Data Analytics programs: Partnering across the School of Business and within a Liberal Arts Settings

**Keywords**: Data Analytics, Liberal Arts, Management Faculty

**Abstract:** Business Schools involved in creating Data Analytics programs face a multitude of decisions in designing the program. This is especially true when the Business School sits within a liberal arts college, or a College where integration among different disciplines is emphasized, both within the School of Business and outside it. The role of faculty from within the Business School and in disciplines outside the School, as well as the targeted group of students all impact the creation of the program. Issues raised for management and general Business School faculty as well as the larger institution are discussed with the experience of the presenters in creating such a program as background.

**Introduction**

Business Schools involved in creating Data Analytics programs face a multitude of decisions in designing the program. This is especially true when the Business School sits within a liberal arts college, or a College where integration among different disciplines is emphasized, both within the School of Business and outside it. This roundtable presents an example of a Business School developing a Data Analytics minor and major, the former specifically designed to be open to non-Business School students. Review of programs developed in other schools reveals a number of different models for incorporating data analytics into business programs. This roundtable will encourage discussion and contributions by others involved in such program development.

**Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implication**

There is strong agreement that Data Analytics skills are of key importance to business students going out into today’s workplace. Data Analytics program are being developed in many schools, often building on or in partnership with computer science departments.

What about the situation when a Business School exists within a liberal arts setting? The business students unquestionably need the technical data analytics skills, but how do you incorporate those with the more traditional business subjects, particularly some of those focused on “softer” skills? And what about the students outside the business school, in the liberal arts majors? What does the liberal arts education contribute to the data analytics framework? (“Data Analytics…,” 2020; Business Higher Education Forum, n.d.; Report, 2020).

If the data analytics programs are interdisciplinary, where does that leave management faculty within the business school who don’t teach data analytics but who have projects that could usefully employ such skills? And what is the role of faculty outside the Business School who possess data analytic skills themselves? Would their approach differ if they taught required courses in the Data Analytics program?

At one liberal school these questions and others were raised and discussed in a several months long Data Analytics summit, with faculty from business school areas and from humanities, social sciences and hard sciences. The discussion that ensued revealed areas of common thinking about data analytics, as well as areas where thinking diverged. This inevitably raise the question of what the shape of a new data analytics minor and major should look like.

As the programs developed, questions also arose within the School of Business about how other management professors and their specialty areas would be involved in the program, and how students would be able to integrate their data analytics skills into other fields such as organizational behavior, strategy, human resources, entrepreneurship and others. External input from working professionals in these fields provided very useful examples of ways to integrate data analytics into other business fields.

Some **additional points** raised in our Data Analytics summit and in the literature that will be discussed include:

If the minor was truly interdisciplinary, would the core of knowledge necessary be diluted? Would the data analytics major be a true business degree, with other courses such as organizational behavior, finance and strategy included? Should faculty from other fields and from non-business fields be included in teaching the data analytics courses? Would team teaching be appropriate for some classes?

What do the liberal arts and other management fields have to bring to the data analytics programs? What additional perspective do they provide? Adam Weinberg, President of Dennison College has written, “The challenge lies in the art, or craft, side of data analytics: how to frame questions correctly, how to bring together interdisciplinary teams to work effectively in analyzing data, and how to communicate results to decision makers and the public. There also are the ethics of data analytics, given that so much of the data are collected in non-traditional and often hidden ways” (Weinberg 2020). Many of these skills are those taught in business management classes as well as in the liberal arts disciplines.

The key role ethics plays in reviewing and using data is particularly important in business and non-business settings. Here the liberal arts background can play a key role.

The difference in approach that exists between those in data analytics who understand the big data that exists in the external world and are determining how that data can be used to solve problems, versus those first identifying the question they’re interested in, then determining how best to collect and analyze the data.

The need to clarify the difference between digital humanities and data analytics.

**Session Description:**

The 60 minute session will be broken up as follows:

**10 minutes**: Background of Data Analytics programs developed in smaller institutions, description of Data Analytics Summit in the presenters’ institution, and the value of such a months long discussion.

**10 minutes:** Overview of Issues uncovered during the Summit and the decision making issues raised, including connections of program with larger college departments and with colleagues in the Business School in other management fields

**30 minutes:** Participation by roundtable attendees describing their own institutions’ efforts around developing Data Analytics, discussion of some of the points raised above about Data Analytics programs in liberal arts institutions, as well as specifics about how faculty in fields such as organizational behavior, strategy, human resource management, entrepreneurship, etc. can be involved.

**10 minutes:** Wrap up and possible future communications and partnering.

**References**

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