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MBA Program Evaluation, Constructive Criticism

David Fox <dfox.mba@auaf.edu.af>

Tue, Apr 12, 2016 at 8:57 PM

To: "Patrick K. Asea" <pasea@auaf.edu.af>

Cc: Mark A English <menglish@auaf.edu.af>, Timor Saffary <tsaffary@auaf.edu.af>, Zuhra Khwajazada <zkhwajazada.mba@auaf.edu.af>, "Leslie M. Schweitzer" <leslie.schweitzer@friendsofauaf.org>, Class of 2015-17 <mba2015-17section1@auaf.edu.af>, Naveed Zulfiqar <nzulfiqar.mba@auaf.edu.af>

Prof. Asea,

I will also repeat my response to your emails from last year, which is that your tone is unbecoming of a university professor and Director of a graduate program.

I don't play political games, Prof. Asea. I will advocate relentlessly to the administration and Board of Directors to provide oversight for the MBA program, while at the same time fighting the administration and Board of Directors to make sure that they do not fire you over a labor rights dispute (no matter the *ad hominem* language you may use to describe me).

What I am doing has to be done, no matter how unpleasant it is. And so I am doing it.

If the administration of this university is truly interested in the state of this program, I would very much suggest looking at the most recent QMB 501 and ECO 500 mid-term exam papers, and see how the students performed. Giving failing grades to 39% of the class in QMB (with another 25% receiving Ds) does not exactly indicate that the students are walking away from this program with a mastery of the material.

Sincerely,

David

On Tue, Apr 12, 2016 at 7:18 PM, Patrick K. Asea <pasea@auaf.edu.af> wrote:

Dear David,

We exchanged over 20 emails on this matter in 2014/2015. Yet here you go again.

You keep on harping about a lack of transparency in grading. You keep on saying that you are an important business person who does not have the time to attend class regularly or review class materials. You keep on saying that the AUAF MBA program should not have the same standard as top American universities. That my exams are too difficult. My exams are too long. That the entire leadership of the university is deficient. The Board is unethical. Everybody is at fault apart from you. Sorry that does not fly. This is a university and its not up to you to set the academic standards. The textbook we are using is authored by highly respected Professor's at MIT Sloan Business School. It is a workhorse of QMB classes around the world. I am not going to dumb down the material to suit you. If that was your expectation then I am sure you will soon be disabused of that notion if you have not been already. As I told you in 2014 "leave the political games aside, roll up your sleeves and get down to hard work. Master the material and excel." Hurling slurs and making disparaging comments about me, the Board and the leadership of the university will get you exactly nowhere. Over 80 Afghan students have taken and PASSED QMB500/QMB501 (on the first try) and gone on to graduate from AUAF with an MBA degree without whining that the academic standard is too high, QMB is too hard, or that they are senior managers and are paying a lot of money and should not be made to jump through hoops for the degree and so on and so on.

I have nothing more to add than to draw your attention to this email I sent you in January 2015.

Dear David,

Let me repeat what I said in our earlier email exchange. You have an inflated self-ego. You simply think you are better than you actually are. You got 57% in the Mid-Term and 0% in the Final (which you opted not to take). You got 0% in solving problems in the class. That is an F. You can complain all you like but those are the facts. The MBA Association is NOT supporting your ludicrous petition. Neither are your former class mates many whom came to see me to apologize for your rude and outrageous emails. You think because you are a foreign student at AUAF you must

somehow get special treatment. That is not the case and will not happen. You will be treated exactly the same as any other student. When you came to see about joining the MBA program you explained to me the circumstances that led to you being fired from AUAF. I told you that those were issues when you were an employee and so long as you kept the minimum academic standard you were welcome to apply and study here as a student. Clearly, you did not heed that warning. You have clearly failed to meet the minimum academic standard. Just as you did on the third floor you have become a disruptive, rude and undisciplined factor.

On Tue, Apr 12, 2016 at 5:12 PM, David Fox <dfox.mba@auaf.edu.af> wrote:

Hello Dr. English, Dr. Saffary,

At our meeting the other day, Dr. Saffary stated that MBA students had not been providing constructive criticism about the program. I happen to disagree (please review the emails I sent to the administration in 2015).

I am happy, though, to repeat some of the points that I communicated to the main administration last year.

Let me start by saying that the standards of this program should not be compared to an MBA program in the United States. Nearly everyone in this program works full-time in senior management positions at their respective organizations. Due to the economic situation of Afghanistan (and the lack of facilities to obtain student loans) students who have families to support simply cannot take a 2-year leave of absence from gainful employment. My younger brother received his MBA degree from Columbia University, but I promise you he would not have been able to manage this while holding a full-time job.

Due to the fact that students in this graduate program are juggling serious responsibilities outside of class (i.e. financially supporting their families or employees), we should not have to jump through hoops to get this degree. That does not mean that the degree should simply be handed out, thereby diminishing its value; it means that students should be given the maximum amount of resources to learn the course material in the minimum amount of time.

So now let me get into some specifics regarding what I, David Fox, believe needs to be done to improve this program and right past wrongs:

- **Exams:** Earlier today we received a summary of test results from the Quantitative Methods of Business (QMB) mid-term. 11 out of 28 students received failing grades, with an average score of 57%. As one of my close friends, a professor at Boston College, told me, if two or three students fail an exam, then that is likely their own fault. If you have a large number of students failing an exam, according my friend, then there is a problem with either the exam or the study material. It is my opinion that the problem here is both; excessively difficult exam questions contained within excessively long exams, as well as inadequate study material that fails to provide students with an accurate idea about what type of questions to expect.
- **Course and Exam Grading:** A significant issue in Prof. Asea's classes has been a lack of transparency with exam and course grading. Without a clearly defined and publicly posted standard for exam and course grading, the fact is that these grading decisions are made in an arbitrary and inconsistent manner. I am attaching the first page of my mid-term exam from QMB 500, from the Fall 2014 semester. There is a 74% marked over the original score of 59%, with no explanation of how a grading curve was implemented. The "3rd" at the top of the exam signifies that this was the 3rd highest grade in the class, which would indicate that the 3rd highest grade in class was - prior to the curve being added - a failing grade. That should raise alarm bells. Consequently, I would ask that all exam and course grades be issued publicly, with students identified by their student ID numbers. If nearly a majority of students fail an exam, the onus of responsibility should be on the professor to explain how this could have happened, not the students.
- **Clearly Communicated and Consistent Standards:** Why was I prevented from continuing in the MBA program when I missed the QMB 500 final exam in the fall of 2014? Why were some students the year before allowed to continue in the program after failing QMB 500, and I was singled out (along with one other student) to be held back? Why are there re-takes for exams in some cases, and not for others? These are serious questions that have dramatic consequences for students' careers, yet these decisions are being made in a way that unequivocally and verifiably arbitrary. Students are making enormous sacrifices in time and money to attend this program, and they deserve to be treated fairly and transparently. The cases of all students who have been pushed out of the MBA program as a result of arbitrary decisions should be reviewed carefully.

I would like to say in conclusion that Prof. Asea's classroom behavior and responsiveness to student requests has changed remarkably (for the better) between this year and last year.

Sadly, though, I believe that this is entirely a result of the increased scrutiny on Prof. Asea following the Vote of No Confidence affair of last semester. Issues have been raised about Prof. Asea's personal conduct and grading policies for years, yet there has been zero interest on the part of the main administration and Board of Directors to address these issues up until now.

I can only conclude that as long Prof. Asea kept quiet about faculty labor rights, the President, Provost, and Board of Directors were happy to sit back and give him the full authority to make vindictive, potentially career-destroying decisions related to MBA candidates.

As soon as Prof. Asea played a significant role in speaking up about accountability and oversight in protecting faculty rights, suddenly the main administration and Board of Directors is interested in the MBA candidates' opinions, along with the administrative structure of the program.

In short, the leadership at this university - at all levels - is grossly deficient, with no one taking a serious interest in the education and welfare of the students here. It is a sad state of affairs, and I hope that the leadership of AUAF will do their jobs and put students' education first, for once.

Sincerely,

David Fox

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