

By James R. Gleason

# Contemporary Business Administration Curricula

IN TODAY'S BUSINESS AND MARKETING EDUCATION, THE NATIONAL STANDARDS REFLECT A BROAD BUSINESS CONTEXT.

**WHAT TO TEACH? IT IS THIS MOST BASIC** of questions that defines who we are. As answered by national initiatives, state education departments, legislated standards and, most importantly, local teachers, decisions on how to use our limited time with students define our programs and our impact on future business leaders.

Course titles notwithstanding, teachers who focus on employability skills are teaching an employability course. Those focusing on basic software applications courses are teaching entry-level skills typical of those being added to elementary and middle school curricula. Similarly, teachers using limited class time for day-to-day operations of a school store are suggesting that the course outcomes should focus at least in part on very basic customer service skills and daily store operations and housekeeping.

While few of us would argue the importance of employability, customer service and software application skills, all of us must consider today's education environment, with its heavy focus on reform through increased rigor, relevance and relationships. If CTE is to grow and if it is to serve the needs of today's students, local teachers must think more strategically, must focus more heavily on instructional outcomes (vs. process), and must work toward higher levels of integration and articulation.

Business and marketing educators must continually look to industry to inform the

"what to teach" question. Daily decisions regarding assignments, projects and assessments must be driven by the skill sets that industry believes critical, even as these same activities are further defined by college expectations for their own graduates.

## Contemporary Business Curriculum

The National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium

(NASDCTE) career clusters initiative continues work completed as part of several federal projects in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This initiative marks the first time that the state directors have ventured into the curriculum arena. The association's plan is to continue the research and foster

development of curricula and assessments for each of 16 broad occupational groupings known as career clusters. These clusters encompass a broad range of careers, ranging from agriculture to law, health to government, and finance to education.

In analyzing the clusters, MarkED/Career Paths identified four of particular interest due to their focus on business enterprise. Research indicates that career opportunities in these four clusters are closely related in that they utilize a common base of core business skills. These clusters include:

- Business, Management and Administration
- Finance
- Hospitality and Tourism



▲▲ **Testing, Testing, 1, 2, 3**  
DECA has adopted the business administration standards as the basis of its competitive event program.

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- Marketing, Sales and Service

Viewed together, these clusters represent a comprehensive *business administration* model supported by a set of core business concepts with specialized skills and concepts for each of the four career clusters. This approach parallels a typical college business administration program in which students select specific majors or areas of specialization.

In June 2006, MarkED/Career Paths released the second in a series of draft reports that ultimately can define both business and marketing education within the broader parameters of the new business administration model. The first two phases of a continuing curriculum research initiative addressed a wide range of career options typical of business administration programs.

MarkED's research focused on finance, management and administration, and marketing, including more specialized pathways such as accounting, banking, administrative services, human resources, professional selling, retail merchandising and entrepreneurship. Additional research in hospitality, travel and tourism is scheduled to begin this winter.

Based on 75 industry focus groups conducted in 19 states, the research identified curricula content critical to *all* students interested in virtually any business career, and additional content critical to business and marketing students in specialized programs such as those listed above. This content has been organized into "Knowledge and Skill" statements (standards), performance elements and performance indicators.

**Standards:** The 12 core business standards, or knowledge and skill statements, are broad-based content standards. They identify what students should know and be able to do as a result of instruction in any of the business-related clusters within the overall business administration model. These statements encapsulate the overarching intent/purpose of a work function.

Additional standards represent critical knowledge and skills for each of the specialized areas (*e.g.*, finance, management and administration, or marketing).

**Performance Elements:** Each knowledge and skill statement is composed of multiple performance elements. These statements are broad-based work or cognitive performances that aid in defining the knowledge and skill statements. Although not measurable in and of themselves, they provide a way to organize curriculum in a logical and easily comprehensible manner.

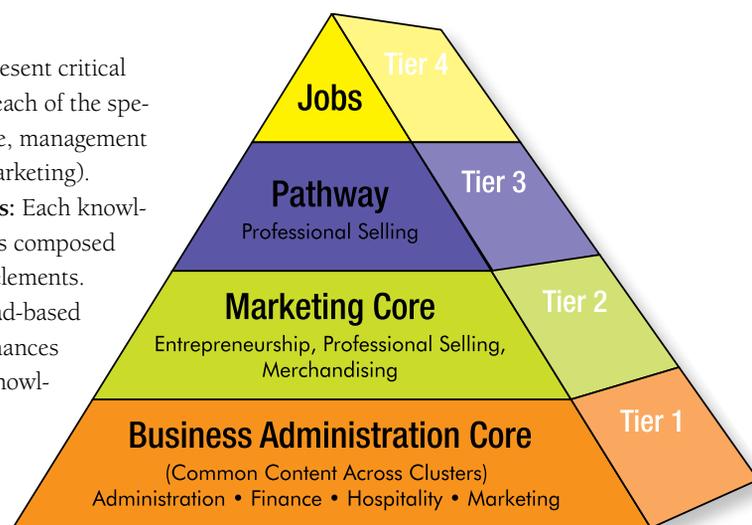
**Performance Indicators:** Performance elements are defined by performance indicators (*i.e.*, competencies) that are specific work-based actions—either knowledge or skills. They specify what an individual worker must know or be able to do to achieve the performance elements. The performance indicators are measurable in that the quality of work associated with them can be determined.

**Curriculum Structure:** The curriculum for each cluster is divided into four tiers of specificity: the business administration core, the cluster core (*e.g.*, management and administration or marketing), the pathways (*e.g.*, banking or marketing research), and the pathway/career specialties (*e.g.*, controller, executive assistant or advertising media planner). Specifically, each cluster is defined in terms of career pathways that are further defined by specific, closely related careers. A strong entrepreneurship standard ensures that entrepreneurial processes are embedded throughout the curriculum model.

### Tier 1: Business Administration Core



The business administration core consists of content common across the four clusters of interest. Industry focus groups repre-



sented various pathways and careers within each cluster were used to identify key concepts and skills relevant to their respective occupations. Participants were middle- and upper-level managers, business owners, and specialists (*e.g.*, independent sales professionals, certified public accountants or human resource managers).

Data from more than 500 participants, along with exhaustive secondary research, resulted in hundreds of specific content suggestions. These were synthesized, edited and leveled to parallel a career ladder concept that will ultimately facilitate course and course of study designs and related sequencing issues. Content recommendations that support all four clusters provide the basis for the 12 common standards (knowledge and skill statements) addressing:

- business law
- communications
- economics
- emotional intelligence
- entrepreneurship
- financial analysis
- human resource management
- information management
- marketing
- operations
- professional development
- strategic management

Each of the above areas is further defined by a comprehensive standards statement that is supported by a series of performance indicators (primarily concepts and cognitive skills). Additional foundational content required of all 16 career clusters was infused throughout the curriculum model, including:

- academics
- employability and career development
- ethics
- information technology applications
- leadership and teamwork
- problem-solving and critical thinking
- safety, health and environment
- systems technical skills

It is particularly important to note that the above lists are *not* lists of recommended courses. Rather, each standard represents content that should be embedded in the course of study for all students of business. The marketing standard in the business administration core, for example, includes only two performance indicators. The implication is that all business students need to understand the marketing concept and have a basic knowledge of the marketing functions. However, not all business students require in-depth knowledge of marketing or specific marketing skills.

Since the actual scope of content recommended for each of these standards is relatively general, much of it might be delivered as “principles of business” and “business management” courses. Similarly, the content might be embedded within any marketing, finance or management and administration sequence of courses. These core business standards represent tier one of the curriculum model that resulted from the first phase of research.

## Tier 2: Cluster Core



The second tier of specialization represents the skills and knowledge that are common

to each individual cluster, but that are not common to all four clusters. For example, the marketing cluster core is based on marketing functions identified in the literature and from the input of industry representatives employed in marketing positions. The marketing core is composed of the following six areas:

- channel management
- marketing information management
- pricing
- product/service management
- promotion
- selling

Tier two marketing standards, along with the tier one business core, provide the broad content base for all marketing students, including those working at entering the profession and those focused on higher-level management positions. A similar set of tier two cluster standards is under development for the finance and business management and administration clusters.

As with the business administration core, the actual number of performance indicators for each standard in these cluster cores is relatively small. Only those concepts or skills critical to *all* marketing careers or to *all* finance careers are included.



## Making Connections ▲▲

The business administration standards can connect with the activities of career and technical student organizations such as the ones in which these DECA students are participating.

## Tier 3: Pathway Content



The third tier further defines each cluster in terms of broad-based career areas called pathways. Examples of pathways within the marketing cluster include occupational areas such as merchandising/buying, marketing research or professional selling.

Similarly, the management and administration cluster includes pathways in administrative services, general management and business information technology.

## Tier 4: Career Specialties



The final tier of specialization contains curriculum content unique to a product or service. In the professional selling pathway, for example, career opportunities might include specialties such as real estate sales, industrial sales or pharmaceutical sales.

Other examples might include the addition of specialized product or operations knowledge such as apparel/fashion or services marketing.

## Academic Integration

Finance, management and administra-

tion, and marketing are critical, challenging business functions that apply many academic areas of study such as economics, psychology and sociology. Successful performance in all areas of business management depends on the application of mathematics and English language principles, the use of scientific problem-solving skills, and the application of computer technologies to business situations.

Given the current educational environment, with its emphasis on traditional academics and college preparation, particular attention was given to related academic standards throughout the development of the business administration model. National standards were carefully reviewed for each of the following academic areas:

- language arts
- mathematics
- social sciences
- social studies

As appropriate, key academic concepts and skills were integrated throughout the new standards. Specific suggestions for academic integration are being developed to support all performance elements. For example, in marketing, each standard may integrate one or more national academic standard(s):

**Information Management Standard:** Understands the concepts, systems and tools needed to gather, access, synthesize, evaluate and disseminate information for use in making business decisions.

**Performance Element:** Process marketing information to test hypotheses and/or to resolve issues.

**Academic Application:** Use statistics to determine the factors influencing the buying behavior of high school students at lunchtime.

**Integrated Mathematics Standard:** Select and use appropriate statistical methods to analyze data.

Although core academics have for many years been integrated throughout marketing and many other business curricula,

it is particularly important today that all business and marketing faculty accept responsibility for:

- reinforcing key academic skills throughout the teaching/learning process;
- embedding critical, industry-validated academic skills into the assessment process; and
- managing the relationship with academic teachers to help encourage contextual teaching of academics and to foster an integrated strategy for the delivery of both technical and academic skills throughout each student's overall course of study.

### Implications

Each local teacher must make a final determination regarding the impact of these new standards on his/her respective situation. MarkED/Career Paths researchers believe that the new model and associated standards should be carefully considered for the following reasons.

Business administration standards provide a solid, research-based starting point for all students of business, thereby helping each individual make more meaningful decisions about course-taking, selection of majors, and career preparation in both

high school and college settings. Adopting the standards will move curriculum closer to the real-world demands of business. For example, a marketing program focused on industry-based curriculum research would include less emphasis on advertising than is typical of many local classes, and increased emphasis on marketing information management and research. Similarly, a general management program might focus less on basic accounting and more on financial or managerial accounting.

Industry-validated standards provide the foundation for the development of many different support tools for local programs. For example, current initiatives by MarkED/Career Paths include development of sample courses-of-study, course guides, instructional modules focused on specific performance indicators, assessment tools and materials to enrich and extend instruction through incorporation of current events, higher order thinking, and integration of academic standards.

Research-based standards can help educators fulfill accountability requirements of Perkins legislation, including significantly increased requirements in the new bill. Standards provide the basis for assessment and for documenting accomplishments of students enrolled in

## Student Organizations

For more information about the career and technical student organizations in this article, visit these Web sites.

Business Professionals of America  
[www.bpa.org](http://www.bpa.org)

DECA/Delta Epsilon Chi  
[www.deca.org](http://www.deca.org)

Future Business Leaders of America-Phi Beta Lambda  
[www.fbla-pbl.org](http://www.fbla-pbl.org)





business and marketing programs.

The business administration model provides specific standards and supporting performance indicators that lend themselves to integration and articulation among marketing courses, business courses and academic courses. They provide a vehicle to encourage dialogue, teamwork and a focus on student needs as identified by the business community.

The model is closely aligned with college business programs and provides opportunities for developing a stronger relationship with colleges and schools of business. It supports initiatives such as CLEP testing, dual credit arrangements, course waivers, and other options to help better position college-bound business students.

The standards and associated performance indicators can provide a direct connection with career and technical student organization activities. DECA, for

Nationally accepted, industry-based standards make possible the development of a portable credential. Various assessments to support such credentials are under development in conjunction with the A\*S\*K Institute, with certification exams available through NOCTI and A\*S\*K.

The business administration curricula provide the basis for a new delivery model currently under development. The *High School of Business* model, patterned in part after Project Lead the Way, will offer a high-level course of study targeted at future college business majors. The *High School of Business* is being designed to provide a high-end benchmark program to better position business and

## ◀◀ Competition Preparation

The DECA competitive events include preparation, testing and presentation.

example, has adopted the standards as the basis of its competitive event program. Similar efforts are underway with FBLA and BPA activities and with other student organizations.

marketing education within today's very challenging education environment.

MarkED/Career Path's continuing curriculum research initiative will provide a common knowledge base for all business students, along with specialized standards and associated performance indicators for a wide range of career-focused business programs. The research will help position business and marketing programs relative to current educational priorities and to demands of Perkins and similar legislation. Most importantly, the research findings will help ensure that all business programs are focused on helping individual students learn key concepts and develop key skills critical to future successes in the highly competitive real-world business environment.

## To Learn More About the Research

MarkED/Career Paths, a not-for-profit curriculum research center serving business, management, marketing and entrepreneurship programs throughout North America, gratefully acknowledges the financial support provided for the research cited in this article by BPA, DECA, FBLA, Glencoe, Thompson/South-Western, Consortium for Entrepreneurship Education, and 25 state education departments. Additional information on the continuing research initiative for business administration is available at: [www.Career-Paths.org](http://www.Career-Paths.org) and on the Career Cluster initiative at [www.CareerClusters.org](http://www.CareerClusters.org).