

# COLLEGE SCHOOLS OF BUSINESS: A FURTHER APPRAISAL\*

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I wish to limit my remarks to *undergraduate* schools of business. This restriction rests on the conviction that, even though existing graduate schools of business which accept only students with a bachelor's degree may represent the wave of the future, this wave is no great roller that will immediately submerge the undergraduate enterprises. In the years ahead, most young people who enter business from an institution of higher education will, and should, have obtained their education in four undergraduate years, or preferably in three. Since I have attempted elsewhere a justification for the four year undergraduate curriculum in which general and professional subject matter are combined in varying proportions as the student proceeds toward the bachelor's degree, I will not do that here.<sup>1</sup>

## Reference Points

The title of this address contains two words which presuppose a point of refer-

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<sup>1</sup> See *Liberal Education in the Professions*, Earl J. McGrath (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1959), pp. 50-59.

ence. "Further" implies going beyond an earlier assessment. Many who have played a part in, or who have employed the graduates of, collegiate schools of business will recall two reports issued several years ago which evaluated these institutions.<sup>2</sup> These comprehensive studies rightly attracted nation-wide attention and they have already been followed by, if not caused, some commendable reforms in policy and practice in collegiate education for business. Some of these changes will be referred to presently.

The current appraisal, though it does treat some of the concepts contained in these reports, stems from a longer association with, and study of, the purposes and programs of schools of business—an association which began in the late twenties at the University of Buffalo and concluded only in the late fifties at the University of Kansas City. Moreover, this assessment rests on a prolonged study of the more comprehensive purposes of our system of higher education as it has attempted to serve a Society whose social, economic, and cultural life has changed with increasing swiftness.

The most recent such study is reflected in a series of analyses of a variety of undergraduate professional schools conducted by the Institute of Higher Education. Hence, even though some adversions may be made to the two recent studies in

<sup>2</sup> Robert A. Gordon and J. E. Howell, *Higher Education for Business* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959).

Frank C. Pierson, *The Education of American Businessmen* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1959).

business, and some questions raised concerning the possible long run impact of their recommendations, these remarks should not be interpreted as appraisals of appraisals, but rather as independent judgments about what I consider to be very significant matters. In any event, the word "further" merely implies that one person is adding his own studied observations on business education to a host of others which reach back at least to the founding of the Wharton School in 1881.

The other word in this title, "appraisal," also implies a point of reference. Some value, standard, or goal must be set before an evaluation can be made. Schools of business can be, and sometimes have been, evaluated in accordance with a variety of criteria. A "good" school may be considered one which employs only faculty members who hold the Ph.D. degree. The excellence of an institution could also be thought to be determined by the percentage of students admitted from the upper quarter of their high school graduating classes, or the number who achieved a score of 600 on the College Entrance Board Examinations. These examples are enough to establish the point that though many criteria may be used to define "good" business education, they are all really irrelevant to the main issue. Excellence in a school of business must in the last analysis be determined by its success in preparing young people as perfectly as possible for a great variety of occupations in the business enterprise. This conception undergirds all the reasoning which follows. In theory, it will be generally accepted as obvious, but in practice it is often violated or disregarded.

To be sure, schools of business share certain characteristics with other types of institutions, but these qualities should not be used as ultimate measures of excellence. A school of business may, for example, provide a superior liberal education for its students, but a liberal arts

college should be able to do this as well or better. The business faculty may do distinguished research and issue commendable publications, but in this respect many graduate departments of economics could match or surpass it. A school of business may offer high quality and comprehensive instruction in the behavioral sciences, but this would not distinguish it because other university divisions could excel in this respect. Other examples could be offered. But the justification for, and the assessment of, these institutions must be based on other, more specific, criteria directly related to the needs of American business. If these institutions cannot meet these differentiating criteria, they really have no reason for existence.

Some of the recommendations recently made, if adopted, might cause schools of business to turn out liberally educated graduates, well grounded in the behavioral sciences, possessed of the habits of scholarship, highly intelligent, and yet they might be no better prepared for a career in business than if they had attended a liberal arts college. In this case, whatever its other contributions, such a school of business would have no special justification for being. Perhaps some would consider this development desirable, but if this is their objective, I believe they ought forthrightly to say so.

### Peculiar Functions

In terms of the business enterprise what then are the peculiar functions of an undergraduate school of business? In my judgment, three major purposes should shape its principal features. They are first, to provide the basis of general, nonprofessional education essential to business competence, informed citizenship, and an effective personal life; second, to lay down the foundation of general professional education commonly referred to as "the core," essential for an understanding of the business and industrial enterprise as a whole

and for flexible movement within the range of occupations it affords; and third, to initiate the specialized education which enables a graduate immediately to enter an occupation of his own choosing. With each of these three elements in proper proportion and balance, and, of course, with instruction of suitable quality, graduates of schools of business ought to be able not only to get a reasonably good beginning job, but to have acquired as well the abilities and the attitudes essential to future occupational growth and advancement.

### Undergraduate Curriculum

Proceeding at once to translate these abstract ideas into concrete terms, it would be my view that a quite satisfactory undergraduate curriculum in business could be made up roughly of 50 per cent, general; 25 per cent, core; and 25 per cent, specialized instruction. Converted into the conventional 120 credit hour requirements for the bachelor's degree this would mean 60 hours, general; 30 hours, core; and 30 hours, specialized instruction with some local variations depending on faculty attitudes, student interests, and the particular major involved. This weighting seems to be practically feasible and educationally defensible.

How does existing practice compare with these figures? For recent and comprehensive information on this subject, I am indebted to Professors Opulente and Clark of St. John's University. During the fall, they systematically collected data from nearly 100 of the major schools of business concerning changes which have occurred since the publication of the two reports in 1959. Though they kindly made these facts available for my use they are in no way responsible for any of the interpretations made or the inferences drawn.

### General Courses

Since 1959 there has been a significant

change in regard to the 50 per cent of general or nonprofessional subjects proposed above. In that year 28.8 per cent of the colleges reporting required from 40 to 49 credits in non-business subjects; by 1962 that percentage has dropped to 9.3, but while in 1959 only 26.6 per cent required as much as 60 to 69 hours of liberal arts and science subjects, by 1962 the percentage in this category had risen to 52.5, and another 38.6 per cent require from 50 to 59 credits. These figures show that more than half of the schools have already reached the standard of 50 per cent in liberal arts and sciences and many others closely approach it.

Correspondence with 25 selected schools within the past month disclosed that many are still earnestly trying to redesign their programs to reach the 50 per cent mark. Hence, the situation really looks very encouraging. Moreover, other studies of the Institute of Higher Education show that if some liberal arts courses were genuinely liberal rather than specialized preparatory instruction for future majors, many professional schools would move more decisively toward a larger requirement in these subjects.

### Core Courses

The so-called General Business Core, that is, courses required of all business students, irrespective of their majors, has also become a more prominent element in the average curriculum. In 1959, 25.4 per cent of the institutions required from 20 to 29 credits. This percentage has now dropped to 16.9 and the requirements above 39 hours have become more common. The percentage required in the core is somewhat higher than I proposed, but it should be remembered that from 3 to 6 hours would commonly be the first course in a subject in which the student later specializes. Moreover, since the core courses are general introductions to the various basic subjects, they provide a

desirable vocational flexibility and, therefore, where excessive, constitute less of a handicap than too many courses in a major field.

### *The Major*

The most impressive curricular alteration has occurred in the number of credits required in the major. In 1959, 24.0 per cent of the schools required from 10 to 19 hours; in 1962, this figure had jumped to 55.1 per cent, more than double. On the other hand, few institutions (12.2 per cent) today require more than 29 hours for a major. Only 20.3 per cent reach the percentage of courses in the major I suggested as defensible, namely, one quarter of the curriculum. This trend toward a reduction in the major, may go too far; in fact, it may reach a point where no real major in the conventional sense is offered. Those acquainted with developments in business curricula will recognize the present trends as mere continuations of those visible for the past quarter century. One could sum up the general curricular situation by saying that the trends have been toward more general education in the liberal arts and sciences, an increase in the core of business subjects, and a decided drop in the number of credits in the specialized field.

### General Problems

#### *Number of Ph.D.'s on the Faculty*

As far as the future education of young people preparing for careers in business is concerned, there are three other matters of a more general nature which may be of even greater significance than the foregoing curricular changes. The first concerns the percentage of the faculty holding the doctor's degree. The questionnaire prepared by Dean Gilliland and returned by 61 institutions only within recent weeks, provides illuminating information on this subject. The results reveal a change in the percentage of those holding doctor's

degrees from one college in which 13 per cent fewer of the full-time faculty had received this degree to another in which the percentage had risen by 45. The average increase was 15 per cent.

Most scholars would immediately infer that undergraduate business education had automatically improved as a result of this increase in the proportion of the faculty having the doctor's degree. In a measure this would be a valid deduction. These figures might be assumed to imply that on the average, faculty members now know more about their special subjects, have a keener awareness and understanding of the value of scholarship and research, and would, therefore, *ipso facto* be better teachers. Insofar as undergraduate students are concerned, however, the validity of the latter inference has never been objectively demonstrated. On the contrary, as an article in the September 1962 issue of *Horizon* shows, holders of the Ph.D. are becoming so preoccupied with research, writing, and consultation that even if their teaching ability is enhanced through advanced graduate study and research (a questionable assumption), their interest in and dedication to undergraduate teaching dwindles. More and more, faculties in schools of business are attaining the doctor's degree and in turn launching graduate programs. In view of what has already happened in the liberal arts colleges and elsewhere, however, one cannot be called an alarmist or anti-intellectual if he points out that without proper safeguards an increase in the number of Ph.D.'s on the faculty may, whatever other advantages it provides, lead to poorer rather than better undergraduate teaching.

#### *Majors?*

Second, the controversial matter of undergraduate specialization in a major. This problem has two facets. One concerns the question whether undergraduates in

business should be permitted to concentrate in a single subject as liberal arts colleges usually require their students to do. Practically the question is, "Should there be majors in such fields as insurance, retailing, and advertising?" The other question relates to the degree of specialization which should be permitted, that is, the number of hours that the student ought appropriately be allowed to take within a particular field. These are quite different questions. On the extent of specialization I have already expressed myself in the view that not more than 25 per cent of the total curriculum should be devoted to the major and often it might be less. Some institutions have imposed grievous handicaps on students by permitting them to take 50 or 60 hours in a single field such as finance, insurance, or management. Institutions following this practice are vulnerable on three grounds—its narrows the students' general education, it thins out the subject matter of his specialty, and it gives him a false sense of having arrived professionally. Thirty or 32 hours ought to be adequate preparation in any major, and in some, it can be far less.

But the other question as to whether more than three or four majors, or any at all, ought to be offered can only be answered in terms of the types of jobs for which the institution offers preparation, the changing character of our commercial and industrial enterprise and the opportunity for employment within it, and the value of deep penetration of a field of learning as part of an undergraduate education.

First, consider whether schools of business ought to prepare students only or primarily for top management and upper level executive positions. In respect to this matter, it seems to me that some of the statements made by some schools of business, as well as by persons who study them, to the effect that their curricula

ought primarily to train executives or top managers at best exhibit naïveté and at worst duplicity. As Leonard S. Silk has convincingly shown, in the industrial and business enterprise as a whole there are only about 100,000 executives in firms of than 100 employees, and not all of these by any means are or will in the visible future be graduates of schools of business.<sup>3</sup> Many hold degrees from liberal arts colleges, engineering schools, law schools, even pharmacy and medical schools in certain firms, and not a few come up through the ranks without a higher education. Yet the number of graduates of schools of business in June, 1961 was 50,559.

It follows from these hard facts, as common sense would suggest, that many graduates of schools of business are not going to be top managers—nor should they, any more than all graduates of schools of medicine should expect to become a Sir William Osler or all graduates of law schools, a Blackstone or Storey. This statement contains a good deal of deliberate hyperbole to highlight the pretentious fancifulness of suggesting that all graduates of school of business should be encouraged to expect to rise to top management jobs. The implication is disturbing that if a man has not risen to a high management position, however successful he may have become in a lower or different job, he has to a degree failed occupationally. Leonard Silk's conclusion seems sound that:

... it would seem rather vain to pretend that the dominant mission of our 163 business schools and our more than 400 departments and divisions of business administration is to turn out hundreds of thousands of wise, gifted, sensitive but tough-skinned, visionary but practical, cultivated and responsible and highly motivated and ambitious but thoughtful and

<sup>3</sup> Leonard S. Silk, *The Education of Businessmen*, Committee for Economic Development, New York, 1960, p. 11.

moderate and statesmanlike leaders of American business.<sup>4</sup>

Some graduates may have no capacity for, or more importantly, no interest in the activities of management, but may be highly successful in non-directive occupations. They ought not be deluded by seductive literature, or psychologically coerced by invidious statements, away from what would otherwise be economically rewarding and psychically satisfying occupations. A large percentage of undergraduates ought to receive enough liberal and general business education to enable them to move around occupationally at suitable levels without cultivating the patently false notion that they will, or should want to, become president, or even fifth vice-president, of the company. This is not to say that schools of business should set their sights exclusively on positions below the upper executive levels. Moreover emphasis in undergraduate schools should be on the type of education which will ensure future occupational growth and the potential for advancement, but the program should recognize that management is only one type of occupation for which schools of business ought to prepare students.

The other facet of the matter is that until automation completely eliminates the need for special knowledge and skills other than those connected with the operation of machines, and equipment, many young people ought to be prepared for specialized positions below the level or outside the sphere of management. Our economy is complex. Particular jobs requiring a higher education increase at the rate of about a dozen a year and institutions of higher education ought to fit young people for them. Pierson lists an

<sup>4</sup> Leonard S. Silk, "New Dimensions in Education and Business," an address before the Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, Division of Business Administration, Washington, D.C., November 14, 1962.

aggregate of 23 major subjects offered in 1955-56 in 98 schools.<sup>5</sup> He also reports some obviously questionable courses such as Hotel Front Office Procedures and Principles of Baking: Cookies, which patently do not belong in a credit program in higher education.

If the amount of specialization in the major is limited to 20 or 25 per cent of the whole, and if the intellectual content and methodology of instruction reflect the putative standards of college and university instruction generally, I see no objection to these majors. In fact, such a concentration should be of real value to the individual and to industry. As far as the individual is concerned, a definite occupational goal and instruction related to it increase motivation to learn and serve as a focal point for the integration of the whole learning experience. Howard Mumford Jones, for many years Professor of English at Harvard, in speaking of the value of an early vocational choice and an organization of the curriculum toward it has the following to say:

It is wonderful how, when the individual establishes such a goal, education comes into focus. The postponement of the necessity for such a decision by two years has led the student aimlessly through freshman and sophomore courses unrelated to each other and meaningless to him, since his understandable attitude is that they are patiently to be endured until he is permitted to begin his real education. But if from the beginning of his college work—indeed, if possible, before beginning that work—the student is faced with the necessity of making an adult choice of occupation, it soon becomes possible for the college to deal with him as an adult. His professional or vocational training will not then be crowded into the last two years of a four-year curriculum, and his "liberal" education will not be administered in the vast and shoreless void of two years of drift; on the contrary, the two can be administered together, the practical necessities of the one will focus the theoretical

<sup>5</sup> Pierson, *op. cit.*, p. 219.

implications of the other, and the deeper the student plunges into his professional or vocational work, the more clearly he will see the necessity of a governing philosophy.<sup>6</sup>

But many of Professor Jones' colleagues in liberal arts departments, who argue incontinently for a 30, 40, or even 50-hour concentration in such subjects as physics, English, or economics as an indispensable element in a higher education, commonly find specialization in finance, insurance, or retailing corruptive of sound educational principles.

If depth of study of a subject has value in one field it follows *a priori* that it has value in another. The former dean at New York University School of Commerce, Accounts, and Finance, Thomas L. Norton, has made a strong case for the contribution of a major specialization to undergraduate education in business. "Specialization," he says,

in any one of the broad areas of business permits the student, through sequential courses, to study a subject deeply. He can begin to grasp intelligently the problems of the subject and to apply to them all the interrelationships and analytical skills inherent in the various courses in the Business base as well as those of the General Education part of his curriculum. He has little opportunity of doing this in the Business base courses, because in each he is dealing with only the elementary aspects of the subject. . . .

In my judgment, a specialization of from 18 to 24 credits need not result in exposing the student to 'narrow, stultifying instruction,' as Pierson contends. To me, this comes pretty close to begging the question. There is no reason to believe a specialization need be narrow or stultifying in an area of business any more than in chemistry or history in a liberal arts college. Assuming that the business courses are of high intellectual content and that the desirable combination of courses may come from several disciplines, a field of specialization

can make a valuable contribution to the student's intellectual growth.<sup>7</sup>

And the fact that a person doesn't remain in his initial type of job for life or even for a year seems to be of little significance. Educationally, he has to start somewhere, and if the courses composing a major specialization are taught analytically and in terms of general principles, he should possess the body of knowledge and a complement of intellectual abilities prerequisite to occupational mobility. A single institution should not extend itself too thinly by offering too many specializations, but assuming that the major is kept within a quarter or less of the total program and that the quality of instruction is defensible, I see no reason why the company of schools of business as a whole should not offer any number of specializations. Indeed this is the established pattern of higher education even in undergraduate and graduate liberal arts departments.

A study of the Institute of Higher Education reveals that in addition to the conventional majors in such subjects as mathematics, history, and philosophy, independent liberal arts colleges offer several dozen other specialized programs with a more obvious vocational goal such as medical technology, journalism and accounting. Yet, Opulente and Clark's study shows an aggregate loss since 1959 of 22 majors among the institutions studied. Unless the original offerings were of inferior quality, in which case *no specialty* of any kind should have been offered anyway, even in such established subjects as finance, accounting, or economics, it is a question whether the business community or individual students have been well served by this curricular reorientation. The conception that the number of undergraduate specializations in business should be greatly contracted seems to me ill founded.

<sup>6</sup> Howard Mumford Jones, *Education and World Tragedy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1946), p. 95.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas L. Norton, *The Undergraduate Business Curriculum*, The Ford and Carnegie Reports, privately printed.

Considering schools of business administration as a group, the needs of students seem to indicate the desirability of reversing this trend.

### Admission Standards

Last is the question of admission standards. Many of the schools queried on this subject provided no answers. Of those which did reply, some have raised the qualitative requirements for admission, but many have not. Several studies have shown that some schools of business have accepted students of low scholastic aptitude. Moreover, there is a minimum of ability and high school accomplishment without which respectable higher education becomes impossible, and those who fall below these levels ought to be excluded.

But the recent blind preoccupation with academic excellence throughout the enterprise of higher education may be socially, educationally, and morally indefensible in a democratic society, and wasteful of our human resources to boot. To a considerable extent, this obsessive desire to be certain that only the "best" are admitted to our institutions of higher education springs from noneducational forces, such as fear of the Russians, a false conception of educational and human worth, a narrow view of academic accomplishment, and plain academic status seeking.

*Three Factors.* As we review admissions practices we ought to keep three factors in the forefront of our thinking. First, throughout our history many persons of only modest academic ability have been admitted to our institutions of higher education and have later made good both in college and in life. Because of the unfortunately growing tendency to stress sheer speed of the acquisition of factual knowledge rather than growth in genuine intellectual power, such persons of limited talent and even some of greater aptitude

will encounter difficulty in gaining admission to, or remaining in, an institution of higher education.

As we become more mechanically selective in our admissions policies we ought to be careful that we do not disadvantage potentially capable and worthy citizens. Anyone who made the necessary effort could compile an arresting list of distinguished men and women in all activities of life, whose high school records were not above, and were frequently below average. Dr. George B. Smith of the University of Kansas, in a study of student careers has discovered that many who stood in the lower half of their high school classes achieved successful and often distinguished records in the university.<sup>8</sup> Even at rather high levels of ability remarkable differences in achievement occur among professional students of differing aptitude and previous academic preparation. A recently released study at McGill Medical School reveals no relationship between academic grades and later success in medical practice as indicated by the ratings of members of the profession.<sup>9</sup>

Mr. Henry S. Coleman, Director of College Admissions at Columbia College, in commenting on the predictive value of test scores in the entering class of September, 1961, said that high College Board scores sometimes could be misleading. "Most of the fifteen freshmen," said Mr. Coleman, "with the poorest mid-semester grades scored well on their entrance board examinations. The difference between a boy who scored a high 500 on his examination and one who scored in the low 700's is often negligible."

One ought not conclude from these and

<sup>8</sup> George Baxter Smith, "Who Would be Eliminated," *A Study of Selective Admission to College, Kansas Studies in Education*, December, 1956, Vol. 7, No. 1a.

<sup>9</sup> R. C. A. Hunter, J. G. Solrenge, and A. E. Schwartzman, "A Fifteen-Year Follow Up Study of Medical Graduates," *The Canadian Medical Association Journal*, October 20, 1962, 87:865-68.



other studies that every Tom, Dick and Harry should be admitted to a school of business or an engineering school, college of liberal arts, or any other university division. But they suggest that (1) admissions policies ought to take into consideration factors other than high school records and test scores, (2) that until more reliable knowledge has been produced on the relationships existing between aptitude and achievement scores and success in various business occupations, a latitudinarian admissions policy is indicated, and (3) that the admissions policies of any division of a university ought not automatically determine those of any other division. Some have asserted that some schools of business are the haven of the unfit, the poorly motivated, and the country club set. A Gresham's law probably prevails in schools on a particular campus, and also a kind of molecular attraction doubtless draws together a body of poor or good students, but adequate safeguards can be taken against a gravitation of the inadequately prepared toward any particular school without excluding those who with stimulating teaching could succeed.

Second, since the nation needs a massive corps of men and women in business and industry of widely varying abilities and special skills, educational programs ought to be diversified even in terms of the average aptitude of the students involved. Certain jobs, even those which require a higher education, can be filled with complete competence by those of less than brilliant scholastic promise. In fact, persons of high ability and accomplishment often become badly adjusted in their employments and fail, while others of a different level and type of ability succeed. The need for greater diversity will increase. Moreover, unless I misjudge the temper of our people they will not permit their sons and daughters who do not possess I.Q.'s of 150 to be herded into technical institutes, junior colleges, or

segregated courses for the average student. Many such students can profit from four years of business (or other) education within the atmosphere of a college or university, and they will not be denied it by academic snobbishness or a rigid division of academic labor.

In approaching the problem of admissions, as well as of later academic performance, we can well recall the thoughtful observation of one of America's wisest educational statesmen, Lotus D. Coffman, for twenty years President of the University of Minnesota, who said on this subject, "It should be remembered that the significance of a college lies not in what students bring to it but in what they take away."<sup>10</sup> Consistent with our traditional social and educational philosophy, schools of business ought to remain considerably diversified in their missions, in their programs, and in the quality of their student clienteles. The result will be an untidy enterprise of business education, but the unparalleled strength of American higher education has been the consequence largely of a belligerent institutional independence. Recent pronouncements would suggest that we abandon all three of the foregoing practices and substitute a more common set of purposes, a more standard curriculum, and more uniform admissions practices. Neither is education for business nor for any other occupation would such actions be in the national interest and I feel confident that, though some weaknesses which ought to be corrected may exist in business education, as in all other kinds, we ought jealously to guard the traditions of independence and variation under which our system of higher education has flourished and served a democratic society better than any other in the world.

<sup>10</sup> Lotus D. Coffman, *The State University, Its Work and Problems*, The University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1934, p. 93.

## Accreditation Standards

These remarks have been directed principally to members of the profession, to employers of the graduates of schools of business, and to the public generally. I would like to conclude with a brief statement addressed directly to those charged with the responsibility of accrediting schools of business. The present situation at home and abroad demands the maximum development and use of our human resources of all varieties, levels, and complexions. All of us engaged in education, therefore, have the responsibility to favor policies and practices which seem calculated to achieve this goal.

Through the years, accrediting organizations have rendered incalculable service in improving the quality of higher education. In the light of the present condition,

they can most effectively continue their high service not only by permitting, but by encouraging the greatest possible variation in educational effort, by countenancing wide deviation from what may appear to be sound practice, by not only tolerating but by actually fostering the most radical educational experimentation of all types, and most importantly of all, by imposing inflexible standards only when they are sustained by completely objective and indisputable evidence. By doing so, an accrediting agency will be nourishing healthy educational development in our schools of business, and it will be acting in accordance with our most cherished intellectual traditions of easy accessibility to education and institutional independence. It will also assure a favorable outcome in any future appraisal of schools of business.