

# Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 12, 1985

## BUSINESS POLICY CONTENT AND TEACHING METHODS: COMPARISONS OF THE HEGARTY AND SUMMERS AND BOYD FINDINGS

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### ABSTRACT

The two studies utilized the same membership group for obtaining data. Comparisons of the two research findings are made, especially as they pertain to policy course content and the use of business games and cases as teaching methods. The conclusion regarding content is that the findings are very similar and the apparent difference in use level of games is because of item content differences in the questionnaires. The lack of a stream of research that permits comparison and the need for replication is emphasized.

### INTRODUCTION

Faculty acceptance and utilization is an area of continuing concern for those interested in developing simulations and experiential learning materials. (Hegarty, 1976; Hunter and Price, 1980; Raia, 1966; Robana, 1980; Shim, 1978; Shim, Scott, and Knod, 1982; Summers and Boyd, 1984, 1983, 1982; Thompson and Pitts, 1980). The extent these learning methods are used depends at least in part, on the faculty member's perception of course content and one's role as a professor.

The Business Policy course and the professors of Business Policy have been especially targeted for research in this area. The reasons for this interest are extensively reviewed in the studies cited in the first paragraph; we will not repeat that background here.

At the 1984 ABSEL meeting, Summers and Boyd reported their findings in this research area. Their tables, which space limitations required omitting from the Proceedings, were distributed at the meeting. In 1976 Hegarty reported his findings in the same research area at the Academy of Management meeting. This paper compares the two sets of data, and especially seeks differences in the findings that may indicate shifts in professors' perceptions over time.

Both studies drew the sample from the membership of the Business Policy and Planning division, the Academy of Management. Hegarty mailed the questionnaire to all division members associated with a college or university; Summers and Boyd mailed 200 to a random sample of the division membership.

Comparison of respondents' distribution by academic rank cannot be made, since Hegarty did not report this breakdown.

TABLE 1  
SAMPLING AND RESPONSE

	<u>Hegarty</u>	<u>Summers and Boyd</u>
Number Mailed	400	200
Useable Response	130	56
Percent	32.5	28

### FINDINGS

There are some terminology differences between the two studies. The operational definition of that which Summers and Boyd label content is almost the same as that which Hegarty labels course objectives. Summers and Boyd distinguished between the graduate and undergraduate course while Hegarty did not.

Even given the difficulties of data comparison (Tables 2 and 3), inspection does seem to clearly indicate that Strategic Planning, or Strategy Making and Top Management Perspective, continue to be most important in the professor's view of the Policy course.

TABLE 2  
HEGARTY FINDINGS

<u>What are the course objectives for Business Policy?</u>	
Develop overall management skills	14
Develop a top management perspective	15
Develop decision-making skills	12
Develop strategy making/planning skills	15
Develop a philosophy of business	4
Integrate the functional areas	12
A combination of two of the above	19
A combination of three of the above	17
A combination of four or more of the above	10
Other	6
No Response	6

\*Note: We presume the respondent was requested to indicate "most applicable" because the above totals 130, the useable response value.

TABLE 3  
SUMMERS AND BOYD FINDINGS  
RANKINGS OF COURSE CONTENT

<u>Course Content</u> <u>Factor</u>	<u>Undergraduate</u> <u>Course</u> <u>Rank/Prof.</u>	<u>Graduate</u> <u>Course</u> <u>Rank/Prof.</u>
Set Obj./Goals	2	3
Strat. Plng.	1	1
Fin. Anal.	7	5
Think Competitive	3	2
Impl. Plans	6	4
Eval. Results	4	3
Controlling	5	4
Market. Concepts	8	6
Role Top Mgmt. Values	6	3
Envir. Anal./Change	3	1

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TABLE 3 (Continued)

Quan. Dec. Mak.	12	10
Top Mgmt. View	4	1
Prod. Ops. Mgmt.	10	8
Org. Struc.	7	5
Integ. Func. Act.	3	3
Hum. Beh./Dec. Mak.	9	7
Mot. Lead., Beh. Concepts	11	9

Hegarty's findings regarding course emphasis (Table 4) are clearly consistent with Summers' and Boyd's findings regarding Strategic Planning and Setting Goals/Objectives (Table 5). While not inconsistent, the findings regarding Strategy Implementation may be indicating a slight shift in the professors' emphasis.

### Business Game

Hegarty found that 51 percent of his sample were using a business game, 49 percent of his sample were devoting 10 percent or more of their course to the game, and 23 percent were devoting 30 percent or more of their course to the game (Table 5). Only 6 percent of Hegarty's respondents indicate they tried a business game without success. The Hegarty respondents appeared to positively perceive business games.

The Summers and Boyd findings are more negative regarding the use of business games--out of four learning methods it was ranked third by the professors and fourth by executives. Note however, that Hegarty reported about 49 percent not using a business game. Inspection of Table 5 would indicate cases would have also been ranked higher by Hegarty's subjects.

Do these findings indicate a shift in the popularity of business games? We do not know from these data. The differences may only be because Hegarty asked the time devoted to a learning method and Summers and Boyd asked for a ranking (Table 5, 6)

### Cases

Both studies report similar findings regarding cases. Hegarty finds that most course time is spent on cases; Summers and Boyd find cases rank first as a teaching method (Table 5, 6).

### SUMMARY

After an approximate eight-year span of time, there appears to be no remarkable shift in the findings. The attempt to compare these two research papers highlights the need for replication and extension of

TABLE 4  
HEGARTY FINDINGS

Objective formulation, strategic planning, and strategy implementation all fall under the umbrella of Business Policy. I would like to know how much emphasis you place on each concept.

<b>*Objective Formulation</b>				
47	56	22	3	2
Very Strong Emphasis	Strong Emphasis	Moderate Emphasis	Little Emphasis	No Response
<b>*Strategic Planning</b>				
49	65	13	1	2
Very Strong Emphasis	Strong Emphasis	Moderate Emphasis	Little Emphasis	No Response
<b>*Strategy Implementation</b>				
31	63	32	2	2
Very Strong Emphasis	Strong Emphasis	Moderate Emphasis	Little Emphasis	No Response

TABLE 5  
HEGARTY FINDINGS

The Business Policy course is usually taught using business cases. Approximately what % of the time do you devote to case analysis?

5	7	24	31	45	18
0%	10-29%	30-49%	50-69%	70-89%	90-100%

The Business Policy course is frequently taught using a business game. Approximately what % of the time in the course do you devote to the game?

66	34	22	7	0	1
0%	10-29%	30-49%	50-69%	70-89%	90-100%

TABLE 6  
SUMMERS AND BOYD FINDINGS  
LEARNING METHOD

Learning Method	Professor Rank
Case	1
Lecture/Discussion	2
Other Experiential	4
Simulation Game	3

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research. The two studies are not directly comparable. An opportunity for useful comparison was missed; especially so because the same membership group was sampled.

By combining parts of both studies and replicating them, a more conclusive set of data can be obtained. It is important that trends within the interest areas of ABSEL be known. This paper is evidence of a need for a continuous and comparable flow of research and data in that regard.

Ranking should be avoided in favor of rating. The method(s) and instrument(s) used need to be clearly presented. Time devoted to a learning method needs to be distinguished as class time, student's time, and instructor's time. The instructor's belief regarding what course content is supported by which learning method should be assessed. Those instructors not using business games should be asked why they do not. Terminology in the questionnaire needs in some instances to be defined and standardized, e.g., business games or computer simulations. There are examples of each that do not include the other. When we mean a computer-based simulation of firms functioning in an industry, we need to use words that make this explicit.

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