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David D. Van Fleet

Daniel A. Wren

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*David D. Van Fleet*  
TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY  
*and*  
*Daniel A. Wren*  
UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

## **HISTORY IN TODAY'S BUSINESS SCHOOL**

**Abstract:** Members of the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business were surveyed to determine to what extent the history of various business school subjects (accounting, economics, management, etc.) was a part of today's curricula. Findings indicated widespread teaching of history and the feeling that more should be done. However, the findings also indicate that much of the current teaching is not being done in separate courses by professional historians or even those interested in history. Implications for curricula development are discussed.

One authority has stated, "There is a growing recognition that a discipline which aspires to be a 'profession' must include its intellectual heritage [i.e., its history] as part of the educational process." Is this true for business, management, and related disciplines? In discussions over the past several years, it has become evident that most of us have little precise knowledge about what business schools are or are not teaching by way of history. In an effort to determine the extent to which the history of a discipline (accounting, business, management, etc.) is a part of today's curricula, a survey was conducted of all member institutions of the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). To provide some comparative information, members of the Business History Conference were also surveyed. The purpose of this paper is to present the results of that survey.

### *The Questionnaire*

The questionnaire was kept simple. It asked only a few questions since it was designed as a first effort to get an overall view rather than an indepth probing of the situation. The basic questions asked included the following:

1. Is history, in some form, part of the program at your school?
2. How is the history taught in your program?

3. Indicate the type of history taught and the academic level at which it is taught now.
4. Indicate the type of history and academic level which should be taught.
5. Has the teaching of history in your program increased, stayed about the same, or decreased over the last 10-20 years?
6. Do you think that the teaching of history generally has increased, stayed about the same, or decreased over the last 10-20 years?
7. Make comments and suggestions.

### *The Sample*

The AACSB population consisted of 64 institutions accredited at only the bachelor's level, 17 accredited at only the master's level, 217 accredited at both levels, and 346 non-accredited institutions for a total of 644. The Business History Conference list added another 181 to the list. The overall response rate was 38% (313 returned of 815 mailed); six of these were not usable, however. The response rate by subgroup was as follows: 45% for institutions accredited at the bachelor's level only; 41% for those accredited at the master's level only; 38% for those accredited at both levels; and 39% for non-accredited AACSB institutions for 40% overall for the AACSB list. The Business History group did not respond as well—only a 32% response rate.

The addition of the Business History Conference list caused some duplication to result among institutions covered. If two or more responses were from the same business school, one was selected to "represent" all of them; an effort was made to choose one that was "average" or "typical." This occurred for only nine institutions and resulted in 13 questionnaires not being used in the analysis. Thus 294 questionnaires were used in the analysis (313 returned less 6 not usable and 13 duplicates).

### *Results*

As shown in Table I, an overwhelming proportion of the respondents felt that history was part of their programs, and, for those who felt that it was not, an even greater proportion said that they thought that it should be. However, the responses as to "how is it taught" suggest that it is usually taught as part of a course or courses rather than as one or more separate courses. In such cases, of course, it is highly unlikely that a history specialist will be overseeing the presentation of the history material. The "debate" as to whether the

**Table 1**  
**Percentage Responses by Type of Institution**

	Accredited					TOTAL
	B	M	BM	N	NB	
Number of Responses	29	7	83	136	39	294
Is history, in some form, part of the program at your school?						
yes	72	100	72	84	72	78
no	28		28	16	28	22
If no, do you think it should be?						
yes	75		83	86	82	83
no	25		17	14	18	17
How is history taught in your program? (multiple checks used so total exceeds 100%)						
as a topic within courses	68	43	47	61	24	52
as a separate course	37	71	24	43	41	37
in several separate courses	22	43	43	23	38	31
Indicate the type of history taught and the level at which it is taught (indicate how things are).						
<b>Undergraduate</b>						
Accounting History	44	0	15	19	0	17
Business History	52	14	33	42	24	37
Economic History	59	43	52	56	46	54
History of Economic Thought	44	43	48	60	32	51
History of Management Thought	37	0	39	44	11	37
<b>Graduate</b>						
Accounting History	19	0	22	10	0	12
Business History	26	43	19	9	11	14
Economic History	28	43	33	10	19	20
History of Economic Thought	33	43	30	14	19	22
History of Management Thought	26	14	23	21	16	21
Indicate the type of history which <b>should be</b> taught and the level at which it should be taught.						
<b>Undergraduate</b>						
Accounting History	41	14	25	27	19	27
Business History	63	43	71	65	35	62
Economic History	63	71	59	65	51	61
History of Economic Thought	41	43	53	62	65	57
History of Management Thought	48	14	49	52	41	48
<b>Graduate</b>						
Accounting History	26	14	33	20	3	22
Business History	30	57	46	29	22	33
Economic History	26	29	46	26	14	30
History of Economic Thought	41	43	48	32	35	38
History of Management Thought	33	71	46	39	32	40
Has the teaching of history in your program increased, stayed about the same, or decreased over the last 10-20 years?						
increased	30	14	21	25	26	23
stayed about the same	63	57	58	62	59	60
decreased	7	29	21	15	15	16

**Table 1**  
**Percentage Responses by Type of Institution (Continued)**

	Accredited					TOTAL
	B	M	BM	N	NB	
Do you think that the teaching of history generally has increased, stayed about the same, or decreased over the last 10-20 years?						
increased	19	0	18	21	23	20
stayed about the same	42	67	45	40	26	41
decreased	38	33	38	38	52	40

NOTE: B — accredited at bachelor's level only  
M — accredited at master's level only  
BM — accredited at both levels  
N — nonaccredited  
NB — response from nonbusiness department

material should be within courses or in a separate course was also reflected in the open-ended question comments. Representative comments from those who felt that it should be within courses are:

"The history of a discipline should be in introductory courses."

"Our students are vocationally oriented so that history has to be hidden within other courses to be at all successful."

"I'm not sure that it is necessary as a separate course."

Comments from those who feel that this approach is not adequate are:

"How much history gets into classes is strictly a function of the instructor's knowledge and interest."

"I suppose that some faculty do build historical insights into their individual courses, but this would not be systematic and seems to have little impact on students."

"When we say history is covered in a course, it may vary from one part of one class to several class sessions."

Other comments from the open-ended question reflect an attitude that the way to meet AACSB standards for accreditation is by satisfying every requirement with a separate course. This would mean, of course, that there would be "no room" for history. Some of the comments reflecting that view are:

"Our undergraduate program leaves precious little time to focus on history."

"The number of credits allocated in a BBA or MBA degree program tend to crowd out areas such as this."

"Increased quantitative requirements [have meant] less time for history."

"We changed history from a required course in order to bring in Business and Society which AACSB wanted."

"To add [history] would require displacement of some essential content from an already over-crowded curriculum."

The pattern of responses to the "are" and "should be" items is interesting. More respondents indicated that they are teaching history at the undergraduate level than indicated that they are teaching it at the graduate level. Further, they indicated that this is the way it should be.

The responses about changes in the teaching of history over the last 10-20 years are also interesting. Most respondents felt that the teaching of history in their areas was staying about the same or perhaps even increasing, while the teaching of history in general was perceived to be decreasing if it was not staying about the same.

Caution must be exercised in interpreting these results across the categories of the respondents' institutions. The "accredited at the master's level only" category reflects the view of only seven respondents (there are only 17 of these in the population), hence, one person's view becomes a fairly high percentage. The "nonaccredited" group contains numerous institutions which have no graduate programs and, hence, for which no response to the questions dealing with the graduate level was obtained. This lowered the frequency of response to those items. The "nonbusiness" group is composed mostly of faculty from history departments and economics departments outside of business schools, therefore the absence of say, accounting history, should be no surprise for that group.

With these cautions in mind, then, some interesting results can be noted. The highest use of separate courses would appear to be at institutions with graduate programs or, quite predictably, in history and economics departments. The most optimistic respondents about history increasing appear to be those from institutions accredited at the bachelor's level only, while the most pessimistic ones are from either the group accredited at the master's level only or from the history/economics group.

Table II shows differences between "should be" and "are" responses. Large differences suggest that more or less should be taught than is now being taught; small differences indicate a degree of satisfaction with current conditions. At the undergraduate level, only Business History appears to need more coverage. At the graduate level, Business History, the History of Economic Thought, and the History of Management Thought all appear to merit more cover-

age. The groups, however, vary sharply both by topic and from one another.

In addition to the topics/disciplines provided on the questionnaire, respondents were able to add others. Table III shows those along with the percentage distribution for those. Marketing and labor history were the most frequently mentioned topics with general history areas (U.S. History; state history; etc.) being next most frequently mentioned. Others tended to be more specific and/or unique: History of American Journalism; History of International Industrialization; History of British Classical Economics; and The Uses of History by Managers, for example.

**Table II**

**Differences Between What Courses Should be Taught and What Are (in percentages)**

Topic/Discipline	Accredited:					TOTAL
	Bachelors	Masters	Both	Nonaccredited	Nonbusiness	
<b>Undergraduate</b>						
Accounting History	-3	14	10	8	19	10
Business History	9	29	38	23	11	25
Economic History	4	28	7	9	5	17
History of Economic Thought	-3	0	5	2	33	6
History of Management Thought	11	14	10	8	30	11
<b>Graduate</b>						
Accounting History	7	14	11	10	3	10
Business History	4	14	27	20	11	19
Economic History	0	-14	13	16	-5	10
History of Economic Thought	8	0	18	18	16	16
History of Management Thought	7	57	23	18	16	19

Note: A *large positive* value suggests that the respondents thought that *more* of the topic *should be taught than is* being taught.

A *large negative* value suggests that the respondents thought that *less* of the topic *should be taught than is* being taught.

Small values suggest that the respondents thought that what was currently being taught was appropriate in terms of amount.

### Conclusions and Implications

The basic conclusions from this rather tentative survey are both reassuring and disheartening. The reassuring conclusion is that an overwhelming number of respondents indicated that history is now part of their programs, and, of those who said that it was not, most said that it should be. The disheartening conclusion is that the history which is being taught is within the context of existing courses and not by or under the control of professional historians or even those interested in history. If this pattern is expected to continue, and the indications from this survey suggest that it is, then those of us who share an interest in history have an obligation. That obligation is to educate our colleagues so that those covering the material on history do at least an adequate job of it. Further, that obligation involves providing supplementary material to colleagues so that they can do a better job of presenting appropriate and necessary historical material within the context of existing courses.

Another conclusion is that a sufficient number of institutions appear to respond to AACSB accreditation standards with a "course per standard" mindset so that we have an obligation there as well.

**Table III**

#### Percentage Distribution of Responses for other Topics/Disciplines

Topic/Discipline	Are Being Taught		Should Be Taught	
	Undergraduate	Graduate	Undergraduate	Graduate
Other Business Areas:				
Accounting Thought	0	0	0	0.3%
Behavior/Personnel	0	0	0.3%	0.3
Business/Government	0.3%	0.3%	0.3	0.3
Finance	0.7	0	0.7	0.7
Labor	2.4	1.4	1.4	0.7
Marketing	3.1	0.3	1.7	1.4
Transportation	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
Unspecified	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.7
Other Business History	1.0	0.3	1.0	0.3
Education Areas	1.0	0	0.3	0
Other Economic History	1.0	1.4	0.7	0.7
General History Areas	3.1	0	1.4	0
Technology, Science,				
Computers	1.0	1.4	1.0	1.4
Miscellaneous	0.7	0	0	0.3



Our obligation there is to provide information to the AACSB about how to verify the existence of the quality presentation of historical material when it is a component of a course rather than a separate course. Our efforts in this regard might also serve the AACSB as a model for other standards as well—perhaps eventually such efforts would break the mindset which is so restrictive to academic innovation as it presently interprets the accreditation standards.