

STRATEGIC ANALYSIS FOR BUSINESS CAREER SERVICES AT SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY

by

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ABSTRACT

Business Career Services (BCS) is a strategic business unit operating under the Faculty of Business at Simon Fraser University. This report analyses this unit's structure, objectives, and resources required to reach its goals.

Through industry and internal analyses, this report reveals that there is a considerable distance between BCS and its goal of being a differentiator. Despite the expertise found in the unit, it is under-delivering in certain key areas, primarily due to a lack of resources.

The issues facing BCS include differing expectations among MBA students; determination of metrics to measure BCS' performance; selection of primary targets for marketing activities; and building the alumni network.

The recommendation is for BCS to conduct a comprehensive survey with the MBA students and alumni; develop and implement a full-scale marketing campaign; and adjust strategic fit by identifying more funding sources and generating additional revenue.

DEDICATION

To my wife and best friend Kyoko, whose unconditional love and support made the impossible possible.

To my children Shinichi, Koji, and Miyuki who always brought me joy and encouragement when I need it most.

To my mother and father who were always there. Happy 50th Anniversary!!

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1 INTRODUCTION

Business Career Services (BCS) is a strategic business unit operating under the Faculty of Business at Simon Fraser University (SFU). BCS provides specialized services for students and graduates of Bachelor and Master of Business Administration programs (BBA and MBA), and for employers interested in recruiting SFU business students. According to an article in Canadian Business.com by Andrew Wahl, career services have become the latest marketing tool for the MBA programs across the country.¹ This suggests the vital role business career services play in the prospective student's choice of business school, yet the word "latest" also indicates that this distinction is fairly recent. All major business schools in Canada provide career services. This report will include a strategic analysis of BCS, uncovering some of the issues, and put forward recommendations to address them. We shall begin by providing some background on the university, BCS, and the unit's customers.

1.1 Simon Fraser University

Simon Fraser University (SFU) opened in September 1965. In its 40 years' span, SFU has developed its core competencies in liberal arts and sciences. Its interdisciplinary and professional programs have been known to be innovative. Maclean's magazine, Canada's premier news magazine, has rated SFU as Canada's best comprehensive

¹ Wahl, Andrew. "Job one," Canadian Business. (Oct 25, 2004): p.1. March 3, 2005
<www.canadianbusiness.com/mba2004/article.jsp?content=20041025_62941_62941>

university five times (1993, '96, '97, '98, and '00) in the publication's annual rankings and the university has consistently been at, or near, the top of the publication's national evaluations.²

The university's main campus is in the City of Burnaby. In addition, the Harbour Centre campus in downtown Vancouver opened in 1989, and Surrey campus began operation in 2002. Approximately 25,000 students attend its graduate and undergraduate programs.

1.2 Business Career Services

The BCS in its present format is approximately one year old, and is considered a “start-up” business by management. Until its establishment, career services provided to business students came from SFU's Health, Counselling, and Career Centre (HCCC). As the name suggests, registered SFU students can go to HCCC for health care, physiotherapy, personal counselling, learning skills, and career services. BCS was created to provide more focused services to the students of business programs. The rationale for this separate branch is that business students often have more specific and sophisticated needs compared to students of other faculties. As well, they in general pay higher tuition in both graduate and undergraduate programs and therefore often have higher expectations from the university in terms of value delivered.

Currently, BCS is a team of three – Executive Director, MBA Career Manager, and Manager, Undergraduate Careers. The team is supported by occasional contractors providing specialized services. It also shares an administrative clerk with some of the

² About SFU. *Simon Fraser University*. March 3, 2005 <www.sfu.ca/about/index.html>

MBA programs. Its funding mainly comes from three sources: the Faculty of Business, and its graduate and undergraduate programs. Since it does not charge the students for most of its essential services that include counselling and coaching, BCS is treated as a not-for-profit unit. The success of its activities are linked to those of the MBA program, which in turn are connected to that of the university. BCS is therefore able to leverage other activities of the university and share costs. In fact, oftentimes costs will be born entirely by other strategic business units of the university. An example is the branding done by and for SFU.

As a relatively new business unit, some of BCS' goals at this stage are to create an identity, and to focus on integration with other strategic business units in the Business Faculty at the university. It plans to benchmark itself against other similar organizations, and in particular to become distinguishable from career services of major Canadian business schools.

1.3 The Customers

BCS main customers include students in BBA and MBA programs and alumni of these programs. Some of the services provided by BCS to students include counselling and coaching. BCS help them build up skills in interview techniques, resume writing, job searching and networking. These skills are developed through workshops, seminars and one-on-one career coaching. Job postings are also available to them. The MBAs enjoy a dedicated job posting website. Online career resources supporting the above are also available. These resources will be described in more detail later.

1.3.1 BBA

About half of BBA program's 1800 students have little or no full-time work experience. The co-op program attracts approximately half of the BBA population. Their need for services from BCS largely consists of basic job search skills for entry-level positions. BCS activities such as the annual career expo held in Vancouver serve the needs of the BBAs. The recruiters that attend as exhibitors enjoy the benefits that come with addressing an audience that is fairly consistent in terms of qualifications. While in aggregate dollars, the funding from the undergraduate program is somewhat larger than that of the MBA program which consists of 225 students in 2005, the per-student breakdown of that budget is substantially lower at approximately one fifth that of the MBAs. This translates to less personal service provided to the BBAs.

For the purpose of this project, we will focus mainly on the MBA programs and their students, whose needs are often at a different level and more sophisticated than those of BBAs.

1.3.2 MBA

The demographics of the MBAs are quite varied, compared to the BBAs. At SFU, they range from the Specialist MBA (SMBA) where students may have as little as two years of work experience with an average age of twenty-seven, to the Executive MBA (EMBA) with most of the candidates meeting or exceeding the minimum work requirement of six to ten years with at least four of them in a managerial or professional position. At thirty-eight, the EMBA has the highest average age among the MBA students. It also charges the highest tuition fee of all the MBA programs at SFU. Due to the requirement of full-time employment status, the EMBA program is focused on

students residing in BC, whereas the other MBA programs at SFU have more of an international student mix.

One similarity between the EMBA and SMBA programs is that both experienced a major upward shift in tuition fee since 2001 when the newly elected provincial government allowed universities to open up the frozen tuition fee structure and increase rates accordingly. As a result, EMBA and SMBA tuition increased within a four-year span by nearly 100% and 1000% respectively.

In line with its reputation for innovativeness, SFU is the first university to establish some of the MBA programs that it currently offers. These programs are described below, listed in descending order of current tuition fees (2005 figures are in parentheses).

1.3.2.1 Executive MBA (\$45,000)

SFU was the first university in Canada to establish an Executive MBA program (EMBA) back in 1968. Since then, the 24-month, classroom-style program has graduated more than 1,500 executives. Until 2004, each year the new students were divided into two separate cohorts – a weeknight class that met once a week, and a weekend cohort that met bi-weekly. In the fall of 2004, students beginning the EMBA program were offered only the weekend format. Most of the candidates of this program are seasoned executives. The weekend class tends to draw a slightly higher age group. In 2004, the program re-asserted its positioning as the flagship MBA program within SFU Business and across Canada by increasing its tuition from \$35,000 to \$45,000.

One of the requirements of the program is that the candidates must be in full employment. Their immediate need for BCS' service is therefore less than that of other MBA programs, since they enter with full-time employment. This is especially the case for those whose tuition is sponsored by their employer. These students may have obligations to remain employed at their current place of work for a pre-determined period of time. Company sponsorship often depends on the state of the economy. During upturns when the economy is healthy, the percentage of sponsored students increases, as is the case for the 2005 cohort where approximately 50% of the candidates have company support. In comparison, only 30% of the two 2003 cohorts are sponsored by their companies.

Being more mature with an average age of thirty-eight, many of the executives in the EMBA program tend to have a greater need for career coaching or salary negotiation skills rather than resume writing or job interview training. BCS can gauge the amount of service they expect to provide by observing the percentage of company-sponsored candidates. This percentage also hints to management of BCS and the EMBA how sensitive they need to be when communicating job opportunities. An e-mail blast to all students, including the company-sponsored ones, may be frowned upon by the employers if they come across such messages.

1.3.2.2 MBA in Global Asset and Wealth Management (\$31,500)

Global Asset and Wealth Management (GAWM) is a fairly new program established in 2002 – the first of its kind in Canada. The program is geared toward candidates from the investment industry who want to learn how to build and manage

assets and wealth. GAWM is supported by a Business Council comprised of a select group of over twenty professionals and corporations across Canada. They provide financial and advisory support. In addition, some council members are partners in an internship program. Not only does the internship program provide opportunities to apply curriculum theories to practice, but it can also lead to long-term and/or permanent employment with the firms after completion of the MBA program. As such, GAWM students' direct need for the services of BCS is relatively low.

1.3.2.3 MBA in Management of Technology/Biotechnology (\$25,000)

SFU was the first western Canadian university to offer an MBA in Management of Technology (MOT). It offers three different course schedules. Students can choose from a full time 12-month curriculum consisting of mostly face-to-face interactions with classmates and instructors; a part time 24-month program that combines face-to-face and online learning; or a 16-month program delivered completely online.

The student profile of the MOT program is fairly well defined. They are mostly middle or up-and-coming managers, with experience in team and/or project management. Many have strong technology backgrounds, with about 50% of them being engineers. Their average age is thirty-two, with average salary in the \$70,000 range. Similar to GAWM, the MOT and Biotechnology MBA programs have a Business Council that provides support in curriculum development and internship opportunities, though on a smaller scale compared to GAWM. Candidates are able to gain hands-on experience through on-site assignments with these council members. Their needs from the BCS will

be mostly the “polishing services” – resume writing, job interview skills, dining etiquette, and networking in the community.

1.3.2.4 Specialist MBA (\$25,000)

Candidates in Specialist MBA (SMBA) can choose among three specializations: Leadership and Organization Change, Marketing, or International Business. They have the option of a full-time 12-month program, or a part-time 24-month schedule. All SMBA candidates have undergraduate business degrees or have completed the business course prerequisites.

This program has over twenty years of history and has established a legacy. It was the “basic” MBA offered by the university with a phenomenally low price tag of only \$2700 up until 2001 when the provincial government changed, a tuition freeze was lifted, and the Faculty of Business raised the price of the program to \$18000 in 2002 and to \$25000 in 2003. With increased tuition come higher expectations from students, including post graduation job placements.

The SMBA program and its curriculum are now in a transition stage, shifting from being an academic program to a “professional” one. Under the academic model, it was structured in a classroom setting with limited exposure to industry or even case studies. By re-positioning itself as a “professional” program, the SMBA program intends to attract candidates with stronger work experience. Part of this transition may also include re-branding by changing its name from “Specialist MBA” to simply “MBA”.

Among all the MBA programs at SFU, SMBA students probably have the greatest needs for career services due to their young age and low number of years of work experience, and because many of them left their full-time jobs to attend the program.

1.3.3 The Alumni

For three years after graduation, alumni are provided with services similar to those that they enjoyed as a student at SFU. While career development is an important service to the alumni, they are in turn a good resource to BCS for employment opportunities, mentorship, guest speakers, and applied research projects for MBA candidates. Despite this knowledge, the alumni are one of the most under-utilized resources for BCS (and perhaps the Business Faculty itself). This is especially true for the graduates who have moved out of town and have since lost contact with the school. The faculty claims a network of 13,000 graduates worldwide. Many of these left the university prior to days of internet and e-mail, making it more challenging to search for and keep in touch with them. The potential networking opportunities alone are of high value, especially to those who wish to develop an expansive international and inter-sectoral network.

1.3.4 Faculty of Business

In addition to being the first in Canada to establish the EMBA and MOT programs, SFU Business was also the first university to establish a presence in downtown Vancouver back in 1989. In the fall of 2005, all of the SFU Business graduate programs will move to the new Segal Graduate School of Business, housed in a refurbished heritage bank building in downtown Vancouver, just two blocks away from the downtown Harbour Centre campus.

The Business Faculty looks to BCS to support its students, who in turn enhance the faculty's image, reputation, brand equity and support the faculty's goal of being a ranked business school by recognized authorities. As one of the strategic business units operating under the Business Faculty, BCS is able to leverage the strengths of other units and has direct access to resources such as students, marketing, finance, and the faculty. In addition to BBA and MBA, the faculty also offers doctoral programs in Business Administration and other graduate programs in niche areas including the online Graduate Diploma in Business Administration, and the newly launched Masters in Financial Risk Management Program.

1.4 The Market

The market has evolved in a number of ways. In the past five years or so, the tuition fees for MBA programs have increased substantially at SFU and other universities across the country. This has changed the expectations that students have of the MBA programs. With a higher tuition fee, students expect more support services. As well, with numerous universities in the Canadian market offering MBAs, the intensity of competition and rivalry has increased. As a result, BCS has become more central to MBA program strategies.

Recently, perhaps as a result of price increases, the number of student applications to MBA programs has dropped across the country, adding to rivalry. Placement services and placement rates from MBA programs have become important criteria for prospective students. In addition, placement statistics help with program ranking by media like Maclean's magazine and Financial Times, making placement a strategically important activity.

Based on the global trend and decreasing number of baby boomers, demand for EMBA programs has been declining in the past five years. As the pool of potential applicants becomes smaller, there is a need among the business schools to focus resources (faculty, staff and others), to benchmark to best-practices models of EMBA programs worldwide, and to adopt the pedagogy and curriculum that matches the customer's profile. This environmental change has led to the decision at SFU to offer only one cohort (weekend) beginning 2004.

2 THE INDUSTRY

2.1 The Business Schools

If price is an indication of perceived value, SFU's tuition fee of \$45,000 ranks eighth among the business schools in Canada offering Executive MBA programs. Below is a chart adapted from Canadian Business.com showing the tuitions of fourteen Canadian universities offering EMBA's.

Table 1: Canadian universities EMBA tuitions (2004-05)

University (Business School)	EMBA Tuition
York (Schulich)	\$85,000
Queen's - <i>national</i>	\$75,000
Western (Ivey)	\$75,000
Toronto (Rotman)	\$70,000
Queen's - <i>in Ottawa</i>	\$70,000
Ottawa	\$58,000
Calgary (Haskayne)	\$55,000
Simon Fraser (Segal)	\$45,000
Concordia (Molson)	\$45,000
Athabasca	\$39,600
St. Mary's (Sobey)	\$38,000
Royal Roads	\$30,000
Sherbrooke	\$19,125
Lansbridge	\$14,500
Quebec-Montreal	\$4,200

(Source: MBA Guide 2004)

The schools near the top of the list are all concentrated in the Ontario region. This gives them an advantage in networking with major corporations simply because they are geographically closer to large financial centres – Toronto in Canada, and New York in

USA. For students seeking value from their tuition, this access to a large job market is an important factor. Employers, too, have the advantage of visiting only one geographical region to access a large body of MBA candidates. Generally speaking, these top schools do enjoy stronger brand equity and brand recognition nationally than others.

2.2 Business Career Services at Business Schools

Most if not all of the business schools in major Canadian universities have devoted business career services that cater to the needs of business students rather than the entire student body of the university. This is partly due to the fact that business programs at most universities command a higher tuition fee than others, thus increasing the expectations of the students in terms of services provided by the university and its obligations to deliver. Wall Street Journal writer Ron Alsop said in an interview, “People seek an MBA degree for one primary reason: to make a career change.”³ The important role business career services play in MBA programs cannot be underestimated.

The focus of services provided by business career services has shifted from career counselling to career coaching. Counselling is helping the students learn what their job skills are, where their strengths lay, and consequently which direction they should head based on their interests. Coaching is more about providing support to help students develop their career paths, and building a strategy to reach their career goals. In short, the focus shifts from “job” with a short-term end goal, to “career” which is supported by a long-term vision.

At time of formation over a year ago, SFU BCS’ management was determined from the outset that they were not to have job placement perceived as their core

³ Alsop, Ron. “Study takes fresh look at business-schools ranking.” [CareerJournal.com](http://www.careerjournal.com). (April 30, 2001): March 3, 2005. <www.careerjournal.com/specialreports/bschoolguide/20010430-alsop-qanda.html>

competency. The emphasis instead is on its ability to network and to develop confident individuals. SFU BCS' view is that it is more valuable to develop an individual who is capable of securing employment for him/herself over the span of his/her career, than to identify one single employment opportunity. Simply put, they prefer to teach the MBAs how to fish rather than to find them the fish and feed them.

2.3 Benchmarking

To understand how SFU BCS is performing compared to its competitors in Canada, we look at some of the statistics compiled by various sources to determine their effective use of resources.

Do the now higher tuition fees necessarily reflect a corresponding business career services staff to student ratio? SFU BCS last year recruited a consultant to conduct interviews with a few major business schools in central region of Canada, including Ivey at Western, Rotman at Toronto, Schulich at York, and Queen's. Here is part of the findings:

Table 2: Business Career Services Staff to MBA Student Ratio

Universities	Staff	Students	Ratio
Queen's	6	1200	200
SFU (Segal)	1.25⁴	225	180
York (Schulich)	9	1500	167
Toronto (Rotman)	6	550	92
Western (Ivey)	12	1000	83

(Source: SFU Business Career Services Review 2003)

⁴ ¼ Executive Director, ¼ MBA Career Manager, ½ Administrative Clerk, ¼ Special Project Coordinator.

With the exception of Queen's, SFU BCS' ratio is clearly higher compared to its major competitors to the east. Rotman School of University of Toronto has a lower ratio of 92:1. This corresponds to its high percentage of 90% of the students being employed within three months of graduation from their MBA programs.⁵ SFU was 83%. However, with SFU BCS as a start up business, this is expected. Its higher ratio means its ability to provide full service to its customers is compromised. The unavailability of human resources to dedicate to servicing the MBAs affects the service levels and the number of markets covered (sectorally and internationally). This calls for a strong focus on identification and provision of core services.

This ratio, however, raises one question. Do scale effects exist? If we multiply the SFU BCS' size by four times to six staff members, does the level of its services proportionately increase four folds? The likely answer is that it will be much more than that because having more staff will allow more specialization. Smaller units may lack built-in efficiencies with the staff stretched to its maximum. A larger staff will create scale effects, propelling SFU BCS into a competent position.

One commonality among most of the top ranking Canadian universities' business career services is that they all offer counselling and coaching, seminars and workshops, and online resources. The differences lay in the breadth (different product lines) and depth (assortment within each line) of offerings. Services offered by SFU BCS will be described in more detail in the next chapter. SFU BCS hopes to shift from a cost-based strategy to one of differentiation in the future to create more value for its customers, by

⁵ "The basics: What it takes, what it costs...and what your MBA dollar will actually get you." Canadian Business. March 3, 2005 <www.canadianbusiness.com/mba2004/chartDisplay.jsp?content=001>

offering services that have either more breadth or depth, or both. Given SFU BCS' staff to student ratio, this is a major challenge at this point in time.

2.4 Rankings

As mentioned, the third-party rankings have great influence on the prospective students' choice of business school. With the substantial tuition fee structure, this is often a high involvement decision. The student will go through the stages of need recognition, identification of alternatives, and evaluation of alternatives before a decision is made. Rankings provide several quantitative measures to help evaluate alternatives. Some media include figures such as percentage of job placements after graduation, elapsed time between graduation and commencement of new job, as well as pre- and post-graduation salary comparisons. With growing popularity of rankings by Maclean's, Canadian Business, Business Week, and Financial Times, business schools cannot help but focus on these figures that affect their rankings.

One of the most authoritative rankings in the world for business schools offering MBA degrees is the FT100, produced by Financial Times based in London, UK. In 2005, six Canadian universities made it into their list of top EMBA programs.⁶ They are listed below along with their 2005/04 ranking.

⁶ "EMBA Rankings." Financial Times. April 5, 2005
<<http://rankings.ft.com/rankings/emba/rankings.html>>

Table 3: FT100 ranking of Canadian universities offering EMBA programs

Universities	2005	2004
Western Ontario – Ivey	16	11
Toronto – Rotman	20	32
Alberta – Haskayne	57	n.a.
Queen’s	62	46
Ottawa	65	n.a.
Athabasca	74	72

(Source: EMBA Rankings, Financial Times)

The criteria for FT100 covers three areas. One is based on the Alumni Survey, which tracks their present salary, salary percentage increase, career progress, work experience, and aim achievement. The salary and its percentage increase are based on current year and the two previous years. Career progress is a comparison of the level of seniority of alumni related to company size before starting the EMBA and today. Work experience criterion takes into account position held, company size, and number of years spent in each position prior to starting the EMBA program together with international experience. Aim achievement is whether the alumni have attained their personal or career goals for taking the EMBA.

The second criterion for the FT100 ranking is the Business School Survey. It compares the percentage of women and international content in the faculty, student body, and the advisory board of each business school. Also considered are the number of languages required to enter the program, and the percentage of faculty with a doctoral degree. Lastly, it includes a Financial Times doctoral rating, which tracks the number of

doctoral graduates from the past three years, with added weighting to those doctoral graduates taking up faculty positions at one of the top fifty full-time MBA schools.

The third and last criterion for the FT100 is the Research Survey. This is an FT Research rating of faculty publications in forty international academic and practitioner journals.

All figures in the three surveys are weighted, with salary today and salary percentage increase assigned the highest weights, while advisory board content and language are rated the lowest.

Noteworthy here is that Rotman School at University of Toronto leaped from 32nd place to 20th within one year, while Ivey, Queen's and Athabasca all dropped, with Queen's taking the biggest plunge from 46th to 62nd. Nonetheless, being on this list automatically earned the business schools bragging rights for at least one full year following publication. Attaining a position on the FT100 list is one of the goals for most business schools' MBA programs and their business career services.

2.5 Key Success Factors

These benchmarks, especially the rankings, drive the MBA programs which in turn give direction to the business career services. What does a business career services unit need to function well in this environment in order to support the MBA programs? A few key success factors can be identified to help us understand how some business career services perform better than others.

2.5.1 Network

The extent of the network of business career services is measured through the relationships between the unit and the university's programs as well as the recruiters. These connections are vital to its success. While job placement may not necessarily be the focus of the business career services, it must be mindful of this ultimate goal of the students. At the end of the day, the students have not advanced unless the employers have identified and secured them as the ideal candidates for job advancement.

Therefore, those business career services with extensive networks that span across industries, and, for some, countries, will have competitive advantages over others. In addition to recruiters, tapping into the alumni network is also a key source of employment, program funding, potential MBA candidates, testimonials of their MBA programs, and mentorship. Since most of these relationships are cultivated through personal contacts, a senior manager with strong people skills is required in the business career services.

2.5.2 Financial Support

For some, the bottom line is that minimal financial support limits the quality of the business career services' programs. Highly funded programs at Schulich, Ivey, and Queen's take their top students to major centres such as New York for meetings with key alumni and corporate recruiters. This type of activity raises a business career services' credibility to deliver quality employees to recruiters and the school's reputation to deliver high return on investment. In doing so, it increases the marketability of the MBA school itself.

2.5.3 Integration

Successful business career services across Canada seem to be those that are most integrated. Many are vertically integrated within the university network, and able to create much synergy among the students, faculties, and the business career services. Eager students approach the business career services as early as term one, and develop themselves as they advance in the university program. The more the business career services is integrated with the university's strategic business units, particularly those within the business faculty, the more it can take advantage of the existing infrastructure. Early exposure to MBA candidates also allows them more time to work with each other.

2.6 Taking advantage of these factors

According to Paul Patterson, a seasoned consultant invited by the SFU EMBA program to address its class earlier this year, most placement agencies and executive search firms carry literally thousands of resumes in their databases. To stand out among the crowd, the candidate must have a resume that "shouts" assertively. Since this is not easily done, a strong expansive network connected to business career services will provide an advantage to those without one. A strong network does not always have to mean a large one in terms of numbers. Efficiently utilized limited resources can still be of value. For example, a corporation is a resource for job placement, but it can also provide mentorship, career advice, internships, applied projects, and even funding.

Along with a strong network, other important success factors are sufficient financial support and strong integration. Financial support will allow the business career services unit to simply provide more freedom and flexibility to invest in items that it

otherwise would not. It may also allow business career services to move from a cost-based strategy into a differentiation strategy. The level of integration within the university network is important in that some of the resources that drive business career services can be found within. These include potential employers, mentors, and partnerships in programs. Strong integration also means that business career services can become involved in the MBA programs early on in the game, including being part of the orientation programs.

3 INTERNAL ANALYSIS

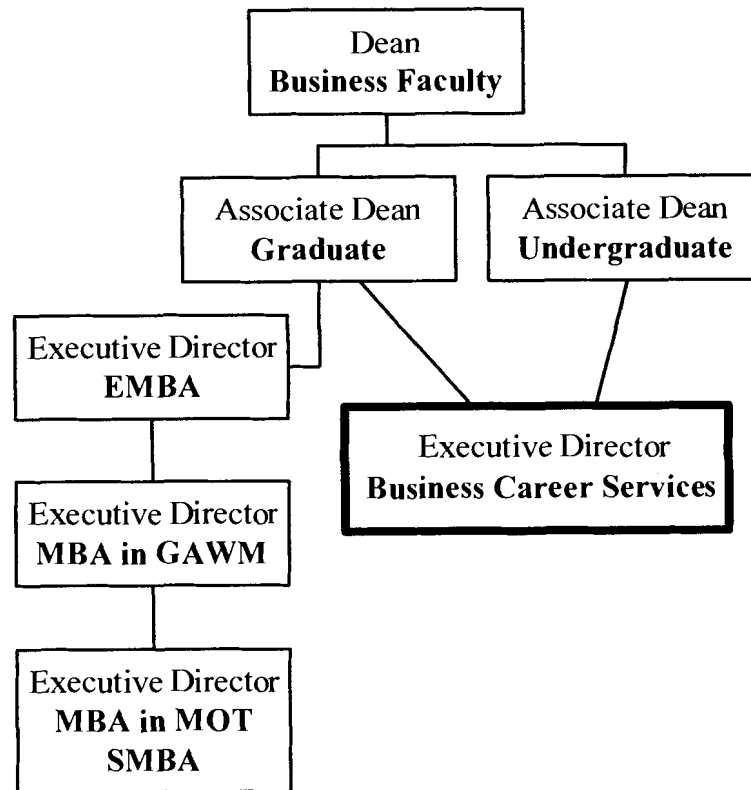
3.1 Structure of SFU Business Career Services

SFU Business Career Services (BCS) is a strategic business unit under the Business Faculty and therefore enjoys most of its supporting activities through the faculty and the university systems. This includes Human Resources, Accounting, Information Technology, and Procurement.

The Executive Director of BCS reports to the Associate Deans of Graduate and Undergraduate Business Programs. The Associate Deans in turn report to the Dean of SFU Business Faculty. Its funding from these three sources (the Faculty, Undergraduate, and Graduate Programs) is more or less evenly divided into one third from each entity. Therefore, the Executive Director of BCS also reports indirectly to the Dean occasionally.

The following organizational chart shows how the position of the Executive Director of BCS fits with other related programs' managers in the Business Faculty.

Figure 1: SFU Business Faculty Organizational Chart (partial)⁷



3.2 Services

As a start up, BCS at this moment is consolidating and refining the information inherited from the Business Faculty. The Executive Director feels that the inherited service level is mostly under-delivered and inconsistent. Given that most of the career education was provided on an ad-hoc basis by the MBA programs, there is an opportunity to improve the quality of career education and support. BCS needs to satisfy the needs of students from four different MBA programs. Each has its own unique needs. For example, MOT and GAWM are industry specific, and therefore require either a thorough

⁷ By author.

knowledge of the industry on BCS management's part, or a strong network connected to that industry at least.

BCS essentially provides services to two groups: students and employers. For the students, BCS mostly provides career counselling and coaching. For the employers and corporations, BCS facilitates opportunities for recruiters to access the students. These services are described in more detail below.

3.2.1 Student Services

BCS offers many different types of services or tools to the MBA students. They range from large group sessions like seminars to one-on-one meetings for career consultations, to online resources for research purposes.

While SFU BCS is very clear on its desire to not be perceived as a job placement service, one of its goals for MBA students is to connect them to employers and/or career opportunities by the time they graduate. As such, one of the core competencies BCS is developing is its effectiveness in connecting MBA students with potential employers or at least the business community.

The current vision of BCS is:

When people meet SFU MBA students, they know these are from SFU MBA because the students are professional, know what questions to ask, and are well prepared. (Hill, 2005)

The following are some of the services provided by BCS to prepare MBA students.

3.2.1.1 Counselling

Access to the counselling services is available to all MBA students and to alumni for three years after graduation. Career counselling at BCS is mostly done by the MBA Career Manager, who covers resume editing and job interview preparation – including mock sessions and cover letter writing. Currently BCS does not administer aptitude or personality tests. Students interested can take these tests at the Health, Counselling and Career Centre (HCCC). Popular tests such as Myers Briggs are done in class by professors in courses such as Organizational Behavior. BCS also advises students on work search strategies and professional associations' memberships. These types of counselling services are usually suitable for younger MBAs who may lack experience in these areas, and are communicated on its website, through e-mails, and in class presentations.

3.2.1.2 Coaching

Coaching is based on a long-term view, and focuses more on the career than the job. Therefore, while the coach will also review resumes, it will be done more from the perspective of the student's career path development. The coach usually works one-on-one with the students to develop their job search strategies. This type of coaching tends to be geared toward the more mature, seasoned EMBA and GAWM candidates.

Since the MBA Career Manager looks after the counselling, most of the coaching is managed and sometimes conducted by the Executive Director. At present, part of the coaching is also contracted out to a consultant. The consultant is invited in after the Career Manager sets up the meeting schedule with the MBAs. These sessions are usually

one hour long, and each MBA student is entitled to two complimentary sessions per year. After that, the coach is made available to the student for a fee.

3.2.1.3 Seminars and workshops

Where appropriate, BCS will deliver some of this knowledge through seminars and workshops. Topics covered include interview skills, resume basics, presentation skills, online job search techniques, dining etiquette, wine tasting, dressing guidelines, and networking skills. The availability of these sessions depends on the level of MBA program. The SMBAs, for example, will have regularly scheduled sessions throughout their term to address these topics. The EMBA's on the other hand, do not attend these sessions until near the end of their two-year program, although coaching is made available to them early on. The 2003 cohort (graduating in 2005) attended a full-day session toward the end of their program in April, 2005, covering four topics: job interviews, networking, dressing guidelines, and wine tasting.

BCS organizes an annual career expo to allow recruiters and students to network with each other. This one-day event includes a series of keynote speakers in the morning, an inspirational speaker at lunchtime, and a career fair in the afternoon. Although this is made available to the EMBA's on a complimentary basis (normal fee is \$10), the event is mainly designed for and attended by undergraduates, since they are the ones who are eager to learn about a wide variety of companies, yet lack the network to approach them personally. The career fair therefore serves as a door opener for them.

3.2.1.4 Online Resources

With constant advancement of technology, BCS is able to offer various types of services through its website. Currently, BCS provides these online resources to students: resume posting, and job search resources with links to industry research. For the employers, BCS provides a platform for job postings and viewing of resumes.

BCS most recently purchased the license for VAULT MBA career resources, which is made available exclusively to SFU Business graduate students and alumni.

VAULT is an Online Career Library that allows users to:

- ❑ Download VAULT industry and career guides, and employer profiles.
- ❑ Perform research on over 2,500 specific companies, complete with extended profiles and employee surveys for selected companies.
- ❑ Conduct research on industries using their industry overviews and occupational profiles.
- ❑ Access career resources for resumes, cover letters, interviews.
- ❑ Obtain career advice on specific industries, work/life, and job search through its 1,000+ exclusive articles.
- ❑ Connect and network with other job seekers through message boards.

Operating normally under a fee-for-service model, selected resources found on VAULT.com are made available to SFU MBA students and alumni on a complimentary basis, courtesy of BCS.

BCS has also just purchased CareerLeader. This is an online career assessment tool developed by Drs. Timothy Butler, Director of Career Development Programs at the Harvard Business School, and James Waldroop of Peregrine Partners. Over 260 top business schools and corporations use CareerLeader worldwide to help guide the careers of students and employees.

CareerLeader is a 100% online program that provides proprietary self-assessment test. CareerLeader analyzes test results to identify areas of interest for their career. This information is integrated with the users' profiles to determine their suitable career paths. It can go further by assessing the users' fit with critical elements of corporate culture, to ensure that the work environment is suitable. In other words, it assesses one's unique pattern of interests, values and abilities

Lastly, there will also be a new online student lounge to be launched this fall that will contain a fully functional job board online application system, interview scheduler, and career resources.

With a team of only three managers at this time, these online resources help alleviate the pressure placed upon the BCS team.

3.2.2 Alumni Services

A key to BCS' success is its network in the business community. One resource within that community to tap into is the alumni. Given the existing connection to the university as graduates – some of whom include former users of BCS – this group should be the first and most natural one. Yet, as mentioned earlier, the alumni are perhaps one of the more under-serviced customers at BCS, despite knowing that they are a good source

for employment opportunities, mentorship, guest speakers and MBA applied research projects. However, this is not unique to SFU's BCS. Other universities' business career services also seem to focus on students and sometimes do not take full advantage of the potential of alumni. The variety of companies and organizations in this network reflects the value created by BCS.

Alumni are extremely important, not only to BCS, but also to the MBA programs, as well as the university as a whole. In addition to the potential benefits stated above, they are also a source of revenue for the programs (donations, contributions in-kind, user fees). Strategies to optimize the potential value that can be created by this under-utilized resource should be developed. Recognizing their value, BCS recently amended the two-year free access to its service for alumni to three years.

3.2.3 Employer Services

So far, BCS is able to provide to employers free job postings on its website, and resume search and match. The annual career expo is also available to employers. This is a one-day event held at a downtown location. This year, workshops and seminars related to recruiting and job search were held in the morning. An inspirational speaker started off the afternoon. The rest of the day was devoted to the career fair itself. Starting at \$500, recruiters were provided a table at the fair to directly interact with students from the Business Faculty. Additional fees were payable for those looking for additional profile as major sponsors. BCS brought together 55 employers participating at various sponsorship levels, with over 400 students from the Business Faculty. Most of the students who attended were from the undergraduate program. They benefited from opportunities to speak directly to the human resources department representatives of these firms. Armed

with freshly prepared resumes, they roamed the fair ground speaking to as many recruiters as they could in the afternoon. The recruiters themselves prepared for this crowd by having their information made available to students at their tables. BCS intends to continue this activity on an annual basis.

The Executive Director applies his core competency of networking to develop relationships with employers so that when the job opportunities arise, he is able to match the employer to the student(s). This network with the employers is expanded by referrals from alumni, and/or the placement agencies that work with BCS.

One can see that the level of service to the employers with regards to the MBA programs is relatively low compared to those for MBA students. This is partly due to budgetary constraints. However, this may change once some of the following goals are met.

3.3 Short term goals of BCS

For the remainder of the year, the BCS team is focusing on these areas: (1) Developing a core curriculum that applies to all MBA programs at SFU; (2) Introducing new online career resources (library and assessment tools); (3) Solidifying the technical support system; (4) Marketing; and (5) Developing a three-year strategic plan.

3.3.1 Core Curriculum Development for the Professional Development Programs

In order to develop a certain level of consistency, BCS will develop a core curriculum for its Professional Development Programs (PDP). This means establishing a minimum standard of programs for the MBA students to participate in, so that by the time

they graduate, BCS can present them as a group who all possess the same core level of knowledge and skills.

This presents a challenge to BCS as it is difficult to determine the appropriate “minimum standards” when the MBA programs’ students are so diverse. Again, the EMBA students are experienced and more sophisticated. They want to learn how to develop their career path. The SMBAs are relatively younger, and are more concerned about how their resumes are presented. Up to 50% of them are international students, which means they may also require assistance in language support. The GAWM MBAs are to be groomed not only as financial experts but also connoisseurs of wining and dining.

For now, one solution is to provide customization to each program according to the students’ needs. The EMBA program is the most expensive one, and therefore their investment into BCS is also the highest. In return, BCS delivers more but at a higher cost. EMBA students receive more executive coaching, more leadership training, and more access to guest speakers. The GAWM MBAs go through panel interview and portfolio assessment, a norm in the finance industry. The MOT MBAs are technically specific. The SMBAs are still job focused.

The format of delivery can be a concern as well. Many SMBAs are full-time students attending classes regularly. The curriculum can be broken down into smaller elements and presented to them on a regular basis. The EMBA students, on the other hand, work full-time, and are hard-pressed as it is to learn all the MBA materials they can within the shorter number of class hours. Should BCS condense the package and deliver it during

the residency weekend at the beginning of the school year, or schedule an additional intensive weekend between their bi-weekly weekend classes?

3.3.2 Introduce online career resources

Thanks to technology advancement, there are plenty of valuable resources available electronically. Having access to them through the internet has many significant advantages. Virtually all students have access to the internet these days. Being able to find the information they need online saves them time. Updating is made easy and almost instant when new information becomes available. By simply typing a few keystrokes, fresh, new information can be had. Technology allows electronic storage and filing of important information, such as resumes for employers to view, or job postings for students to search. Computers also make searching itself faster. Furthermore, a resourceful website allows alumni or employers overseas to have the same convenient access to this information as local users. This opens up more communication channels to those who were difficult to reach at first.

Setting up a proprietary program takes time, and money. Alternatively, there are a few effective and convenient off-the-shelf packages that can be purchased, installed, and used almost immediately. VAULT MBA is a good example. The only drawback with packages like VAULT is that it is American-based, and so some of the information may not be applicable to the Canadian environment. Having said that, VAULT does provide Canadian information where available. For example, a search under accounting firms will produce findings on Canadian accounting firms in addition to American ones.

Another reason for online service improvement is that the other universities' business career services we benchmarked against also provide much support using advanced technology. If SFU BCS is to be competitive, then it will need to be able to provide similar services to its customers. Schulich of York University, for example, has on its website an MBA Salary Survey, showing its graduates' salaries within three months of convocation, updated to show its graduates from 2004. It includes details complete with compensation packages with functional areas, listing minimum, median, and maximum salaries of their graduates in forty-seven different job types in eight industries.⁸

3.3.3 Construct the infrastructure for information technology support

BCS needs to build up its technological support promptly for many reasons. First, given the small team of three, they cannot possibly provide personal service effectively to over 2000 students from the MBA and BBA programs. The resources found in VAULT, for example, can at least partially replace some of the support that would otherwise have been given face to face, such as resume writing or job interview skills. The research data can be collected first by the user, and then analyzed together with the Career Manager. Similarly, the students themselves can take aptitude and personality tests first, and then have the results discussed with BCS.

The more automated their tools are, the more efficiently the management team can carry out their functions. At present, BCS is outsourcing a contact database, and a

⁸ "2004 Graduate Placement & Salary Survey". Career Development Centre, Schulich School of Business, York University. April 6, 2005
<<http://ssb.yorku.ca/VISCaree.nsf/dd5cab6801f1723585256474005327c8/99e7a1e3ae7596da85256ff600580586?OpenDocument#2004%20MBA%20Survey>>

tool for customer relations management. Once these are in place, they will help BCS manage internally their network with students, employers and alumni. BCS is planning to launch this in September, 2005. The Executive Director predicts that it will take up to one year to modify this program after its introduction. This tool will help with internal needs.

External needs – those of the employers – will be met with the introduction of a job board soon. Employers will be able to post jobs, view resumes and even view application forms.

3.3.4 Marketing

3.3.4.1 Events

As part of its strategy to reach out more to the corporations, BCS plans to increase the number of on-campus recruitment events. One such activity is the Campus Recruiting Forum 2005, which was held in early July of this year. SFU Business was host sponsor for this event. Other main sponsors were business career services of other post secondary institutions including Queen's University from Ontario, University of British Columbia (UBC), British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT), University of Victoria and a few others from BC and Alberta. Recruiter and placement firms were also some of the key sponsors.

The Campus Recruiting Forum 2005 was a gathering of employers, recruiters, and university business career services that share common interests in campus recruiting. This two-day forum helped them “learn about best practices in campus recruiting; discover strategies to make better use of tight resources; explore trends in the labour market and changing student attitudes; discover new technology-based recruitment solutions; meet

and network with campus recruiters from across Canada; and prepare to implement a variety of practical tips to increase their recruitment effectiveness.”⁹ Being the Host Sponsor of Campus Recruiting Forum 2005 put SFU BCS front and centre before the recruiters.

With a successful Career Expo this year, SFU BCS is now planning ahead for Career Expo 2006. It will apply the same template that has worked well in the past, including seminars with industry and inspirational speakers, and a trade fair type expo. A marketing effort focused on recruiting exhibitors is now underway.

3.3.4.2 Online Services

Once the new job board is in place, BCS will promote it to the employers. This will allow the corporations to become more directly involved with the recruitment process. A fully functional job board online application system will be part of a new online student lounge that also includes interview schedule and career resources.

VAULT was recently made available to MBA students and alumni exclusively through the BCS website. CareerLeader was purchased for use by both MBA and BBA students. Alumni dating back up to three years are also given access to it.

The communication of these new services’ availability has only been done through its website, and to students via e-mail and class presentations to date. More active messaging will be considered soon in the coming new school term in September.

⁹ Campus Recruiting Forum 2005. Jun 29, 2005 <www.campusrecruiting.ca>

3.3.4.3 Communication tools

Also on the agenda is the revision of promotional materials. This is mostly the printed collaterals and website which will be edited where appropriate. With so many improvements made in the past year, this will be a necessary but exciting activity as it allows BCS to re-invent communication tools to deliver its message effectively to the target audience, be it students or employers.

3.3.5 Development of 3-year strategic plan

Having been in his position for nearly a year, the Executive Director is now prepared to look ahead and develop a three-year strategy. This will include setting overall goals and defining BCS' vision. It will include sub-plans for MBA, BBA, business development, alumni, and operations (technology and staffing).

3.4 Mid-range goals

3.4.1 Create an identity and re-branding

Being a small, new strategic business unit, BCS' objective within a year is to create an identity among its networks within the university, as well as with its customers and the recruiters. Obviously, with school ranking becoming a key criterion in a prospective MBA candidate's decision-making process, BCS plays an important integral role in improving that. Its goal should therefore be to market itself as an indispensable supporting group for all the business programs at SFU.

With the "rebirth" of BCS comes "renaming". BCS will gradually re-brand itself as the "Career Management Centre". As stated in the SFU BCS Review conducted in 2004, this new name reflects the consultative nature of the group's services, as well as

appropriately position it as “management” level expertise. The deletion of the word “service” from its name will help steer it away from the misconception that the unit provides placement services. Rather, they will focus on how to manage one’s career, be it at the entry level with the undergraduates, or at a different stage with an EMBA graduate. The unit’s goal will be to generate a buzz within the student body and corporate community. Although the name change will effectively take place this summer, the process of changing it in the customers’ minds will likely take a longer time.

3.4.2 Integration into the MBA programs

As the unit develops its core curriculum for the professional development program, it will integrate it with the MBA program’s curriculum. Timing and other logistical details will be determined, since different MBA programs have different needs in terms of career management. Formats can include retreats, lunches, morning sessions, weekend sessions, or even in-class as with some of the existing programs with the SMBAs.

3.5 Long-term goals

3.5.1 Build up BCS team

As pointed out in the benchmarking section, BCS is understaffed at the moment. The Executive Director envisions that the size of staff will increase from three to four within one year, and probably to five in three years. It will continue to use outsourced consultants to fill the roles of career coaches or IT technicians, researchers, and other areas as needed.

Recognizing the value of alumni, BCS will place emphasis on its efforts to increase service levels to this group. It will focus on building relationships with them. Some of its activities in this area will be modeled after the comprehensive Alumni Career Services at UCLA's Anderson School of Management. Their alumni are provided with career coaching services at substantial discount compared to industry rates. These can be delivered in person, or via phone and/or e-mail. In addition, ongoing alumni career services include:

- Career resources website for working professionals – this contains information and resources for career management.
- UCLA alumni database – a resource for networking with UCLA Anderson School of Management alumni. The database can be searched by region, industry, job function, company name or UCLA Anderson student club membership.
- Career Management Centre – alumni can visit the office on campus and access its resources on site.
- Career Management Centre classifieds – job postings targeted at UCLA MBA graduates.
- Alumni jobs e-mail list - Subscribers receive real-time job listings via e-mail from the UCLA CMC and alumni.
- CareerLeader – same as that described earlier.

Ability to deliver the above services will depend on the size of SFU BCS staff, amount of resources available (library of career guides, assessment tests, and others), office space area, and financial support.

3.5.2 Support SFU MBA program to be ranked in FT100

As pointed out earlier, much of the weight in determining the rankings by Financial Times rest on alumni's salaries. BCS will need to find ways to help MBA students and alumni reach their optimal compensation levels. Student satisfaction will also be closely monitored throughout their term, since this affects their responses to the surveys in the future. BCS will continue to identify key benchmarks to measure its performance.

3.5.3 Support marketing and expansion of MBA programs at SFU Business

This is a longer-term project but part of the MBA programs' marketing message will include the services available for career management. BCS' role will be highlighted in its efforts to attract high quality candidates. The MBA programs themselves will continue to evolve to match the changes occurring in the business community.

4 ISSUES

4.1 Reality Check – Interview with MBAs

To reaffirm some of the findings and suspicions stated previously, a series of informal interviews were conducted with students and recent graduates of the SFU MBA programs. Eight interviews were conducted face-to-face, by telephone, or by e-mail between July 8th and 18th. The respondents were from EMBA (weekend and weeknight cohorts), MOT, and SMBA Programs. All interviews were conducted on the basis that their anonymity would be respected and protected.

4.1.1 The questions

A series of simple questions were developed to gain a sense of the MBAs' experience with BCS. The main questions were:

1. What are your expectations of the Business Career Services?
2. Are they delivering on them?
3. What would you suggest BCS do in the next twelve months?

Also asked were types of services and products used, benefits gained, satisfaction rate, and role of alumni. All interviewees were given the same set of questions.

4.1.2 The findings

All respondents were aware of BCS. The main differences lay in their understanding and expectations of its role. BCS was introduced to all MBAs at or near the beginning of their programs. SMBAs were meeting the BCS team on more or less a weekly basis, while the MOTs and EMBAAs see or hear about them sporadically. Despite the frequency of the meetings, all SMBAs interviewed said they did not have a clear understanding of BCS' role at the beginning.

One SMBA student expected BCS to not only find sponsors for their applied projects, but also companies that were willing to hire them upon completion of the projects. Consequently, the student's satisfaction rate with the BCS was low. This student strongly felt that the tuition paid is an entitlement to such expectations. According to this same student, a few other colleagues in the same cohort were equally disappointed in the services provided by BCS.

Another respondent from the same group admitted that most of the colleagues in SMBA were categorically passive, and were waiting for BCS to find them a job. This one student, however, decided to be more proactive and sought BCS' help directly. In the end, this student did gain some benefits in the area of counselling, and feels very confident in the workplace now as a result.

Most of the other interviewees went to BCS for, and received, services to help develop their career. Almost all used BCS for resume writing improvement. They were able to have face-to-face meetings with the Career Manager (whom almost everyone interviewed used), the Executive Director, and/or the career coach.

Almost all respondents expressed a preference to learn about the services earlier on in their program. Although many admitted that BCS did either introduce themselves near the beginning of their program, or at least their program's management made them aware of BCS' existence, many did not understand the role of BCS until later.

At least two EMBA students were told by their program that job search support was not emphasized due to the fact that some of the students are sponsored by their employers. While they understand that this is a valid concern, both students had hoped the program recognizes that many of the students are not in that situation. One respondent commented that even if the majority of the students were content with their present employers, they would likely at least be interested in finding ways to develop or improve their career path within their own company, regardless of their tuition fee sponsorship. Hence, the potential benefits provided by BCS are of value to them in any case.

An MOT graduate, on the other hand, was quite positive about the experience with BCS. This person was able to connect with a company through the Career Manager's introduction for an MBA project, and was later offered financially gainful employment through this connection. This recent graduate also frequently visited the job postings section of BCS website, and expressed that this is one place likely to be revisited in the future. One area of improvement suggested is on-campus recruitment. The respondent felt that this would ease the job search process greatly for the students.

All in all, most respondents were satisfied with the services received, but did express a desire for more. Most wanted to use the service sooner. They wanted more products. They needed more clarity of the offerings of services or products, and how they

can access them. Many find value in the face-to-face interactions with the BCS team. Upon learning that the BCS is available to them up to 3 years after graduation, many expressed interest in accessing the service in the future. Thinking that they will return to the job board in the future, they want the job postings to be easier to search by category.

4.2 Development of metrics

Determining the metrics to measure success is a serious issue facing the management of BCS now. Some students judge the effectiveness of a BCS by the job they line up upon graduation. Media rankings track salary levels of MBA graduates. SFU's Faculty of Business is pressured by the university to produce marketable and employable graduates. Given these expectations, can we simply apply the same formula to SFU BCS, and measure its performance by the number of job placements or salary levels? Some say this is an unrealistic expectation for a few reasons.

First, the management is stretched in different directions multitasking on a daily basis. As pointed out in the benchmarking section, only one quarter of the Executive Director's time can be devoted to the MBAs at this stage. The rest is spent building up the structure for BCS. Even the MBA Career Manager is spending more time on operations than on face-to-face interaction with the MBAs. Despite the title, the Career Manager, too, can only devote one quarter time to MBAs. Until the basic infrastructure is in place, it is difficult to expect management to free up more time for the MBAs.

Although there has not been any issue with funding yet, it is nevertheless limited by the size of the business programs. With substantially fewer MBAs than some other business schools in Canada – 225 at SFU versus 1200 at Queen's – the total amount of

dollars that can be directed to BCS is restricted. This comparison, however, depends on the funding structure of each university. Schulich School at York receives all of its funding from the Dean of the Business Department. In addition, revenues from its Executive Education programs are used to fund career services, alumni relations, external outreach, rankings, business trips and corporate advertising. Being a start-up now, BCS needs funding to install all the technological support. If UCLA charges its alumni for its services, albeit at a discounted rate, should SFU follow? If Schulich underwrites most of the employers' costs when they participate in their programs, should SFU do the same?

Schools such as Schulich, Queen's, and Rotman located in central Canada have a geographical advantage by having better access to major corporations in financial centres where head offices are based. There are simply more employers. They are bigger, and capable of providing attractive packages to its employees. BC is better known for the entrepreneurial spirit of its predominantly small and medium sized businesses, who thrive on "doing more with less".

Finally, we mentioned earlier that schools like Schulich will list on their website the salary survey of their graduates. The numbers do look impressive. However, one may argue that the output – the graduates with high salaries – corresponds to a certain degree to the input – the new MBA entrant. Being the highest priced EMBA in Canada at \$85,000, Schulich MBA candidates consist mostly of high caliber executives who are already commanding a high salary when entering the program. Therefore no doubt their salary upon graduation should be even higher.

For the above reasons, it is a big challenge to determine a set of metrics for SFU BCS at this time if it is to be based on job placement and salary levels.

4.3 Marketing targets

One of BCS' main concerns now is marketing the MBA students to the businesses. Therefore, its approach is first to build relationships with members of the business community. The question is which ones to target. For MBAs like the EMBA and Specialist MBA, it can mean many different industries, while GAWM is specifically finance. Having said that, GAWM probably requires the least support from BCS for business contacts at present, thanks to its effective Business Council model. The twenty plus council members can either be recruiters themselves, or provide links to potential employers. MOT also is fairly focused in terms of industries to target.

The other challenge is how to build these relationships. Will the Executive Director go out personally to approach all these firms one by one? What about the extent of outreach? Should BCS draw the geographical boundary within Greater Vancouver Lower Mainland, the entire province of BC, nationally across the country, or internationally?

Given the responses from the MBAs in the interviews, the other marketing issue is the product development aspect. This includes building up, packaging, and branding the BCS. How can BCS clearly communicate its role to the MBAs? What products and services can they deliver now given the limited resources?

4.4 Role of alumni

Traditionally, alumni are contacted by the school for two reasons: class reunions, and fundraising. The alumni have been identified several times in this paper as a key resource capable of delivering more than just funding. They bring many benefits to BCS, MBA programs, and the institution. The issue is identifying which benefits are important to the development of BCS now, and how to reap them.

There are various ways alumni contribute to BCS. They can provide jobs, internships, and applied projects. These are the most direct benefits for MBA students. Obviously jobs are what students want, and they are how BCS can most concretely deliver value to students. A solid job offer by the end of the MBA program that matches the candidate's career goal is evidence that value has been created. Internships and applied projects may lead to future employment opportunities, but they primarily support the activities of the MBA programs. Some alumni enjoy internships and applied projects because they allow them to sample the MBA candidate before hiring, if that is the intent.

Alumni are a source of valuable industry information for BCS and MBA students through mentorship programs, testimonials, and guest speaker engagements. As mentors, they can take the students into the trenches and guide them through. Unseasoned MBA candidates will especially appreciate this. Testimonials and speaking engagements give alumni a voice to communicate to students. Not only do they share information and experiences, but it also put their company name in front of students.

Source of revenue is an important aspect of this approach. As much as they would like to be a differentiator, BCS is operating under a cost-based model. Alumni pay fees

and participate in career expos and other events as sponsors. These payments, even at a low amount level, can at least help cover cost. Beyond that, major program funding should also be considered. They can, for example, sponsor future purchases of online resources, and be recognized on the web page and other promotional materials. Moreover, BCS can even play a catalyst role in identifying major benefactors for the university's fundraising department.

For MBA Programs, alumni are a source of students to enroll in the program. Promotion to this group can be less intensive since they already understand the value of the program. A testimonial or endorsement from the potential MBA candidate's own employer is often more influential than a brochure or a web page describing the program.

In many ways, these activities create win/win situations for the alumni and BCS. The alumni will be able to contribute back to the institution in a meaningful way. This potentially has high public relations value. Their exposure could be enhanced through sponsorship and other branding opportunities. Their search for suitable candidates for job openings is less laborious with BCS' help. The MBAs could build profitable business relationships with alumni. The image and reputation of BCS improve as a result of successful dealings between students and alumni. This affects the attractiveness of the MBA programs, and therefore student enrollment as well. With such benefits, why limit the extended service to alumni to three years? Why not for life? The issue of limited resources needs to be examined carefully to evaluate its effective use toward this valuable network of alumni.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conduct Student Survey

In light of the findings from the interviews with the MBAs, BCS should consider designing a comprehensive survey to be conducted early in the MBA programs to understand its customers better. This will provide a more complete picture of the students' perception of BCS, and give students an early sense of the current services available.

The survey can start by asking what type of services they need and want. Caution should be exercised here to avoid raising students' expectations. It could list the counselling and coaching services provided, and have the students rate them on their relevance to their job search and career development. The answers will likely differ between MBA programs.

BCS can invite students to try out new online services such as VAULT and CareerLeader, and rate them on their effectiveness. Ask them to try to download the documents, review them, and determine their usefulness. Take the tests found in CareerLeader and analyze their ease of use, accuracy, and application to their career management needs. The feedback will be valuable not only to BCS, but also suppliers of online products. BCS can use this information to set goals and determine service levels for the coming months and years.

To address the issue of defining the metrics for measuring BCS' success, SFU Business can use a survey of graduates to find out the level of customer satisfaction. Job placements and salary levels aside, how much more does the MBA candidate feel confident after going through BCS' programs? Which tools did they find most valuable? How much has BCS helped them improve their job search skills? A scale can be developed to gauge how BCS is performing and improving as it progresses.

5.2 Design a full-scale Marketing Plan

The marketing described in the earlier chapter has been done on an ad-hoc basis, reacting to products and services that become available through new purchases. A full-scale marketing plan will help BCS visualize how each stage is supported by an action plan based on a sound marketing strategy. Applying the classic model of using the four Ps in marketing – Product, Price, Place, and Promotion – determine the appropriate marketing mix for BCS.

These four areas of focus provide the framework for which BCS to work with. The right mix will help BCS reach the next level once its infrastructure is in place. Hiring a marketing specialist, either as a full-timer or on contract basis, will allow BCS to further develop itself into a larger scale unit.

5.2.1 Product

Philip Kotler, an authority in marketing and professor at the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University, once said, "Who should ultimately design the

product? The customer, of course.”¹⁰. Using the feedback from the student survey, BCS can review its product scope and determine the appropriate breadth of product and service mix and depth of product line. What are the building blocks? Do the students need more online products? Should it continue to focus more on coaching rather than counselling? How often should coaching be delivered? The marketing research will reveal the answers to many of these questions.

Judging by the responses from the interviews, the MBAs appreciate face-to-face interactions. While the addition of online resources is useful, BCS may consider building its team further. As mentioned, BCS already has planned to add one more person to its team within the next twelve months. However, considerations should be given to adding even more, at least on a contract basis, to enhance that personal element which MBAs seem to value, and to satisfy the MBAs’ appetite for more products and services as indicated by the interviews conducted.

If BCS hopes to move toward a differentiation strategy, personal service differentiation may be a place to start. It can focus on simpler tasks such as guaranteeing a 24-hour turnaround time for resume reviews; or paying more “house-calls” to selected students (e.g. EMBAAs) by visiting them at their offices. There is a myriad of resources accessible in libraries and on the internet. The massive amount that is available, however, can be daunting at the same time. An example will be the number of resume writing guides. A member of the BCS team who can demonstrate authority on the subject by pointing out the appropriate resources to students will lend credibility to the SFU BCS brand.

¹⁰ Kotler, Philip. Marketing Management. p.348

5.2.2 Price

At this point, price to users will likely remain at near zero, with BCS absorbing most of the cost. However, the value of the products should still be calculated and communicated to the students, so that they understand the value-added benefits they are receiving from BCS. UCLA offers coaching services to its alumni at a reduced rate and they clearly indicate the amount of discount so that the alumni realize the value they are gaining.

BCS arranged complimentary tickets to Vancouver Board of Trade luncheons for EMBA students. These tickets were worth \$80 each. This fact was not communicated to the EMBA students who received them not once but twice this past year. The redemption rate as it turned out was rather low. None of the EMBA students interviewed used them. For those who appreciate the value of networking, which most of these functions offer, this was a missed opportunity.

In the MBA interviews, one suggestion was to set aside funds designated toward professional development to subsidize MBAs who wish to attend networking events, or join selected organizations as members. MBAs who lack the network will especially benefit from this.

Given the fact that BCS is still building up its customer base, it should continue providing most of its services on a complimentary basis. In the long run, however, a pricing strategy should be developed to generate revenue as it gradually builds up its brand equity. Meanwhile, should the trend of rising tuition fee continue for the next few

years, the faculty could consider rolling some of the projected additional expenses into the tuition to support BCS.

5.2.3 Place

What are the most effective channels to reach the MBAs? Does BCS need more face-to-face interactions with the students, or do they need to upgrade further the online services? What format is more valuable to each group? More seminars? More career expos?

If programs like SMBA have a high 50% international mix of students, then resources available online may be more vital to them than those from EMBA program as many SMBAs may return to their home country upon graduation. EMBA is the flagship program. Since it is geared toward local students residing in BC, face-to-face interactions should remain the focus for this group. Regardless, it is advantageous for BCS to network with this cohort. They are mostly senior managers who are in a position to support the institution. They will likely deliver more value to BCS and the faculty as alumni than other MBAs.

Among those interviewed, the MBAs who attended the career expo expressed disappointment due to its emphasis on undergraduates, but pointed out that if there is an event devoted to MBAs only, then that will be of value to them. There is already an exclusive MBA job board on the BCS website. A dedicated MBA career expo, therefore, will merely be an extension of that type of offering. Activities at such events should be geared toward a more mature audience. The same applies to on-campus recruiting and other events BCS plans to present.

5.2.4 Promotion

In addition to revising the copy in BCS' own brochures and website, ensure that, in the integration process, the Business Faculty and MBA programs increase the amount of attention paid in their own promotional materials to incorporate the BCS. As suggested by the interviews, introduction of BCS to the students should be done by all the MBA programs as early as possible. Position BCS early on in the MBA candidates' minds so that they will seek out the services of BCS rather than the other way around.

Although this is part of the short-term goals already, a promotional strategy should be further developed for employers. This is a group that enjoys some of those same benefits alumni do when they participate in BCS programs. Similar to the alumni, employers will see their participation as a win/win situation if they can fulfil their goal of hiring quality candidates.

The key in its promotional strategy is that the message should be clear: BCS is here to help MBA students learn how to fish.

5.3 Adjust Strategic Fit

At present, service is bare bones under a cost approach. The size of BCS team is its greatest disadvantage when benchmarked against those of other universities. The limited funding does not allow BCS to deliver much value beyond basic services. While it will be costly to move toward a differentiation approach, doing so could significantly and disproportionately aid not only BCS but also the faculty.

Additional funding needs to be secured. One way is to simply approach the three funding sources (faculty, undergraduate, and graduate programs) for more financial

support. Show them the positive end-results that additional staff members produce. Another source will be the alumni. Properly servicing the alumni will bring mutual benefits to both parties. Increased customer satisfaction will improve customer retention. With an established network of satisfied alumni, the BCS can consider them not only for job placements, internships, and applied projects, but also funding itself.

With BCS being a start-up, and the desire to re-brand itself into a Career Management Centre, the faculty and BCS can solicit a title sponsor and name the centre after a corporation or an individual. This will provide the opportunity to interested parties to establish some legacy with the university. A title sponsorship could generate sufficient revenue to help BCS shift toward a differentiation-based strategy.

6 CONCLUSION

This strategic analysis shows that the BCS has many challenges and opportunities lying ahead. The expectations of the MBA students are, whether valid or otherwise, realistic perceptions that need to be dealt with. The needs of other stakeholders too, are concerns that cannot be overlooked. There are already many issues identified, and recommendations are made to address them. The development of the student survey and the marketing plan will communicate to its target audience that BCS is committed to providing the best services and products possible to its customers.

In order to make a difference and establish competitive advantages, BCS should aim toward adapting a differentiation strategy. With the advantage of being a “start-up”, BCS is in a position to build a solid foundation and become a key strategic business unit within SFU Business Faculty. With the support it has now, BCS should be able to identify soon what the MBAs value most, and then find the most cost effective way to deliver these services to the students.

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