York University
Schulich School of Business

Master of Management
Response to External Appraisal Report

We read with interest the review by Professor McWatters (University of Ottawa) and Professor Goerzen (Queen’s University) of our proposed 11-month Master of Management program. They agree with the nature of the program and the societal need for such a program. Indeed, Queen’s University offers its own version of such a program with similar objectives but within only a single four-month term (the briefest of any such program) as contrasted with Schulich’s more thorough 11-month duration.

The external reviewers make a number of observations in their report. Some of them are not very specific, e.g., about the program’s positioning. However, they lead us to believe that the proposal could have benefitted from a better definition of the profile of the graduate of this program. We therefore define this profile upfront as part of this response and have inserted the profile into the program proposal as well (section 2.1):

The graduate from the Master of Management program is:

- Bright and curious,
- Exhibits leadership and/or entrepreneurial qualities,
- Is a good communicator,
- Is well versed in the broad field of management, complementing the graduate’s skills and capabilities acquired in his/her prior (undergraduate) field of study.

More specifically, we would like to respond by directly referencing the reviewer’s comments as enumerated in Sections 4 and 5 of their report.

1.1 Overarching framework. The first point they highlight (Section 4, item 1) is that “the overarching framework of the program is not clear.” This observation surprises us in that the reviewers themselves state that “the general objectives of the program are clear in that it offers a management degree that is general in nature with a balance of quantitative and qualitative elements.” They also acknowledge that the proposed program “fills a gap in MBA programs which do not encourage or accept students who have no relevant experience by offering a general management graduate degree in a one-year format.”

We believe that the proposal is quite clear that, as the reviewers observe, the program is designed to provide students with the qualitative and quantitative skills (as well as basic management skills) to better prepare them for seeking meaningful employment even though they
lack significant prior full-time work experience. Thus, the overarching theme can be framed as follows:

“The Master of Management program provides general management education with a special focus on developing problem solving, team work and communication skills, and with close attention to interpersonal skills without sacrificing core knowledge in the major functional areas of management.”

The need for such an educational approach has been further highlighted very recently by the comments of Janet Ecker, chief financial executive officer of the Toronto Financial Services Alliance [as quoted in The Globe and Mail, 11 December 2015]: “Certainly from industry, there is a sense that graduates don’t always have the hard and soft skills that are required in particular jobs.”

Similarly, the Province of Ontario’s consultation report on modernizing the funding formula (“Focus on Outcomes, Centre on Students”) states that “students [must] actually learn soft skills employers seek, such as communication, teamwork, critical thinking and organization” [as reported in the Toronto Star]. It is exactly these skills that are a primary focus of the Master of Management program.

While we believe that the proposal already embodies this theme, we thank the reviewers for pointing out that the theme needs particular reinforcement both for the approval process and for marketing purposes so that prospective students clearly understand the program’s intent. We have included the above statement on p. 3 of the proposal and inserted clarifying amendments on p. 4 to ensure that the program’s intent is indeed clearly spelled out.

1.2 Sequencing of courses. The reviewers questioned the rationale underlying our choice of courses and their sequencing. The choice of courses is similar to that in most general management degrees: (1) courses that develop the students’ qualitative and quantitative skills, and (2) courses that lay the foundation of management skills.

Qualitative skills are often referred to as “soft skills”, but often they are the most difficult for students to acquire because such skills require the ability to work with others (i.e., in teams), to think in multi-dimensional ways to which many students are unaccustomed, and to communicate complex proposals effectively in writing, in oral communication, and via formal presentations in various formats. Quantitative skills (including quantitative data analysis) are more obvious – the ability to manage, manipulate, interpret and communicate data in various formats for varying purposes, and without bias. Overall, the course sequence is arranged so that each term balances qualitative and quantitative courses.

Management foundation courses focus on the more specific aspects of management such as accounting, marketing and finance. These ‘functional’ management courses comprise the core of all general management programs, graduate and undergraduate. The sequence of management courses is somewhat less consequential, except for the two accounting courses, financial and managerial.

The sequence of qualitative and quantitative management courses represents a learning progression that culminates in the Enterprise Consulting Project.
To ensure that this design principle is more easily recognized, we have edited section 4.1 (p. 6) in the program proposal.

2. **International component.** The reviewers observe that the program has no international component. While it is true that Schulich is known to emphasize internationalization, particularly in the IMBA and iBBA programs, we do not deem it necessary for every program to have an explicit international component. Internationalization is incorporated into many courses, as relevant, and no independent “international” courses need be prescribed in a program that is intended to enable students to seek entry-level positions in whatever type of organization or endeavour that they choose to approach. For those students who may have a particular interest in international organizations, we intend to offer an introductory course on international business as an elective.

3. **Combination of courses.** The reviewers comment on what they perceive as our practice of combining two ‘topics’ into a single course; they then question the ability of a single course instructor to cover both topics. We were quite taken aback by this comment, as the supposedly dual topics are really a single topic. Over the years, it has become clear that one cannot learn ‘strategic thinking’ without simultaneously developing the skills to communicate the results of strategic analysis. Similarly, business communications and team dynamics go hand-in-hand; these skills are core skills for success for any employee, manager, owner, or entrepreneur. These so-called ‘combined’ courses have been taught effectively within the Schulich School for decades at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

   Nevertheless, we have modified the title of “Strategic Thinking and Presentation Skills” by dropping “presentation skills (Figure 1 and Appendix B). Indeed, presentation skills are not a separate topic at all—presentation is an essential aspect of strategic thinking. Regarding the one other course that the reviewers perceive as a “combined” course, business communication and team dynamics go hand-in-hand; they are interrelated, not different topics.

4. **Teams.** The reviewers cite four potential problem areas with student teams. They then assert that “student teams are predictably unstable and many teams will face challenges and some will go beyond the breaking point to combustion.” This may indeed be the experience of these reviewers, but we have not had serious problems with teams for decades. Since the MBA program was first established in 1967, an essential component (and graduation requirement) was that all students, in teams of six, perform a ‘live’ strategic analysis of an ongoing organization with the direct cooperation of the organization’s senior management (MGMT 6100 – Strategic Field Study). Over time, the Schulich School of Business has honed the development of team management such that team problems very seldom arise. Teamwork permeates the curricula at both graduate and undergraduate levels. Indeed, many students are attracted to Schulich because of the integration of teamwork in the programs. They recognize the essential importance of cooperation and group interaction for effective management. Furthermore, the inclusion of an experiential course on team dynamics in Term 1 should provide students with the skills and knowledge required to effectively manage tensions that might occur in their teams, with concurrent and subsequent
courses providing the opportunity to experience team dynamics and practise the management thereof. Schulich has a mediator who is called upon when serious dysfunction occurs in a team.

We have made a note with regards to teams in section 5.2 of the proposal to clarify that (1) the program does require a significant of teamwork and (2) the Faculty is well equipped in managing teams and team dynamics, if needed.

5. **Integration of topics.** The reviewers express concern about the ‘integration’ of topics, as also noted in point 3 above. We view this ‘integration’ as essential to Schulich programs. Instructors at all levels are adept at integration; the students demand that components be related and that the efficacy of techniques and problem-solving approaches be integrated with the other subject matter. Schulich instructors understand that they cannot live in topical ‘silos’; if they are unable to integrate material, they will receive very poor course evaluations.

6. **Niche program.** The reviewers state that “the proposed program should be stand alone and that the program should allow students to obtain a rounded education while still recognizing the inherent time constraints.” We agree completely. The program is designed to provide the knowledge and tools that are essential for success for individuals entering the workplace. The program is explicitly designed to provide students with both the qualitative skills and quantitative tools that they need to enter the workforce at a meaningful level.

   However, the reviewers suggest that we are avoiding thematic choices in order to protect our specialized one-year masters programs. Such is not the case—the specialized programs are fully enrolled and need no protection. Furthermore, since the Master of Management has electives only in the final term, there is no opportunity to create a sequence of courses (i.e., thematic choices) in specific areas of interest. Such an approach would be contrary to the program objective to provide a broad understanding rather than a specialization.

   Curiously, the reviewers do not comment upon an important part of the program – the highly experiential **Enterprise Consulting Project** in Term 3 wherein the students (in teams) find an organization with which to study a particular problem that the organization is experiencing while working on concert with the organization’s management. This is similar to the MBA **Strategy Field Study**, but focuses on finding a solution to a specific management issue rather than on conducting a broad strategy study. This difference in approach is commensurate with the student’s knowledge and skill levels.

7. **Inclusion of MBA courses.** The reviewers object to our including three existing MBA courses in the Master of Management core structure. All three of these courses (accounting, marketing, and organizational behaviour) are introductory courses in functional areas that are relevant for all students in both the MBA core (i.e., first year) and the Master of Management. They presume no prior experience in these subject areas. Individual sections of any course are, in practice, adapted to the skill level of the students without deviating from the course’s learning objectives. While we could create mirror versions of those courses with the MSTM rubric, this would seem to create needless course duplication.
We have inserted a clarifying paragraph in section 4.1 to that effect.

8. **Electives.** The reviewers assert that “the electives ... seem fairly random (as opposed to thematic).” Given the nature of the program, the electives have been chosen on the basis of providing additional breadth (at an introductory level) across a broad range of topics. We believe that young people today have a much wider vision than simply finding a job with a large corporation. For example, many of our undergraduate students are not interested in big business but instead expect to embark on careers in organizations such as social service, entrepreneurship or small business development. Thus, electives have been and will continue to be chosen so that students can tailor their elective choices to suit their individual interests or talents, which may often be related to their field of undergraduate studies. None of the electives will be highly specialized in nature, however.

As the proposal brief indicates, the range of electives will expand in accordance with enrolment expansion thereby giving students a broader range of options. We anticipate conducting a survey in Term 1 to determine the types of electives the students expect they would be interested in.

We would like to make one final observation. As the reviewers are aware, successful completion of this program will enable graduates, after acquiring several years of work experience, to directly enter the second year of the Schulich MBA program (i.e., the “accelerated MBA”). In this two-term MBA program students can develop their expertise in one or two more specific areas of management in which they have become interested. In contrast, the intent of the Master of Management is not to attempt to make students specialists, but rather to provide them with a very strong foundation, similar to (but we believe even stronger than) the foundation in most MBA programs.