Management Education Program Evaluation: An Empirical Study in Mainland China

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Background: With the accession of the PRC to the WTO, Chinese education market is open to the educational service providers of the foreign countries. They are keen to offer MBA Degree programs to the Career Managers in the Mainland.

Aims: This research studies program evaluation and so forth the quality assessment of a MBA degree program in the Mainland.

Sample: The qualitative study involves literature review and focus group interviews of educational administrators, teaching staff and MBA students while the quantitative study embraces questionnaire survey of MBA students. Literature review collates the conventional approaches of educational quality assessment and contemporary theories of program evaluation. The survey generates a return of 924 & 1074 questionnaires for the study of learning, research and appraisal processes of the subject program.

Method: All the returned questionnaires are processed by means of T-test, Correlation Analysis, Linear Multiple Regression Analysis and Factor Analysis of SPSS. Quantitative analysis is supplemented by the qualitative study.

Results: Qualitative cm quantitative study lead to the following findings: (a) Curriculum is the premise of an educational program; (b) Learning materials is closely linked with the educational quality; (c) Good teaching staff warrants the educational quality and (d) Research and appraisal processes reflect the educational quality of the subject program.

Conclusion: Hs Research is concluded with the following recommendations: (a) To renovate the curriculum; (b) To refine the training materials; (c) To revise the "Learning Process"; and (d) To improve the "Research" and "Appraisal Processes" of the subject program. This Research has contributed to the wide body of knowledge in the establishment of a Program Evaluation Model which will be beneficial to the future development of the subject program and can be regarded as a reference for management education offerings. (288 words)

Keywords: Career Managers; MBA Degree Program; Program Evaluation Model.

中國大陸的管理教育課程評估模型

背景：隨著中國加入世貿，教育市場准入的擴大，更多的國外或境外高等院校進入中國舉辦管理教育課程。課程的質量會影響到課程的成敗，有必要對課程質量作出評估，以保證課程的持續發展。

目的：以理論推導進行實證研究，把傳統的課程評估模式結合現代質量保證理念，從而構建一個課程質量評估模型。
調查對象：以一所境外高校為例，利用方便抽樣法訪談國內的院長、教授、教育管理人員及學員，以及在「教學」流程收回９２４份問卷，「學習／研究／答辯」流程收回１０７４份問卷進行分析。

調查方法：定性定量相結合，以文獻評論与深度訪談作定性分析；而定量分析則通過Ｔ－Ｔｅｓｔ、相關係數分析、線性多元回歸分析和因子分析工具將回收的問卷加以處理。
調查結果：研究表明：（一）課程設置是課程質量的前提條件；（二）教材的使用與課程質量有顯著相關關係；（三）優秀的師資是課程質量的保證；及（四）論文研究及答辯是課程質量的體現。

總結：得出的改進建議：（一）對課程設置提出新的設計方案；（二）對課程使用的教材提出改進辦法；（三）對課堂教學的形式和內容提出改進意見；及（四）對論文研究和答辯提出改進措施. 是次研究的貢獻是構建了一個境外高校在中國內地舉辦工商管理碩士課程的質量評估模型，對相類似課程提供了參考價值及實務指引。
(５３１字)

關鍵詞：職業經理人、ＭＢＡ課程、課程評估模型。

Introduction

Traditionally, curriculum design of an educational program always aims to cultivate the target learners thus satisfying their individual needs. Its ultimate goal is to facilitate the expected growth of the target learners in the aspects of ethics, intellectualism, physique or capabilities. Moreover, the curriculum design of an educational program is always associated to the societal needs. When an educational program can meet both the individual and societal needs, it may be regarded as a "quality" educational program.

1.1 Management Education Needs of the Chinese Career Managers

In 1982, Deng Xiao-ping, the late ex-Premier of the People's Republic of China firstly promoted the introduction of Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree program into the Mainland. In the last two decades, there was significant development of management education for the career managers in mainland China. In recent years, there have been increasing needs of management education. Some large enterprises or international companies even require their employees at management level to possess MBA degrees. Thus, career managers always seek management education such as MBA degree program to meet their occupational needs.

1.1.1 Quality Requirement of MBA Degree Program

When the economy of the Mainland has been blooming since the 21st century, MBA Degree Programs should be designed to suit the economic development. Otherwise, this particular degree program could never fulfill the needs of the career managers. In the Beijing Youth Daily dated September 15, 2003, it was reported that there would be a pressing demand of hundred thousands of MBA graduates in the Mainland's management field. (Beijing Youth Daily, 2003)

MBA Degree Program primarily aims to boost the target learners' individual and occupational qualities. It also aims at enhancing the target learners' power of realization, renovation and entrepreneurship. Its goal is to cultivate the target learners who are working in the commerce or industry towards key posts of management, i.e., becoming career managers. Having grasped the fundamental management theories and specialized skills, the target learners could demonstrate competencies of leading the others in commercial, industrial or even training initiatives.

When MBA degree programs are mainly undertaken by working adults in management field, they are categorized as "adult management education". Simultaneously, they are regarded as a kind of major products of the adult management education industry in the

Mainland. It is worthwhile to study whether quality MBA degree programs are being provided in the Mainland. If affirmative, the target learners of the MBA degree programs could become career managers. Then, the individual learning needs and entire societal needs can be hopefully met.

1.2 Provision of MBA Degree Education in the Mainland

In the Mainland, MBA degree programs are offered by different higher institutions. They vary on the curriculum design and program specialization. Some of them have attracted criticism on their incompatibility with the career managers in the field of business administration. Such shortfall might be attributed to the historical background of the higher institutions in the Mainland. Schools of Business in some higher institutions are originated in their Schools of Economics. Their faculties are economic scholars who might have laid much emphasis on the economical theories and overlooked the educational quality requirements of an MBA degree program. (Beijing Youth Daily, 2003)

Asia International Open University (Macau) (AIOU) has been offering MBA degree program since 1980s. In collaboration with about 30 Chinese higher institutions, AIOU extends its external MBA Degree Program to the mainland China for the working adults who wish to become career managers. Stemming from its experience in management education, AIOU strives to provide quality education to the career managers in the Mainland. Hence, AIOU can be an appropriate subject of study in evaluation of an MBA degree program in mainland China.

1.2.1 AIOU's MBA Degree Program in the Mainland

The external MBA degree program of AIOU is a general master program without specialization. It is characterized by the following features and modes:

- ✧ Faculty – Both local and expatriate faculties are involved.
- ✧ Training Materials – Chinese textbooks and references are used.
- ✧ Learning Mode – Two-year part-time studies in 17 core subjects[1] and 3 out of 6 electives[2].
- ✧ Teaching Mode – Action learning is encouraged.
- ✧ Research Mode – Action research is conducted for the compilation of a master thesis.
- ✧ Appraisal Mode – Viva voce is conducted by an academic panel of internal and external examiners.

[1] Core Subjects: (1) Business Accounting for Executives; (2) Organization and Management for Business; (3) Financial Management; (4) Quantitative Methods Analysis; (5) Production Management; (6) Information Systems; (7) Economics for Business; (8) Organization Behavior; (9) Human Resources Management; (10) Marketing Management; (11) Cost Accounting; (12) Small Business Management; (13) Strategic Management of Change; (14) Investment; (15) Business Law; (16) Business Strategic Management; and (17) Corporate Recovery.

[2] Electives: (1) Selected Topics in Advanced Finance; (2) Auditing; (3) Marketing Planning & Strategy; (4) Comparative Management; (5) Total Quality Management; or (6) Taxation.

AIOU is a pioneer of providing MBA degree program in the Mainland. Having provided MBA education to the career managers of the Mainland for over 20 years, AIOU has exerted efforts in the assessment of the educational quality of its MBA degree program. However, MBA degree program is still new to the Mainland as compared with the other types of higher education. Preliminary review of Chinese literature surfaces that there is no known evaluation model for such new higher educational program in the Mainland. Hence, there is an imminent need of developing a generic program evaluation model for general MBA degree education in the Mainland.

1. Literature Review

When MBA Degree Program in mainland China is originated from the United States, it is appropriate to share the American experience in the quality assessment of its higher education. From 1960, there has been tremendous ongoing assessment effort towards the quality of higher education in the United States. Such assessment effort has occurred simultaneously at the state level and institutional level.

By the end of the 20th century, more than three-quarters of the states in America had some form of higher education policy. However, it was noted that "little systemic knowledge has been available to measure the extent and scope of publicly mandated outcomes assessments" (Cole et al., 1997a-b). Contrast with the state level, there were some forms of assessment at the institutional levels. They were often linked to self-studies for accreditation purposes.

At the end of the 20th century, Augustine et al., (1999a-c) surveyed 1,393 public and private institutions in America and found that 82 percent listed "Excellence in Undergraduate Education" as part of their mission statements. However, 38 percent of those institutions did not conduct studies to link student experiences to student outcomes.

American experience showed that much has been learnt from the assessment efforts at the state level as well as institutional level. What is the contribution of those state-level or institution-level assessment efforts? In the 21st century, a fellow researcher of RAND Corporation's Council for Aid to Education raised a series of key questions in respect of quality assessment in higher education (Chun, 2002):

… *if we take as our starting point that one of the central purposes of higher education is student learning, the obvious question arises: Are we indeed measuring what we should be measuring? Or, to what extent do we measure what is easier to measure? Are we looking merely where the light is better?* …

2.1 Conventional Approaches of Educational Quality Assessment

Chun (2002) introduces that there are four conventional approaches of assessing quality of higher educational programs:

1. "Comparison of Actuarial Data" vide 9 publications[3] from 1968 to 2001.
2. "Ratings of Institutional Quality" vide 15 publications[4] from 1987 to 2001.
3. "Conduct of Student Surveys" vide 36 publications[5] from 1958 to 2001.
4. "Direct Measurement of Student Learning Outcomes" vide 20 publications[6] from 1988 to 1999.

[3] Astin, 1968, 1977, 1991 & 1993; Dey et al., 1997; Gates et al., 2001; NCHEMS 1994; NPEC, 2000; Peterson et al, 1999.

[4] Augustine & Peterson, 2000; Astin, 1991; Ehrenberg & Monk, 1999; Ewell, 1984 & 1988b; Gentemann et al., 1994; Graham & Thompson, 2001; Halpern, 1987; Jacobi et al., 1997; Machung, 1995; McGuire, 1995; McClelland & Stewart, 1981; Riggs & Worthley, 1992; Terenzini, 1989; Vandament, 1987.

[5] Aaker et al., 1998; Anaya, 1992 & 1999; Astin, 1991 & 1993; Baird, 1976; Berdie, 1971; Beggs & Pohlman, 1974; Bradburn & Sudman, 1988; Brandt, 1958; Bunda & Muffo, 1993; Converse & Presser, 1989; DeNisi & Shaw, 1977; Dumont & Troelstrup, 1980; Ewell, 1987c; Ewell & Jones, 1993; Gamson & Poulsen, 1989; Gill, 1993; Hansford & Hattie, 1982; Johnson et al., 1993; Kuk, 2001; Laing et al., 1989; Lenning, 1988; Lowman & Williams, 1987; Martin & Turner, 1984; NCHEMS, 1994; Ouiment et al., 2001; Pace, 1985 & 1990; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Peterson, 1987; Pike, 1995 & 1999; Smith & Westland, 1993; Smith et al., 1993; Terenzini & Wright, 1987.

[6] Banta & Palomba, 1999; Banta et al., 1996; Black, 1993; Bohr et al., 1994; Cole et al., 1997; Fong, 1988; Forrest, 1990; Guthrie et al., 1991; Hutchings, 1989; Johnson et al., 1993; Klein et al., 1994; Lenning, 1988; Lutz & Steele, 1995; McClelland et al., 1981; Mingle, 1986; NCHEMS, 1996; Obler et al., 1993; Parkes & Suen, 1996; Pascarella et al., 1994; Waluconis, 1993.

2.1.1 Comparison of Actuarial Data

"Comparison of Actuarial Data" is based on "actuarial" data[7]. Proponents of this approach of educational quality assessment believe that "actuarial" data are relatively straightforward to collect. Above all, those data can be easily compared across institutions and over time. However, there is a shortfall in the Comparison of Actuarial Data. It is assumed that better educational quality is necessarily associated with more or better resource, for instance, better students, better faculty, better funding (Austin, 1968, 1977, 1991, 1992 & 1993).

In America, "actuarial" database at the national level yields little information about an institution's educational effectiveness in terms of student outcomes it produces (Dey et al., 1997 & NPEC, 2000). Obviously, "actuarial" data have prima facie validity in objectively assessing higher educational quality. However, it is questionable whether "Comparison of Actuarial Data" could lead to a tacit measurement of student learning outcome.

2.1.2 Ratings of Institutional Quality

"Ratings of Institutional Quality" is based on the "ratings" and "rankings" of institutions by a group of "experts". Those "experts" are either or both the faculty and administrators of the higher

[7] For instance, "actuarial data" may be administration test scores of entering students, selectivity ratio, graduation rates, racial/ethnic composition of student body, breadth and depth of academic course offerings, highest degree earned by faculty members, levels of external research funding or level of endowment.

institutions. They are asked to rate the educational quality of different institutions and their programs on a series of prescribed dimensions. The informed "experts" are also asked to rank the institutions in the end. The "rankings" are based in part on actuarial data as mentioned before. Besides, the "rankings" are also based on surveys of faculties and administrators on their perceptions and opinions about educational quality.

There is a shortfall in the "Ratings of Institutional Quality". The weights of the prescribed dimensions are the most vulnerable part of this approach of educational quality assessment. A combination of various dimensions into an overall rating obviously lacks defensible empirical or theoretical basis in assessment of educational quality. Sometimes, some prescribed dimensions lack face validity but bear subjectivity. Above all, there is not a simple correlation matrix of the dimensions indicating whether or not the measures are collinear and measuring the same thing.

Though "Ratings of Institutional Quality" have a widespread impact on the assessment of educational quality, it is questionable whether or not the "rankings" have changed educational practices at the institutional level. Opponents of "Ratings of Institutional Quality" question about the meaningfulness of the "rankings" and their usefulness in shaping educational and curricular policy to improve student learning.

2.1.3 Conduct of Student Surveys

"Conduct of Student Surveys" is based on self-reported student information. In contrast, the 1st approach is using proxy data from the sampled institutions while the 2nd Approach is using ranking data from the informed experts. This Approach calls for the collection of data[8] from the students.

Surveys and individual or group interviews are the most common methods for data collection in this approach. Sometimes, interviews with the faculty or other stakeholders are supplementary methods. Like other kind of surveys, the prime concern of "Conduct of Student Surveys" is the reliability of the self-reported data. Two problems impacting the accuracy and so forth the reliability of the Student Surveys were surfaced in previous researches (Aakar et al., 1998; Kuk, 2001).

First, some students are unable to supply accurate information. Second, some students are unwilling to supply accurate information. Furthermore, there is a shortfall in the "Conduct of Student Surveys". It is sometimes difficult to ensure whether or not what students report corresponds to what they have

[8] For instance, data from the students may be their collegiate experience, self-assessments of improvement in academic abilities, satisfaction with coursework and school and their perceptions on the teaching techniques and assessment methods or educational & employment plans.

actually experienced. Proponents of this approach of educational quality assessment support that this shortfall could be overcome under the following conditions (Kuk, 2001):

- ✧ Self-Reported Information requested is known to the students;
- ✧ Questions are phrased clearly and unambiguously;
- ✧ Questions are referred to recent activities;
- ✧ Students think the questions merit a serious and thoughtful response;
- ✧ Students are not threatened or embarrassed by answering the questions;
- ✧ Students' privacy is protected;
- ✧ Students are encouraged to respond in socially desirable ways.

Under the foregoing conditions, "Conduct of Student Surveys" may produce reliable data for assessment of educational quality assessment. Nonetheless, "Conduct of Student Surveys" is still problematic because educational quality is linked with student learning. In particular, this approach is invariably indirect measure of learning given the reliance on student assessment.

2.1.4 Direct Measurement of Student Learning Outcomes

"Direct Measurement of Student Learning Outcome (SLO)" is based on the assessment of the student learning[9] in a program. In America, some states stipulate that all institutions should adopt the same standardized assessment in the direct measurement of their students' ASK (Abilities, Skills and Knowledge). Direct measurement of the students' ASK produce data on individual students as well as groups of students at both the program and institutional levels. Proponents of this approach tend to agree on the validity of direct measurement of students' ASK. However, "Direct Measurement of SLO" is perhaps the least systematically used of the four conventional approaches of educational quality assessment.

"Direct Measurement of SLO" can be a means of collecting data on programmatic and institutional effectiveness. Sometimes, it is conducted by an institution's faculty on its own students. In such circumstances, comparison between institutions may not be viable. Nonetheless, some institutions may collaborate with each other in the "Direct Measurement of SLO" then they could compare results among themselves.

Understandably, use of this approach seems to be the most obvious way to assess educational quality. Unfortunately, use of this approach is

[9] The assessment methods can be (a) use of multiple-choice or open-ended tests, (b) administration of standardized tests, (c) performance of assessment tasks, (d) evaluation of projects or portfolios, and (e) analysis of course grades.

uncommon in America as well as China. Perhaps, its uncommonness is due to the huge obstacles to making institutional comparison while the higher institutions could hardly agree on what should be measured. Moreover, "Direct Measurement of SLO" is cost-prohibited.

2.1.5 Pros & Cons of 4 Conventional Approaches

It is revealed that those conventional approaches have pros and cons in monitoring and measuring educational quality. In the first place, "Comparison of Actuarial Data" is commonly used because of the ease of collection and the patina of scientific objectivity. However, it equates quality with discrete, available and easily measurable indicators of quality, such as counts of people and resources.

Secondly, "Ratings of Institutional Quality" relies on a formula that combines "Comparison of Actuarial Data" and ratings by informed experts. These rankings have limitations as they provide only an indirect measurement of quality and conflate quality and reputation.

Thirdly, "Conduct of Student Surveys" measures quality according to student perceptions of their learning. Chun (2002) comments that this approach may be problematic as it relies on students' self-evaluation. Nonetheless, student surveys could be an important step in connecting SLO with educational quality.

Finally, "Direct Measurement of SLO" may have the greatest face validity in assessing quality of higher education. Ironically, student learning outcomes sometimes relates to the intelligence quotients and learning abilities of the students. It would be problematic when people try to standardize a post-learning test for measuring the SLO.

2.2 Program Evaluation

With the conventional approaches of educational quality assessment, many evaluation models have emerged in America since 1960. Chronologically, the development of program evaluation was spurred as a professional practice by a number of scholars [10]. Some evaluation models are developed either at the national or institutional level. Some evaluation models are built at the programmatic level because of their compatibility with specific programs.

Understandably, international or national forces have stimulated the expansion and development of evaluation practice in America and so forth the relevant

[10] Tyler, 1942b, 1950 & 1966; Campbell & Stanley, 1963; Cronbach, 1963; Stufflebeam, 1966 & 1967; Scriven, 1967, 1991, 1993, 1994a-c; Suchman, 1967; Alkin, 1969; Guba, 1969; Provus, 1969; Stufflebeam et al., 1971; Parlett & Hamilton, 1972; Weiss, 1972; Eisner, 1975; Glass, 1975; Stake, 1975b, 1988 & 1995; Cronbach & Associates, 1980; House, 1980; Patton, 1980, 1982, 1990, 1994 & 1997; Schwandt, 1984; Smith NL, 1987; Smith MF, 1989; Guba & Lincoln, 1991; Cronbach, 1982; Shinkfield & Stufflebeam, 1985; Sanders & Worthen, 1987 & 1997; Cook, Leviton & Shadish, 1991; Freeman & Rossi, 1993; Nevo, 1993; Hatry, Newcomer & Wholey, 1995; Miech, Mosteller & Nave, 1999;

theories. The international or national forces also steer the practice and theories of program evaluation towards quality education for the prospective learners as well as the society.

Hitherto, there have been 22 models of program evaluation (Figure 1) that can be divided into 4 main categories (Stufflebeam, 2000). Occasionally, it is functional to mix and match the foregoing models for the purpose of program evaluation. Mixed application of these Models would produce several hybrid approaches to suit the quality assessment needs of different educational programs. What will be an ideal model for the quality assessment of management education program in the Mainland? It merits further examination in a series of researches.

2.2.1 Evaluation of Management Education Program

Program evaluation can be narrowed down to specific assessments. Assessment of a management education program for the adult learners can take many forms (Athanasou, 1998). It can be formal or informal in nature (i.e., for organizational or personal use). It can be internal or external (i.e., conducted by commoners or consultants). It can be formative or summative. In such circumstances, what educational quality assessment exactly is? Furthermore, how "Direct Measurement of SLO" could throw light to the assessment of educational quality?

Answers to these questions are determined by the purpose of the assessment. There is a range of assessment methods broadly used to fulfill any purpose of assessment. The match between assessment methods, purposes and learning outcomes is more subtle than it appears. If the primary purpose of the assessment is not only "summative" but also provision of feedback to the students, different criteria and comments may be needed.

The match of assessment methods, purposes and learning outcomes becomes more subtle when there are different levels of skills generating different levels of outcomes, such as class level, modular level, program level and institutional level. Assessment at the program level may be the most subtle task. In management education programs, it is unlikely that there is a one-to-one correspondence (Brown, et al, 1997) between an assessment task and an outcome at the module and program level. Brown et al. (1997) opine that there is a high probability of over-assessment if indeed there is a one-to-one correspondence. Nonetheless, it is still possible to design assessment tasks that test a set of overlapping outcomes at the class, modular and program Levels.

2.2.2 Combination of Assessment Methods

Broadly speaking, there are 13

assessment methods[11] (Brown et al., 1997) of SLO. In a prototype of program evaluation model (Figure 2) for an MBA degree program in the Mainland, there is a trend of combined assessment methods to fit the purpose of assessment and measure the SLO at class, modular and program levels.

Taking the subject program of AIOU at an example, the students are required to participate in learning activities in core subjects and electives. They are also required to conduct a research at the end of the program and compiling a thesis under the supervision of a professor. Then, the students have to present the research findings to the internal and external examiners in a viva voce for the award of the MBA degree. These tasks undertaken by the students virtually embrace combined assessment methods, such as essay, reflective practice assignment, problem, cases and open problem, project, dissertation, oral, and presentation.

2. Research Methodology

Admittedly, it is somewhat difficult to get a simple tool for quality assessment in education industry. Bickerstaffe (2000) asserts that the traditional aim of an MBA degree program is to introduce general management skills to the target learners. This reasons why MBA degree program covers the basic management disciplines, such as accounting, marketing and operations. The basic concept of MBA degree program is to introduce the target learners to all specialist areas of management thus developing their integral competencies. Then, the learners playing managerial roles could understand and control functional specialists.

3.1 Curricular Elements & Processes contributing to Quality

Bickerstaffe (2000) further believes that most MBA degree programs also explicitly aim to improve effectives on the job and usually designed in a similar way to a physical fitness regime. Teaching staff introduce a broad range of management functions in which they drill the learners, enabling them to respond swiftly and almost automatically. Case study, action learning, and action research, which analyze real-life corporate problems, is a classical way of doing an MBA. Such pedagogy is regarded as a tradition of general but quality MBA degree program. However, pedagogy seems to be one of the curricular elements of an MBA degree program. What else would affect the quality of a program?

3.1.1 Curricular Elements

Historically in the Mainland, "curriculum" was construed as core subjects and/or electives, teaching

[11] (1) Multiple-Choice Question (MCQ); (2) Short Answer Question; (3) Single Essay Question; (4) Essay; (5) Mini-Practical; (6) Report on Practical; (7) Reflective Practice Assignment; (8) Problem; (9) Cases and Open Problem; (10) Project, Group Project and Dissertation; (11) Oral; (12) Presentation; and (13) Poster Session.

sequences and duration of those subjects and electives (if any). Subsequently, educational institutions in the Mainland defined "curriculum" as subjects of an educational program, their scope of study, teaching sequences and teaching hours. Therefore, curriculum of an educational program appears to be the summation of its learning objectives, its prescribed subjects, scope of study, and learning processes which lead to the students' learning outcomes.

Hua (1998) and Huang (2002) believe that "curriculum" of an educational program consists of three elements, namely (a) program objective(s), (b) scope of study, and (c) mode of study (teaching or learning). Huang (2002) adds that "curriculum design" can be defined as the summation of the planning and design of these 3 elements. These elements are reflected in the curricular processes, such as drafting the curricular plan, drawing the curricular outlines, and selecting the textbooks and/or references.

From the perspectives of curricular elements, educationalists in the Mainland use the term, "curricular setting" (English translation from Chinese) to illustrate the curriculum design of an educational program. Generally speaking, this term implies the various processes in the realization of an educational product or service:

- ✧ Setting up an educational program
- ✧ Determining subjects to be taught within the timeframe of the program
- ✧ Drawing curricular outlines of the program
- ✧ Selecting training materials to be used for the program
- ✧ Drafting the teaching plan
- ✧ Organizing the learning activities

Apparently in mainland China, the definition, terminology, meanings of curriculum or curriculum design or curriculum setting have changed from the past to present through the 20th century. In fact, quality of an educational program is determined by its curricular elements no matter they are collectively known as "curriculum", "curriculum design" or "curriculum setting".

3.1.2 Curricular Processes

Using quality management principles of "system approach" and "process approach", it would be pragmatic to study the curricular elements through their associated processes whilst assessing educational quality. Taking the subject program of AIOU as an example, its external MBA degree program is characterized by the curricular processes, namely Administrative Process, Teaching Process, Learning Process, Research Process, and Appraisal Process (Sou & Zhou, 2005).

Target learners of an MBA degree program are always expecting management education of high quality when they take it as a path of their Life

Learning. The society is also cherishing quality education to boost up its people who would contribute to the economic development. Therefore, the curriculum design of a MBA Degree Program should meet the needs of the target learners as well as the society. Curriculum of a MBA Degree Program needs to be refined continually since the commerce and industry of a developing country like the People's Republic of China is always on the wheel of change. In such circumstances, a program evaluation model for quality management education is desirable.

3.2 Quality Evaluation of AIOU's MBA Degree Program

Since 2002, AIOU has been adopting process approach in the monitoring and measurement of its performance in the educational quality management system. In 2004, the authors of this paper embarked on a series of quantitative cum qualitative research on a feasible prototype of program evaluation model for higher education in the Mainland. It involves the utilization of some conventional approaches mentioned in Section 2 of this paper and the other research methodology (Table 1).

Specimens of the tailor-made instruments (Questionnaires for the "Conduct of Student Surveys") used in the previous researches are available for public reference in the "Sciencepaper Online", a website administered by the Center for Science and Technology Development, Ministry of Education, People's Republic of China (http://www.paper.edu.cn/downloadpaper.php?serial_number=200501-61&type=1). Data collected are analyzed by means of Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS v11.0) or other appropriate statistical tools. Findings of the previous studies generate a prototype of program evaluation model monitoring and measuring the various curricular processes in the quality management system of the AIOU's MBA degree program in the Mainland.

3. Data Analysis

The qualitative study of this research involved literature review and focus group interviews of educational administrators, teaching staff or MBA students while the quantitative survey embraced questionnaire survey through convenient sampling. The survey generated a return of 924 questionnaires for the study of "Learning Process" and 1 074 questionnaires for the study of "Teaching, Learning, Research and Appraisal Processes".

4.1. Teaching, Learning, Research & Appraisal Processes

Combining qualitative and quantitative analysis, the perceived Degree of Importance/Satisfaction of the MBA candidates of the subject program were worked out as follows:

- ✧ Teaching Process
  - ■ Perceived Degree of Importance/Satisfaction in Teaching Mode (Figure 3)
- ✧ Learning Process
  - ■ Perceived Degree of Importance/Satisfaction in Subjects (Figure 4)
  - ■ Perceived Degree of Importance/Satisfaction in Training Materials (Figure 5)
- ✧ Research Process
  - ■ Perceived Degree of Importance/Satisfaction in Research Mode (Figure 6)
- ✧ Appraisal Process
  - ■ Perceived Degree of Importance/Satisfaction in Appraisal Mode (Figure 7)

4.2. Findings

All the returned questionnaires were processed by means of T-test, Correlation Analysis, Linear Multiple Regression Analysis and Factor Analysis through SPSS. Quantitative Analysis was conducted on the hypothesis that educational quality of the AIOU's MBA degree program was correlated to its curriculum, training materials, teaching staff, Research and Appraisal Processes. In brief, the most significant findings of the quantitative analysis are reported as follows:

- ✧ Teaching Process
  - ■ Pearson analysis ($C_V = 0.874$; $\alpha < 0.05$) reveals that the "Perceived Degree of Importance in Teaching Mode" has a statistical correlation with the "Perceived Degree of Satisfaction in Teaching Mode"
  - ■ ANOVA analysis ($R^2 = 0.72$) reveals that the "Overall Satisfaction of Teaching Process" = $0.03 + 0.23^{12} + 0.12^{13} + 0.13^{14} + 0.08^{15} + 0.09^{16} + 0.07^{17} + 0.09^{18} + 0.08^{19} + 0.08^{20}$
- ✧ Learning Process
  - ■ Pearson analysis ($C_V = 0.905$; $\alpha < 0.05$) reveals that the "Perceived Degree of Importance in Subjects" has a statistical correlation with the "Perceived Degree of Satisfaction in Subjects"
  - ■ ANOVA analysis ($R^2 = 0.72$) reveals that "Overall Satisfaction of Subjects" = $0.16 + 0.26^{21} + 0.12^{22} +$

[12] Variable 19 = Teaching process enhances the knowledge of student.
[13] Variable 5 = Teaching process reflects the new development of research.
[14] Variable 2 = Teaching process reflects the seriousness of the teacher.
[15] Variable 7 = Teaching process reflects the focus of the subject.
[16] Variable 10 = Teaching process satisfies the learners' needs.
[17] Variable 13 = Teaching process cultivates the learners' abilities in renovation and researches.
[18] Variable 6 = Teaching process reflects a clear learning objectives.
[19] Variable 4 = Teaching process embraces appropriate course content.
[20] Variable 1 = Teaching process reflects the sound preparation of the teacher.
[21] Variable 24 = Thesis Compilation and Research Methodology.
[22] Variable 11 = Cost Accounting.

0.07[23] + 0.15[24] + 0.08[25] + 0.10[26] + 0.08[27] + 0.04[28]

- Pearson analysis ($C_V = 0.42$; $\alpha = 0.86 > 0.05$) reveals that the "Perceived Degree of Importance in Training Materials" does not have a distinctive statistical correlation with the "Perceived Degree of Satisfaction in Training Materials"
- ANOVA analysis ($R^2 = 0.65$) reveals that "Overall Satisfaction of Training Materials" = $0.14 + 0.15$[29] + 0.22[30] + 0.12[31] + 0.14[32] + 0.09[33] + 0.11[34] + 0.08[35]

✧ Research & Appraisal Processes

- Pearson analysis ($C_V = 627$; $\alpha < 0.05$) reveals that the "Perceived Degree of Importance in Research & Appraisal Modes" has a statistical correlation statistical correlation with the "Perceived Degree of Satisfaction in Research & Appraisal Modes"
- ANOVA analysis ($R^2 = 0.708$) reveals that the "Overall Satisfaction of Research & Appraisal Processes" = $0.15 + 0.37$[36] + 0.14[37] + 0.17[38] + 0.12[39] + 0.12[40] + 0.03[41] + 0.07[42] + 0.08[43]

In parallel with qualitative study, this research led to the following findings:

1. Curriculum with its associated curricular processes is the premise of the AIOU's MBA degree program.
2. Training materials is closely linked with the educational quality of the AIOU's MBA degree program.
3. Good teaching staff warrants the quality of the AIOU's MBA degree program.
4. Research and appraisal processes reflect the quality of the AIOU's MBA degree program.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings, this research has provisionally concluded with the following recommendations:

[23] Variable 13 = Strategic Management of Change
[24] Variable 10 = Marketing Management.
[25] Variable 15 = Business Law.
[26] Variable 2 = Organization and Management for Business.
[27] Variable 17 = Corporate Recovery.
[28] Variable 1 = Business Accounting for Executives.
[29] Variable 7 = Economics for Business
[30] Variable 20: Thesis Compilation and Research Methodology
[31] Variable 5 = Production Management
[32] Variable 9 = Human Resources Management
[33] Variable 12 = Small Business Management
[34] Variable 1 = Business Accounting for Executives
[35] Variable 13: Strategic Management of Change
[36] Variable 22 = Research and appraisal processes enhance the students' overall knowledge level in business administration.
[37] Variable 13 = Appraisal process in the form of 30-minute viva is appropriate.
[38] Variable 20 = Appraisal results is appropriate.
[39] Variable 1 = Research process reflects the proper mentoring in research methodology.
[40] Variable 16 = Appraisal process reflects the professionalism and expertise of the internal examiner.
[41] Variable 14 = Appraisal process reflects the sound preparation of the internal examiner.
[42] Variable 3 = Research process reflects the proper guidance of the thesis supervisor in the conduct of the student's master research.
[43] Variable 9 = Appraisal process reflects the appropriateness of viva voce.

1. To renovate the curriculum of the AIOU's MBA degree program.
2. To refine the learning materials of the AIOU's MBA degree program.
3. To revise the Learning Process of the AIOU's MBA degree program.
4. To improve the Research and Appraisal Processes of the AIOU's MBA degree program.

This research has contributed to the wide body of knowledge in the establishment of a prototype of program evaluation model for the AIOU's MBA degree program. The model with a conventional educational quality assessment approach (Conduct of Student Surveys) embraces Teaching Process, Learning Process, Research Process and Appraisal Process of the subject program. It quantifies the quality of the subject Program in the aspects of Teaching, Learning, Research and Appraisal. The model will be beneficial to the future development of the subject program for the career managers in the education market of the Mainland. Furthermore, it has implications for the educators as well as the theories of program evaluation.

5.1. Implications for Educators

AIOU's MBA degree program for the career managers in mainland China has strong elements of action learning and action research. The "Research Process" and "Appraisal Process" could be platforms for assessment of SLO. In future researches on assessment of SLO, rich qualitative and quantitative data will be available and could fill the research gap between assessment of student learning and the evaluation of educational program.

Further researches on assessment of SLO would lead to a holistic view on the quality assessment of higher educational program. The prototype of the program evaluation model of AIOU's MBA degree program could be refined in a hope to shed light to the evaluation of educational quality of MBA degree programs for the career managers in the Mainland. Educators may regard it as food for thought in the quality educational provision in the management education market. Future research outcome may become implications for the educators as well as education theories.

5.2. Implications for Theories

In quality assessment of higher education, it sometimes points to the links between the notions of "Fitness for Purpose" and "Fitness of Award". "Fitness for Purpose" examines the links between particular students' perception or experience and specific objectives of the educational program. In contrast, "Fitness of Award" concerns the links between the judgment made against general criteria, usually national standards and the running of the educational program. Relatively, "Fitness of Award" is independent of particular educational program and the student.

Obviously, there is an inherent conflict in assessment of educational quality in terms of "Fitness for Purpose" and "Fitness of Award". The conflict is related to the issue of relatives and absolutes with reference to the notions of Platonic and Aristotelian interpretation of "Good". The conflict is attributed to the similarities and differences between Aristotelian and Platonic Notions.

5.2.1. Aristotelian Notion

Aristotelian Notion is established on the premises of "good for what and for whom". "Good" is construed on the basis of the students' reflections upon experience. The reflections lead to differing interpretation of "Good" according to the purposes, context and the shifting boundaries of experience. Assessment of educational quality in terms of "Fitness for Purpose" is conceptualized by this belief.

5.2.2. Platonic Notion

Platonic Notion is established in the principles that are pre-determined by the "guardians" of the society. "Good" is construed on the basis of the pre-determined standards of the society. Plato believes that there are ideal standards to which all human beings should aspire. National standards of a degree program and rank ordering of an educational institution is conceptualized by this belief. A Platonic model of quality assessment calls for a measure against "ideal" standards that are independent of the curriculum of the educational program, processes of the teaching and learning, and abilities of the students.

5.3. Implications for Further Research

Brown & Knight (1994) point out that Assessment is at the heart of the student experience. In higher education, assessment of SLO defines what the students regard as important, how they spend their time and how they come to see themselves as students and then as graduates (Brown et al., 1997).

5.3.1. Benefit from Assessment of SLO

When assessment of SLO could be correlated to learning, it is not only at the heart of the students' perception or experience. It should be at the hearts of those who:

- ✧ learn, i.e., the students.
- ✧ teach, i.e., the trainers.
- ✧ hire, i.e., the employer.
- ✧ develop the course or training program, i.e., the institution.
- ✧ accredit the course or training program, i.e., the authority.

All these people could be benefited from further researches on assessment of SLO. Brown et al. (1997) provides a list of the benefits of assessment of SLO (Table 2). From the 20th century, there has been a dramatic shift in assessment in higher education. At the end of the 20th century, more shifts in assessment have

been detected (Brown et al., 1997). Some of the shifts have gone to assessment of SLO. In store, such shifts will not only maximize the benefits to the students. They also optimize the benefit to the other stakeholders of an educational program.

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Figure 1: Twenty-two Foundational Program Evaluation Models in 4 Categories

Pseudo-Evaluation Model	**Improvement/Accountability-Oriented Evaluation Model**
1. Public Relations-Inspired Studies 2. Politically Controlled Studies	1. Decision/Accountability-Oriented Studies 2. Consumer-Oriented Studies 3. Accreditation/Certification Approach
Quasi-Evaluation Model	**Social Agenda-Directed/Advocacy Evaluation Model**
1. Objective-Based Studies 2. Objective Testing Programs 3. Accountability, particularly Payment by Results Studies 4. Outcomes Evaluation as Value-Added Assessment 5. Performance Testing 6. Experimental Studies 7. Management Information Systems 8. Benefit-Cost Analysis Approach 9. Clarification Hearing 10. Case Study Evaluations 11. Criticism and Connoisseurship 12. Program Theory-Based Evaluation 13. Mixed-Method Studies	1. Client-Centered Studies / Responsive Evaluation 2. Constructivist Evaluation 3. Deliberative Democratic Evaluation 4. Utilization-Focused Evaluation

Figure 2: A Prototype of Program Evaluation Model for AIOU's MBA Degree Program

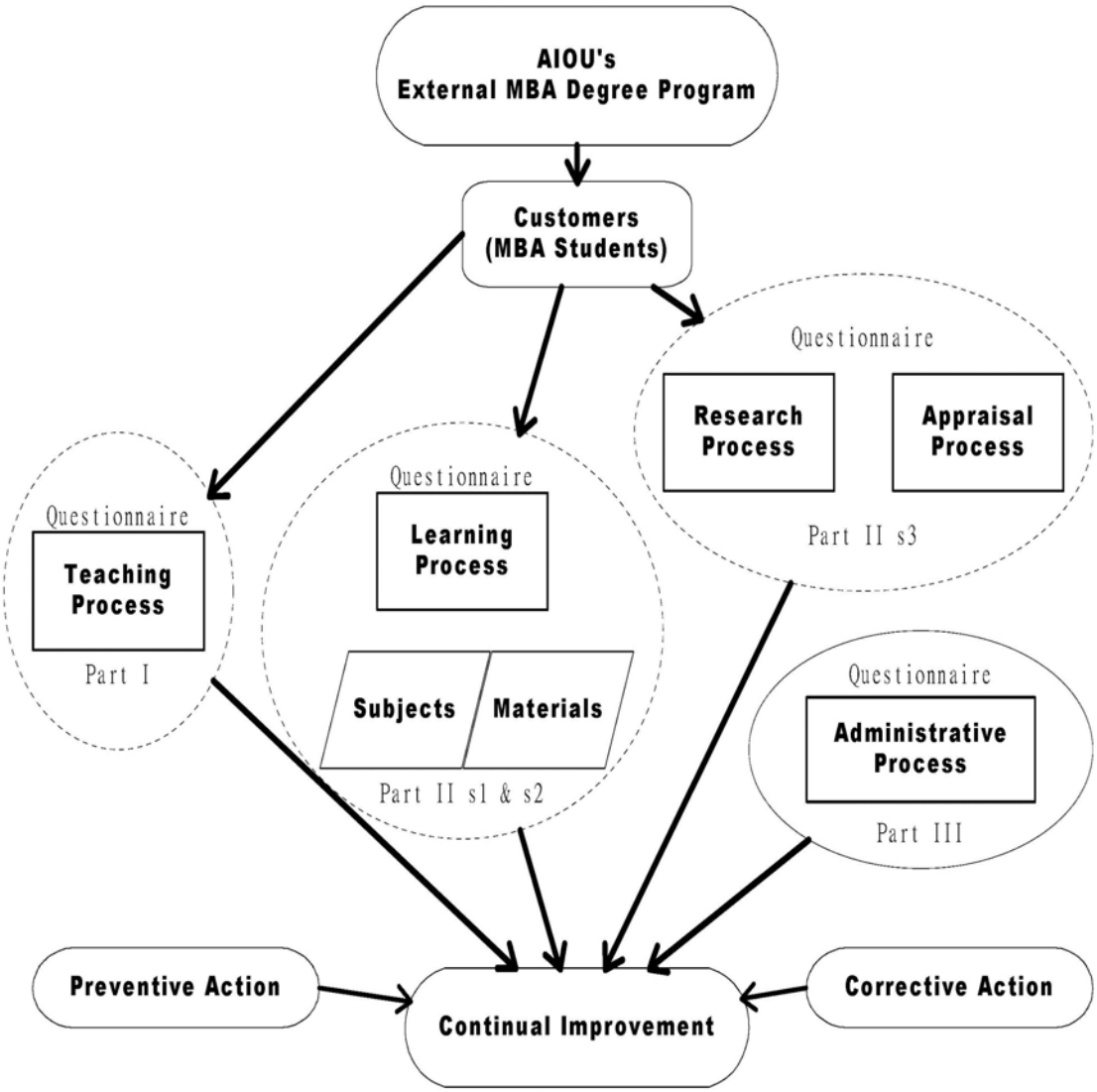

Table 1: Series Researches on AIOU's MBA Degree Program

Item	Survey	Data & Subjects	Data for Analysis
1	2002 Student Survey on Perceived Importance of 17 Core Subjects in the Curriculum of AIOU's MBA Degree Cohort Program (Zhou, 2002)	Available (n=580 MBA Students)	5-out-of-17 Most Important Core Subjects as perceived by the MBA Students in 2002.
2	2003-04 Student Survey on Teaching and Learning Processes in AIOU's MBA Degree Cohort Program in the Mainland (Zhou, 2004)	Available (n=544 MBA Students)	Perceived Degree of Importance and Satisfaction of Pedagogy adopted by the Mainland/AIOU Faculty in the subject Program
3	2004 Student Survey on the Teaching and Learning Processes of AIOU's MBA Degree Cohort Program in Tianjin, PRC (Li, 2004)	Available (n=80 MBA Students)	Apparent Social Needs of Higher Education for Working Adults in Tianjin. Perceived Degree of Importance & Satisfaction of the Pedagogy adopted by the Mainland Faculty in the subject Program.
4	2004-05 Graduate Survey on Perceived Importance and Satisfaction of AIOU's MBA Degree Cohort Program in the Mainland (Sou & Zhou, 2004)	Available (n=1000+ Candidates)	Degree of Importance and Satisfaction as perceived by AIOU's MBA Graduates: ✧ 17 Core Subjects ✧ 3-out-of-6 Electives ✧ Training Materials ✧ Action Research ✧ Viva Voce
5	2004 Educator Survey on AIOU's MBA Degree Cohort Program in the Mainland (Sou & Zhou, 2004)	Available (n=10+ Educators)	Opinions from the Educators about the Curriculum of the subject Program.

Figure 3: Perceived Degree of Importance/Satisfaction in Teaching Mode

Relative Important Teaching Mode	**Relative Unimportant Teaching Mode**
✧ Enthusiasm in Class ✧ Sound Preparation ✧ Logical Presentation ✧ Concise Presentation ✧ Stimulated Thinking	✧ Provision of References facilitating Effective Learning ✧ Provision of Advice on Extracurricular Activities ✧ Stimulation of Thinking by means of Assignment or Examination ✧ Application of Modern Pedagogy
Relative Satisfactory Teaching Mode	**Relative Unsatisfactory Teaching Mode**
✧ Enthusiasm in Class ✧ Sound Preparation ✧ Logical Presentation ✧ Effective Transfer of Knowledge	✧ Application of Modern Pedagogy ✧ Encouragement of Class Participation ✧ Provision of References facilitating Effective Learning ✧ Cultivation of Innovative & Research Capabilities ✧ Provision of Advice on Extracurricular Activities

Figure 4: Perceived Degree of Importance/Satisfaction in Subjects

Relative Important Subjects	**Relative Unimportant Subjects**
Core Subject (2), (3), (9), (10) & (16): ✧ Organization & Management for Business ✧ Financial Management ✧ Human Resources Management ✧ Marketing Management ✧ Business Strategic Management	**Core Subject (4), (5) & (12):** ✧ Quantitative Methods Analysis ✧ Production Management ✧ Small Business Management **Elective (2), (4) & (5):** ✧ Auditing ✧ Comparative Management ✧ Total Quality Management
Relative Satisfactory Subjects	**Relative Unsatisfactory Subjects**
Core Subject (7), (8), (9) & (16): ✧ Economics for Business ✧ Organization Behavior ✧ Human Resources Management ✧ Business Strategic Management	**Core Subject (4), (5) & (12):** ✧ Quantitative Methods Analysis ✧ Production Management ✧ Small Business Management **Elective (2), (4) & (5):** ✧ Auditing ✧ Comparative Management ✧ Total Quality Management

Figure 5: Perceived Degree of Importance/Satisfaction in Training Materials

Relative Important Training Materials	**Relative Unimportant Training Materials**
Core Subject (3), (8), (9), (10) & (16): ✧ Financial Management ✧ Organization Behavior ✧ Human Resources Management ✧ Marketing Management ✧ Business Strategic Management	**Core Subject (4), (11), (12) & (15):** ✧ Quantitative Methods Analysis ✧ Cost Accounting ✧ Small Business Management ✧ Business Law
Relative Satisfactory Training Materials	**Relative Unsatisfactory Training Materials**
Core Subject (8), (9), (10) & (16): ✧ Organization Behavior ✧ Human Resources Management ✧ Marketing Management ✧ Business Strategic Management	**Core Subject (1), (4), (5), (6), (11) & (12):** ✧ Business Accounting for Executives ✧ Quantitative Methods Analysis ✧ Production Management ✧ Information Systems ✧ Cost Accounting ✧ Small Business Management

Figure 6: Perceived Degree of Importance/Satisfaction in Research Mode

Relative Important Research Mode	**Relative Unimportant Research Mode**
✧ Guidance on the Choice of Research Methodology ✧ Guidance on Application of Research Methods ✧ Close Supervision of Research Activities	✧ Guidance on the Choice of Research Tools ✧ Guidance on the Compilation of Thesis ✧ Guidance on Literature Review
Relative Satisfactory Research Mode	**Relative Unsatisfactory Research Mode**
✧ Guidance on Choice of Research Topic ✧ Guidance on Application of Research Methods ✧ Close Supervision of Research Activities	✧ Guidance on the Compilation of Thesis ✧ Guidance on the Choice of Research Tools ✧ Guidance on Literature Review

Figure 7: Perceived Degree of Importance/Satisfaction in Appraisal Mode

Relative Important Appraisal Mode	**Relative Unimportant Appraisal Mode**
✧ Solemnity of Internal Examiner ✧ Solemnity of External Examiner ✧ Professional Knowledge of Internal Examiner ✧ Proliferation of Knowledge	✧ Appropriateness of Viva Voce ✧ Arrangement of Viva Voce ✧ Length of Viva Voce ✧ Environment of Viva Voce
Relative Satisfactory Appraisal Mode	**Relative Unsatisfactory Appraisal Mode**
✧ Solemnity of Internal Examiner ✧ Solemnity of External Examiner ✧ Professional Knowledge of Internal Examiner ✧ Proliferation of Personal Knowledge	✧ Appropriateness of Appraisal Mode ✧ Appropriateness of Viva Voce ✧ Arrangement of Viva Voce ✧ Environment of Viva Voce

Table 2: Benefits of Assessment of Student Learning Outcome

Item	Benefit	To Student	To Trainer	To Employer	To Institution	To Authority
1	Providing feedback to students to improve their learning.	✓	✓		✓	
2	Motivating students.	✓	✓		✓	
3	Diagnosing a student's strengths and weaknesses.	✓	✓		✓	
4	Helping students to develop their skills of self-assessment.	✓	✓		✓	
5	Providing a profile of what a student has learnt.		✓		✓	
6	Passing or Failing a student.		✓		✓	
7	Grading or Ranking a student.		✓		✓	
8	Licensing students to proceed.	✓				
9	Licensing students to practice.	✓		✓		
10	Selecting students for future training programs.				✓	
11	Predicting students' success in employment.			✓	✓	
12	Selecting students for future employment.			✓		
13	Providing feedback to trainers.		✓		✓	
14	Improving teaching.		✓		✓	
15	Evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of a training program.				✓	✓
16	Making a training program appear "respectable" and creditworthy to other institutions and employers.			✓	✓	✓