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“Self-Check Report”
PRT Comments Format



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ABEST21

THE ALLIANCE ON BUSINESS EDUCATION AND SCHOLARSHIP
FOR TOMORROW, a 21st century organization

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I. The Mission Statement and Strategies

1. The School's Mission Statement

PRT Comments:

Revised mission statement seems fine. The PRT might suggest an addendum for applicants indicating that non-Christians are also welcome to apply to ABS.

2. The School's Strategies for Quality Improvement

PRT Comments:

ABS recognizes danger of excessive reliance on international students from China and Taiwan, but The PRT is not convinced by the proposed remedies. See comprehensive comments for suggestions.

3. Humanizing the School's Management Education

PRT Comments:

The PRT might stress the practical advantages of business practices informed by ethics (i.e., avoiding scandals such as those at Toshiba, Volkswagen, LIBOR-setting banks.) As the consultant and business writer Matthew Stewart has written, "all business is about values all the time."

4. Collaborating with Industries in Management Education

PRT Comments:

Seems excellent; ABS clearly recognizes the importance of staying "connected" to the "real world" of business.

5. Globalizing the School's Management Education

PRT Comments:

This is a real challenge. ABS is to be commended for recognizing the importance and for the award it received from eduniversal-ranking.com.

The list of universities abroad with which ABS maintains relationships is impressive, but ABS needs to be careful of too much of a "one way street" relationship with these universities. How many students are actually exchanged? And is it enough to show "globalization"?

The number of English subjects seems too small for "globalization".

See comprehensive comments for suggestions.

II. Self-Check/Self-Evaluation Analysis

Chapter 1 Internal Quality Assurance

Standard 1: Administration and Governance

PRT Comments:

Seems excellent.

In Criterion 1-7, it is shown that a member from the school is participating to the SES committee. But how is she and/or the school reviewing their own administrative operations?

Standard 2: Self-Check/Self-Evaluation

PRT Comments:

Seems fine.

The sentence in "self-check" in Criterion 2-1 is same to Criterion 1-7. And Criterion 2-1 is asking whether the school is analyzing. It seems that the school does not analyze.

Standard 3: Improvement of Education and Research Environment

PRT Comments:

No specific concerns, but ABS will need to address the heavy teaching and administrative burdens on faculty in order to provide more faculty time for research.

It is shown that Aoyama Gakuin's University has SES. But it is not shown what and how the school is doing.

Chapter 2 Mission Statement

Standard 4: Mission Statement

PRT Comments:

The PRT suggests possible mention that ABS welcomes non-Christians (see above).

Mission Statement of Aoyama Gakuin's University is OK. What is the point of Mission Statement of the school?

The sentence in "self-check" in Criterion 4-4 is not a self-check.

Standard 5: Mission Imperatives

PRT Comments:

ABS seems to stand above its peers in this area – suggest stressing that in publicity materials.

Standard 6: Financial Strategies

PRT Comments:

Not easy to understand the situation from the report.

There is a matter of some concern. It is clear that the university expects ABS to be self-supporting financially. While the PRT was assured that the university would stand ready to make up any revenue shortfall in a given year, this is not a long-term solution. ABS appears to rely to a worrying degree on tuition from Japanese-speaking Chinese students – something that could compromise educational goals and carries serious financial risks. See discussion in comprehensive comments.

Chapter 3 Educational Programs

Standard 7: Learning Goals

PRT Comments:

While learning goals are clear and appear to be achieved, the same set of goals for Flextime and Full Time students is a matter of concern. See discussion in comprehensive comments.

Standard 8: Curriculum Policy

PRT Comments:

Again, same concerns indicated immediately above. Curriculum for students with significant working experience should differ from that for students with effectively no working experience.

As for self-check in Criterion 8-2, the Aoyama Gakuin's University self-check committee can actually examine the curriculum policy?

Standard 9: Management of Curriculum

PRT Comments:

The PRT agrees with ABS commitment to additional stress on the 500 level courses. On the other hand, the 500-level courses seem quite almighty. That means maintaining of quality of 500-level courses is extremely important.

Video-taped classes are always effective? Are there any negative points?

How the school evaluates the class with very small number student attendance?

Standard 10: Improvement of Educational Quality

PRT Comments:

ABS educational quality appears excellent.

Again, some concerns about programs aimed at two very different sets of students with the same curriculum/course load/expectation for learning outcomes.

In Criterion 10-5, it is shown the grading is based on absolute scale. The next sentence in that you are discussing "how grades should be distributed" conflicts?

Standard 11: Diploma Policy

PRT Comments:

The PRT concerns about same diploma given for two different sets of students. See comprehensive comments. Agree that strengthening alumni organization could be highly beneficial.

Standard 12: Learning Outcomes' Review

PRT Comments:

The PRT agrees that strengthening alumni organization could be highly beneficial.

In Criterion 12-4, it is shown that some members in the advisory council teach at the school. The members have been selected from outside?

Standard 13: Globalization of Educational Programs

PRT Comments:

“Increasing invitations to teachers, especially from Europe and Asia” is all well and good, but requires additional resources and right now the PRT can’t see where those resources are coming from. See comprehensive comments

In Criterion 13-4, “Chinese speaking staff is needed” slightly sounds strange, because Chinese students have to have enough level of Japanese language for attending the class.

Chapter 4 Students

Standard 14: Student Profile

PRT Comments:

The PRT concerned about the very different student profiles in the Flextime and Full Time programs. See comprehensive comments.

In Criterion 14-1, the sentence in “self-check” is answering the criterion?

Standard 15: Admission Policy

PRT Comments:

The ratio of applicants to admitted students speaks well of ABS reputation and quality. But when ABS writes “the school can choose its target students,” I have some doubts. That statement is certainly true of the Flex Time students. But it seems that the pool of the Full Time students is limited mostly to Japanese-speaking Chinese and Taiwanese students who have decided to make careers in Japan. I have addressed my concerns elsewhere, but as noted, ABS should be alert to the dangers of excessive reliance on this applicant pool.

Standard 16: Student Selection

PRT Comments:

Generally seems very good. But ABS requires that students demonstrate proficiency in Japanese, which is fine. In discussions, it was shown that ABS at one point experimented with requiring English proficiency as well, but dropped that requirement when the applicant pool shrank as a result. This is understandable, but it leaves open the question of how ABS can “globalize.” It is difficult to bring in exchange students and teachers from partner universities when ABS students cannot handle English well.

The school says that the diversity of students is important. The school should consider the student selection methods to ensure diversity?

Standard 17: Student Support

PRT Comments:

ABS seems by and large to have excellent systems for student support together with recognition that support for foreign students could be improved (although it seems the university as a whole does have good infrastructure available to ABS students for supporting foreign students.)

In Criterion 17-2, are there any requirements from students for guidance other than job-hunting?

Standard 18: Student Incentive

PRT Comments:

Increase in students with excellent grades could be a sign of “grade inflation.” Faculty everywhere have a tendency to grade “easy” – ABS might consider some means of checking that – perhaps a system that grades on the curve or a review of faculty members who seem to pass out too many high grades.

Standard 19: Student Diversity

PRT Comments:

Again, the PRT concerned about the diversity in the Full Time Program. ABS to its credit recognizes the problem. The school should consider how to ensure the student diversity, especially for the full-time course

Chapter 5 Faculty

Standard 20: Faculty Structure

PRT Comments:

There is a clear problem here that ABS to its credit recognizes – and a problem that is shared with its peer universities. The problem is sometimes labeled as insufficient “diversity” – as in a faculty that is overwhelmingly male, Japanese, and older. But it is deeper than that. The crux of the matter is how to attract promising junior faculty. Salaries in Japanese academia are not competitive with either the business sector in Japan or, increasingly, with salaries available in universities abroad – not just in places such as the USA and Canada but with countries such as China and Singapore. The teaching load in Japanese private universities is very heavy and the administrative burdens in both private and national universities are also heavy, meaning that too little time is left for junior faculty at Japanese private universities to make reputations for themselves by engaging in cutting edge research. As a result, it is very difficult to recruit outstanding junior faculty from abroad to come to Japan – and next to impossible in disciplines such as accounting and finance. It is also getting harder and harder to attract highly qualified young Japanese.

ABS has adopted one very good way around some of the problem (one not available to its competitors in the national universities): recruiting practitioners who can supplement what they lack in the way of academic qualifications by bringing practical experience into the classroom – something that students everywhere (including the ones we interviewed) say they appreciate.

Nonetheless, the PRT would like to see an expansion of the statement (Criterion 20-5) that “the school will come to have more diversity in our human resources” that gives some specificity on how ABS plans to bring this about. The PRT would recommend that ABS conceive some specific measures– including possibly the carving out of a career tracks for junior faculty that would set aside time for research and “real world” experience (i.e., consulting for companies) either through reduced teaching/administrative burdens or more frequent opportunities for sabbatical/exchange professorships overseas. (The PRT realizes this is to some extent addressed in the self-check of 22-4, but there needs to be more than just exchange of information and periodic reviews.)

Standard 21: Faculty Qualifications

PRT Comments:

Existing faculty is clearly first rate and fully qualified. Problem is the future: specifically, diversification and globalization. See above. Problem is also related to students' English. If only a handful of students will sign up for courses taught in English, it is hardly worthwhile bringing/recruiting faculty from overseas who cannot teach in Japanese. But continued reliance on an overwhelmingly Japanese faculty limits the possibility for diversification/globalization

Standard 22: Maintenance of Education and Research Environment

PRT Comments:

The comment on "Issues to be Improved" of 22-1 is not clear. Are there concrete plans to reduce administrative/committee burdens on faculty members?

The plans (22-2) to "acquire research funds" in cooperation with the university's Research Support Department are impressive.

The lunch time seminar (22-4) is enough to maintain the environment? More regular seminars are needed?

From the interview, the shortage of supporting member seems quite serious.

Appreciate the recognition of need for improvement sabbatical system.

Standard 23: Responsibilities of Faculty Members

PRT Comments:

Not much to add beyond comments already made about administrative burdens.

Standard 24: Faculty Diversity

PRT Comments:

About overall diversity, see comments under Standard 20 above. As mentioned, while exchange programs are an excellent means of achieving goals of globalization and diversity, really to work effectively they need to be seen as a two-way street (i.e., bringing students and faculty from overseas partners to ABS). That bumps up against the English and resource problems.

Chapter 6 Educational Infrastructure

Standard 25: Educational Infrastructure

PRT Comments:

Facilities appear very good; certainly more than sufficient to achieve ABS mission.

Standard 26: Globalization of Educational Infrastructure

PRT Comments:

See comments to Standard 24 above about exchange programs. I found that ABS understanding of the issues and challenges it faces to be very impressive

III. The School's Quality Improvement

1. The School's Quality Improvement System

PRT Comments:

The PRT found that ABS understanding of the issues and challenges it faces to be very impressive

2. The School's Improvement Issues

PRT Comments:

Again, clear understanding of what needs to happen.

3. The School's Improvement Initiatives

PRT Comments:

For the Aoyama Action Learning courses, it seems that there are no fixed methods to carry out. That means there is a possibility that the results will be influenced by the skill of professor and the motivation of participating students. When the school extends the courses, how to secure the quality have to be discussed.

The PRT concerned about possibly excessive reliance on Full Time students to improve finances. See comprehensive comments.

4. The School's Action Plans for three years

PRT Comments:

All well and good, but would like to see more specificity in how ABS intends to attract outstanding junior faculty and to make MOU's a two-way street.

Stress on action learning is to be applauded.

IV. PRT Peer Review

1. Comprehensive Review

From peer reviewer A

Aoyama Business School ("ABS") appears to have a first rate program for its Flex Time students and I can recommend re-accreditation without reservation.

As my comments above might suggest, I am a bit more concerned about the program for Full Time students. Although the students we interviewed seemed enthusiastic and happy with what they are getting out of ABS, it is difficult for me to believe that a program consisting almost entirely of younger students without work experience can deliver the same kinds of learning outcomes as that of an MBA program catering to older students with several years of working experience. As ABS leadership well understands, world-class MBA programs – both in Japan and abroad – are generally restricted to older students with significant work experience.

I recognize and sympathize with the dilemma in which ABS finds itself. It is clear that the university expects ABS to be self-supporting financially. Nowhere in the world, to my knowledge, can MBA programs such as the ABS Flex Time program (or indeed full-time MBA programs aimed at students with significant working experience) support themselves purely on the basis of revenues from tuition. Business schools must therefore supplement tuition revenues with other forms of income: subsidies from the wider university and/or from governments, donations, supplemental revenue generators such as intensive Executive Education programs with high fees, consulting projects for corporations, non-degree offerings in such subjects as English, accounting, and managerial economics/statistics.

It appears that ABS has stumbled onto a stop-gap measure that temporarily solves the revenue problem: the Full Time program. This program seems to cater mostly to Japanese-speaking Chinese (and Taiwanese) students who have decided they want to make careers in Japan and believe that an MBA from a famous Japanese university such as Aoyama Gakuin can help them do that. ABS has discovered some room actually to increase tuition, realizing that tuition fees are susceptible to a Veblen-goods effect (i.e., the higher the price, the more desirable the product can seem) but of course there is a limit to the tactic of increasing tuition.

More generally, the reliance on the Full Time program to make up the revenue gap appears to me fraught with danger – danger that ABS leadership, to its credit, understands. First, this pool of applicants could suddenly diminish. Immigrant communities are particularly susceptible to fashion and word of mouth; anything from a deterioration in Japan-China relations to aggressive competition from competing universities (as everyone including ABS leadership knows, the MBA market in Japan has become extremely competitive with ever-more programs competing in a market for students that is stagnant or even shrinking) could lead to a dry-up of this applicant pool. Second, the granting of the same degree to graduates of the Full Time program as that awarded graduates of the Flex Time program might compromise the "brand value" of the ABS MBA degree. Perhaps this is not too serious a threat since most students in high-quality Japanese MBA programs such as ABS are there for the content rather than the credential – Japanese companies still do not value MBA degrees particularly highly (foreign companies in Japan are a different matter). But it needs to be kept in mind.

It has been suggested that ABS grant a degree other than MBA to graduates of the full time

program – e.g., an MA. But there is an obvious risk in doing so – that applicants would find the program less attractive.

Perhaps, then, ABS could explore other ways to mitigate these threats. ABS admitted that it does not engage in much proactive outreach to potential applicants beyond the Japanese-speaking Chinese/Taiwanese applicant pool. This should change. There are other immigrant communities in Japan with similar aspirations to those of the Chinese students enrolled at ABS (e.g., South Asian – particularly Bangladeshi and Nepali). ABS may also want to look into the possibility of mixing work-experience with class time through some sort of work/study visa arrangement – or if the visa arrangements prove impossible, then to look into non-paying working internships for students, with the idea of bringing work experience into the classroom (and vice-versa – classroom knowledge into the workplace) so that the MBA degree means that the holder has more than simply academic knowledge. The 500 level action learning classes are a good first step.

There is also perhaps an even bigger problem: globalization/internationalization. As ABS to its credit well understands, every MBA program claims to be “global,” “innovative” -- whatever the fashionable buzzword of the moment seems to be. Applicants and students need to see concrete evidence of such: through international exchange programs, a diverse faculty (diverse with respect to national background as well as expertise), and a diverse student body (diverse backgrounds/interests/work experience). The problem, of course, is that achieving all this requires resources; available resources are limited by the inescapable fact that students seeking world-class business education will not come to Japan unless they have already decided to make their careers in Japan and/or with Japanese companies. There is no easy way around this problem (indeed, similar problems affect most higher education in Japan outside perhaps some of the applied sciences such as metallurgy and robotics) – i.e., the problem of “globalizing” in order to attract more students/resources without first having the resources in place to “globalize” -- e.g., attract outstanding senior faculty from around the world; appeal to promising junior faculty with clear career paths and plenty of opportunity to engage in cutting-edge research. (It is interesting – and sobering – to see what the Chinese are doing about this problem: basically they are throwing huge amounts of money at their leading universities in order to attract world-class faculty and ensure plenty of support staff.)

One recommendation would be to benchmark what the most successful MBA programs both in Japan and in the wider world have done. Another would be working to make existing exchange programs (such as the one with Thammasat) more of a two-way street with students and faculty from partners coming to the ABS campus on a short-term/medium-term basis.

Overall, it is clear that ABS offers an excellent MBA education to its students. Accordingly, I recommend re-accreditation with a suggestion that ABS conduct a comprehensive review of the place of the Full Time program.

From peer reviewer B

Aoyama Business School has high quality of education system.

And it is worth to given re-accreditation.

From the self-evaluation report and interviews, I got the following impression.

In the interview with faculty members, they look very busy. Especially, time for research is quite limited. Is it reasonable that the rule of providing more than ten classes per year for whole university faculty members is uniformly applied on professors in the business school?

The school should negotiate with the HQ.

Number of faculty members and the staff looks not enough for continuing high level service for the students. And the financial situation is not good. Those are common issues for almost business school in Japan, and the school has to continue to make efforts to improve the condition. And the situation, that in order to improve the financial situation the number of international students or the tuition fee are increased, should be improved quickly.

Full Time Course is accepting many students from China and Taiwan. In the interview with students of the course, four foreign and one Japanese student, all students look satisfied with the education and service of the school. But they want to have chance to have lecture by foreign professors and exchange with foreign students.

In the interview with students of Part Time Course, following comments are shown;

Because all students in the course are Japanese, then diversity of the students should be extended. Also classes by foreign professors are required.

The hand-out for classes should be provided in digital data.

Classes on IT related should be done by younger professors.

Faculty members look very busy. They make hard-copy for class material.

From peer reviewer C

ABS has high quality of education and learning system. In addition it has very good infrastructure.

2. Good Practice in Management Education

(1) Title of Good Practice in Management Education

(2) Reason for selecting the title stated above

3. Matter to be noted