need for return on investment, appear to play a role in deciding the level of tuition fees reflecting different strategies. Capitalizing on high regard for American education, coupled with the prestige of AACSB accreditation and building on the 'first-mover' advantage, AUS and AUD, the two oldest among the American-styled institutions offer degrees priced at the top end pointing to a differentiation strategy. Fees are substantially lower at AUE and AURAK, two more recently established American-styled colleges that have local accreditation only. Tuition fees are lower at the Canadian-styled CUD compared to AUS and AUD while they decrease even further at UOWD, MODUL and SYNERGY, branch campuses of Australian, Austrian and Russian institutions respectively. It would appear that level of fees is aligned with perceived value of and demand for different education systems.

Number of years of operation in the country may also explain significant differences in fees between colleges following the same curriculum, as is the case of the two Australian institutions, UOWD, the oldest foreign university in UAE, and the late-comer MURDOCH. It may be noted that, despite historical ties between UAE and UK, almost all British business schools did not enter UAE's education market till mid to late 2000's, much later than AUS and AUD, the two prime American-styled colleges, both with a strong presence in business education. The late entry of branch campuses of UK universities combined with low distinctiveness is reflected in moderately-priced tuition fees suggesting a cost leadership strategy.

Differentiation strategies are followed by most schools targeting the graduate market exclusively. For instance, top ranked MBAs such as that offered by INSEAD, ranked the world's no. 1 MBA (FT, 2018), and LBS target a narrow market segment of highly qualified and well off candidates charging about double the fees than other expensive colleges. A differentiation strategy, though with a wider coverage, is followed by HULT and MANCHESTER as both actively recruit promising undergraduates from a small number of well-known colleges, the former making extensive use of student networks, personal contacts and online advertisement.

Low contribution and distinctiveness in several private colleges such as DAR, FALAH, GHURAIR, and HOSN is mirrored in cost leadership strategies targeting mostly local students by offering degrees at a fraction of the cost charged by more well-known competitors. There is intense competition in this market segment as colleges with local accreditation only often resort to offering substantial group discounts, extended fee-payment options and convenient evening and week-end teaching as a good part of students work in private firms and government departments and sponsored by employers to complete MBA or BBA studies. Concern for revenue can lead to mass enrollments with a less than rigid screening of applicants while the surge in student numbers exerts pressure on standards of quality and institutional resources. Targeting sections of the resident Indian and Pakistani communities ABASYN, BIRLA, MANIPAL and SZABIST have followed cost leadership strategies by offering degrees at a very low cost. Other sections of the sizable market of expatriate Indian and Pakistani communities are the target of several international branch campuses using differentiation strategies. For example making the most of high rankings received in the international business press SP JAIN differentiates by branding itself as a global business school offering multi-country studies leading to a degree issued in Australia.

The federally-funded HCT, UAEU and ZAYED, share the lofty mission to graduate qualified Emiratis, serve the community, and contribute to nation-building. Nevertheless, capitalizing on high distinctiveness thanks to AACSB accreditation, the latter two have started accepting foreign fee-paying students to top-priced BBAs suggesting a partial, at least, shift to a market philosophy and perhaps a gradual move towards reducing reliance on federal funding by developing alternative sources of income.

Conclusion

Proliferating within a short period of time, predominantly privately-owned and characterized by a market philosophy business colleges have targeted segments of the education market implementing strategies of differentiation or cost leadership in order to grow, generate profits and quickly recoup investment in a competitive business environment. The resulting spiral in tuition fees has made higher education in UAE among the most expensive in the world. In this context UAE authorities are focusing on enhancing quality in tertiary education issuing warnings to or even suspending institutions failing to comply with increasingly rigorous accreditation and quality standards. Quality improvement is supported by internal and external stakeholders calling for more attention to research and knowledge creation even among institutions

that hitherto were almost exclusively teaching-oriented.

While new tertiary institutions are established it is likely that the further development of business education in UAE will be underlined by emphasis on the quality of programs offered, especially given the high tuition fees charged, rather than number of colleges established. Though accreditation by UAE education authorities is a prerequisite ensuring an acceptable quality standard for an educational institution to be allowed to operate in the country it is primarily international accreditation that business colleges are eager to achieve responding to pressure and expectations of their stakeholders. Given that expatriate residents make up most of UAE's population along with the country's economic liberalization and shift to an outward-looking economy the importance of international accreditation is evident. Acquiring international accreditation is perhaps even more important for a business college pursuing a differentiation strategy, as in this case it is distinctiveness and overall quality of education what students expect and be prepared to pay for, as opposed to another college where low tuition fees is the main attraction of a cost leadership strategy. Thus, branch campuses of foreign institutions are accredited by respective home country authorities such as Australia's TEQSA or UK's QAA while several North American-styled colleges have AACSB accreditation.

The limitation of this research is that conclusions were drawn based on the analysis of publicly available data related to components of mission statement found in websites of tertiary institutions. However, there may be instances that little or no mention of important actions defining institutional mission is publicly made or that what is articulated on a college's webpage is at odds with what takes place in practice. Such instances may be precluded by using triangulation to corroborate data obtained from one source with evidence from other sources.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank the School of Business Administration, AUD, for granting reduced teaching responsibilities for part of the time it took to complete research for this study.

The author is indebted to the two anonymous reviewers for their constructive comments.

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