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## ANATOMY OF A 1930'S MASTER OF SCIENCE IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION PROGRAM

by

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This article deals with the curriculum of a post-graduate course leading to the degree of Master of Science in Business Administration offered by Bryant-Stratton College, Providence, Rhode Island in the early 1930's. My interest in researching this topic is twofold. Firstly, Bryant-Stratton College was the forerunner of Bryant College where I earned my Bachelors Degree in Business Administration with a major in accounting. I was unaware that the college had a graduate school that many years ago. Secondly, I was curious as to the make-up of the program that was offered at that time, in particular, any accounting courses that were part of the curriculum.

Bryant-Stratton College was founded in 1863 as an independent entity after several years of affiliation with the Bryant-Stratton chain of colleges. The college prided itself as an institution that prepared young men and women for success in the modern business world. The following excerpt from the college catalogue provides an insight into the college's mission, "Today, when business has become a profession, Bryant-Stratton College offers training that is broad to insure clear thinking in the manifold old relationships of modern business, and specialized to meet competition in the highly-developed field of professional service in business."

The graduate school was granted the power by the State of Rhode Island to grant the following advanced degrees: Master of Science in Business Administration, Master of Science in Accounting, and Master of Science in Commercial Education. It must be noted that the only graduate degree offered by the college at this time was the Master of Science in Business Administration. The program was modeled after those offered at graduate schools of the leading

universities of the day. However, what was unique about the Bryant-Stratton program was that the student could earn his/her degree in one year. A quotation from the catalogue emphasized this point, "Because it insures (the degree) the student a head start of several years in climbing the rungs of the ladder to success, the course is not a expense - *but is a practical investment* (Italics included)."

The following gives an overview of the curriculum. The student was required to take a core set of courses and electives from a major course of study selected from seven groups. Below is a list of the core courses including a brief description of each:

### Core Courses:

1. Business Policy: This course consisted of the presentation of specially selected practical problems taken from the entire field of business administration. Its aim was to marshal, assemble and coordinate the student's entire knowledge in the solution of actual, executive business problems. The training in this course aimed to dissect large masses of fact for purposes of adaptation to definite, rational solutions enabling the formulation of lines of action conducive to sound business policy.
2. Advanced Business Economics: Emphasis was placed upon the application of a sound economic background to the solution of business problems. A sound and basic training was offered in the fundamentals of economics as they affected situations calling for prompt and rational executive judgment and action. The student, moreover, was taught to comprehend and understand *the limits* within which theory may be beneficially applied but, at the same time was encour-

aged to develop and extend economic theory to the end where it was essential and useful in the profession of business.

3. Budgetary Control: This course aimed to make exhaustive mathematical and economic comparative studies of individual businesses and to utilize statistics derived therefrom for the purpose of forecasting future trends, both secular and seasonal, in

order to effect a rigid control of industry in the business cycle.

4. Applied Statistical Analysis: Statistical technique was developed and applied by the solution of actual problems in the classroom, while in the laboratory, the student was trained in statistical processes related to the classroom problems.

The major courses of study with their respective courses, are listed below.

Electives:

Group I - Retail Store Management

*First Semester*

Retail Store Management I  
Merchandising  
Research and Thesis

*Second Semester*

Retail Store Management II  
Department Store Statistics and Control  
Research and Thesis

Group II- Commercial Banking

*First Semester*

Bank Management I  
Money, Loans and Credit  
Research and Thesis

*Second Semester*

Bank Management II  
Bank Statistics and Control  
Research and Thesis

Group III - Investment Banking

*First Semester*

Investment Banking I  
Corporate Finance and Security Analysis  
Research and Thesis

*Second Semester*

Investment Banking II  
The Stock Market  
Research and Thesis

Group IV - Factory Management

*First Semester*

Industrial Manufacturing Management I  
Factory Systems and Layout  
Research and Thesis

*Second Semester*

Industrial Manufacturing Management II  
Labor Management  
Research and Thesis

Group V - Public Utility Management

*First Semester*

Public Utility Management I  
Public Utility Finance  
Research and Thesis

*Second Semester*

Public Utility Management II  
Public Utility Statistics and Control  
Research and Thesis

Group VI - Foreign Trade

*First Semester*

Foreign Markets  
Export Sales Management  
Research and Thesis

*Second Semester*

Foreign Advertising  
Foreign Exchange  
Research and Thesis

## Group VII - Transportation and Traffic Management

*First Semester*

Transportation and Traffic Management I  
Railroad Operating Problems  
Research and Thesis

*Second Semester*

Transportation and Traffic Management II  
Automobile and Air Transportation  
Research and Thesis

A student could pursue courses outside his/her group if given approval. Also, credits towards the degree could be awarded for actual experience gained from employment. Finally, one year of resident study and instruction, including a thesis approved by the faculty-council was required for a degree.

After reviewing the core courses and major courses of study, one can see that the only accounting related courses offered were Budgeting Control in the core requirement, and a few finance courses scattered throughout the major courses of study.

Looking over the MBA program that Bryant College offers today, one can see some interesting similarities with the 1930's program. For example, like the 1930's program, the college promotes the program today as one that can be completed in a reasonable amount of time. The following excerpt from the college catalogue addresses this point as follows; "To earn a Bryant MBA you will need to complete 48 hours of course work. Out of consideration for your often hectic schedule and your pressing need to enhance your professional expertise, Bryant's graduate studies are concentrated and focused. This allows for maximum learning in a minimum time frame." The curriculum today consists of eleven required core courses (33

credits) and five elective courses (15 credits) which are selected as part of the student's concentration. Like the 1930's program, the MBA program of today offers several different concentrations including; Accounting, Computer Information Systems, Economics, Entrepreneurship, Finance, Health Care, International Business, Management, Operations Management, and Marketing. Similar to the 1930's program, today's program gives the student some flexibility by offering an additional concentration in Business Administration. To fulfill the requirements of this elective, the student must combine related courses from two or more areas of study (Five elective courses in total). Other advanced programs offered by the college include the Master of Science in Taxation, the Master of Science in Accounting, and the Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies.

In conclusion, it is interesting that over the years Bryant College built its reputation through its undergraduate accounting major. However, it chose to offer a graduate degree that focused in areas other than accounting, Whereas today, the college offers an MBA with a concentration in Accounting, as well as, two other advanced degree programs in the field of accounting.