



Report on review session with Students who completed the MBA programme at NWU (24 March 2021)

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Director of the Business School of NWU hosted a review session with students who completed the MBA programme during 2020.
- 1.2 The session was directed at ascertaining the graduates view of the MBA, in terms of both content and overall experience with the programme.
- 1.3 I was invited as an external observer at the session. This report documents my observations and impression of the student experience with the MBA programme.

2. General Comments

- 2.1 The session which chaired by Prof Jan van Romburgh (Head of the Business School) who ensured that all the participants were given an opportunity to express their views. The students freely exchanged views and were very constructive in their comments about their experience with the MBA programme.
- 2.2 The major concerns raised by the students related to:
 - 2.2.1 The *research component* of the MBA programme presented some challenges to the students. In general, the constraints here related to:
 - 2.2.1.1 the content and timing of the research methodology course. This was compounded by the fact that many students were encountering a module with a research output and a pure business management focus for the first time.
 - 2.2.1.2 Writing skills: some students do not have the skillset to cope with the research component of the course
 - 2.2.1.3 Supervisor assistance was variable with some adopting an “arm’s length” approach and others a more focussed interest in the research being done by their students. It is evident that some supervisors are going the extra mile in supervising their students
 - 2.2.1.4 timelines: the time between deadlines and feedback on the research was lengthy and inadequate in some instances
 - 2.2.2 *Feedback*: publication of assessments and feedback on assessments was not always timely.

- 2.2.3 *Administration*: the switchover to on-line programmes presented some problems. These problems related to inter alia, on-line links, start of the sessions, audio related problems and other issues related to notification of sessions.
- 2.2.4 *Communication*: clear and timely communication was not always evident. Response to queries was also not always timely. In some instance it required the intervention of the Head of the business school to get a response.
- 2.3 The major benefits and good characteristics of the programme included:
 - 2.3.1 *Focus on current developments* in some courses highlighted the relevance of these courses.
 - 2.3.2 *Syndicate project*: improved teamwork in solving problems
 - 2.3.3 *Network session*: was crucial in establishing beneficial relationships.
 - 2.3.4 *speakers and discussions* improved the understanding and relevance of the course content.
 - 2.3.5 *lectures and lecturers*: in general, the lectures and lecturers were good. The course content was deemed relevant, and lecturers were generally approachable and willing to assist when required

3. Recommendations

- 3.1 Attention should be given to the *research process and content*. A greater focus on methodology and writing skills will be beneficial to students. It may be worthwhile hosting research symposiums where students can present their work. This could include two sessions, one at the beginning of the process where students present their intentions and another towards the end of the process. Comments from peers and academics will be very beneficial in providing guidance on the content of the research as well as allowing students to benchmark their progress to those of their peers.
- 3.2 Explicit attention should be given to *clear and timeous responses* to queries. Developing appropriate benchmarks and guidelines would be beneficial, e.g., 48-hour turnaround to all email queries.
- 3.3 *Timeous feedback on assessments* should be non-negotiable. Timelines should be established at the beginning of each course and these should be strictly adhered to.
- 3.3.1 Improve the students *e-lecture experience*. This would require attention being given to issues related to logistics, mode of delivery and content being delivered

4. **Conclusion**

- 4.1 From the discussion it was evident that the students were happy with the content and their general experience with the MBA programme.
- 4.2 The MBA programme has a strong foundation which augurs well for the future of the business school. Due attention being given to some of the issues highlighted above will improve the student experience and further enhance the reputation of the business school.



Academic Director
WBS
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