

**ANALYSIS OF
CONSOLIDATION OF BUSINESS DEGREE PROGRAMS:
SOUTHERN POLYTECHNIC STATE UNIVERSITY AND
KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY**

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INTRODUCTION

The University System of Georgia Board of Regents recently directed the consolidation of Southern Polytechnic State University (SPSU) and Kennesaw State University (KSU). Kennesaw State University will be the name of the consolidated institutions and campus operations will continue at both campuses. As part of this process, business programs at SPSU and KSU will be consolidated. At KSU, business programs are conducted by the Coles College of Business. At SPSU, business programs are conducted by the Department of Business Administration. Relative to the consolidation of the business programs of the two institutions, this analysis focuses on two issues: (1) general issues related to the consolidation of business degree programs; and (2) AACSB accreditation issues specifically related to the consolidation. The Coles College of Business is accredited by AACSB International and includes business and accounting accreditation. The Department of Business Administration programs are accredited by ACBSP, a competing professional, specialized accreditation for business programs. My analysis is based on my opinion, judgment, and interpretation of AACSB International Business Accreditation and Accounting Accreditation Standards (April 2013) with which the Coles College of Business is expected to be in alignment for its next and future AACSB reviews.

AACSB is the oldest specialized, professional accrediting body for business schools and represents 687 leading business schools in 45 countries. Less than 5% of institutions globally offering at least a bachelor's degree in business hold AACSB accreditation. The accounting programs at Coles join 182 institutions that also hold separate accounting accreditation from AACSB, a distinction held by less than 2% of the world's business schools. AACSB accreditation is mission-based and focuses on success in teaching, research, and, where appropriate, executive education. Other mission components may be included such as outreach, economic development, etc. Significant emphasis is placed on faculty qualifications that reflect currency and

relevancy to support the mission. Faculty qualifications must be based on significant/substantive research/publication and professional engagement/development activities. ACSBP is focused on business programs that place high priority on teaching with some expectation for scholarship. ACBSP also accredits business programs at the associates-degree level, AACSB does not.

The business programs offered at each institution are shown by degree title in Table 1. The website at SPSU identifies 16 faculty members and two emeriti faculty in business and related areas. KSU delineates 152 full-time faculty members in business.

Table 1: Business Degree Programs Offered by KSU and SPSU

KSU Coles College of Business	SPSU Department of Business Administration
Bachelors of Business Administration: majors in Accounting, Economics, Finance, Information Systems, Information Security and Assurance, International Business, Management, Marketing, and Professional Sales	Bachelor of Science: majors in Business and Accounting; Bachelor of Arts: Major in Management; Bachelor of Applied Science: Major in Business Administration
Master of Business Administration (MBA)	Masters' of Business Administration (MBA) (traditional delivery and on-line): Concentrations in Operations and Technology Management, Management Information Systems, Marketing, Accounting, and Finance
Executive Masters of Business Administration (EMBA)	
Master of Accounting (MAcc): specializations in financial reporting/auditing and taxation	Master of Science in Accounting (MSAcc) (On-line only)
Master of Science, Information Systems (MSIS)	
Doctor of Business Administration (DBA)	

Source: Institutional Websites

ANALYSIS

For AACSB, the consolidation of the business programs at SPSU and KSU is a “Substantive Change” event that may “significantly affect the stated mission and subsequent degree programs offered, participants (faculty, staff, and/or students) and/or resources (financial resources, facilities, etc.) available to the business school or

accounting program” (AACSB policy on substantive change as adopted in 2008). The policy identifies as a “Substantive Change” event, “consolidation or acquisition among institutions where one or more of the participants is AACSB accredited or is formally in the process of seeking AACSB accreditation (pre-accreditation or initial accreditation).”

Therefore, the remainder of this document provides my perspectives on the general issues/concerns and alignment with AACSB standards that present serious concern as the consolidation process moves forward. It is my understanding that Kennesaw State University will be the name of the consolidated entities, and the Coles College of Business will be the surviving entity under which all business degree programs will be offered once the consolidation is completed. This is reflected in my analysis.

Also, in the following, individual AACSB business and accounting accreditation standards are referenced. AACSB Accounting Accreditation Standards are uniquely noted with the numbering system A1, A2, A3, A4, A5, etc. There are 15 business standards and 9 accounting standards.

Issue 1: Current SPSU Business Students

Regardless of accreditation status, the impact of the consolidation on SPSU students is a key issue. In my opinion, an appropriate “work-out” plan for students currently enrolled in business programs at SPSU must be developed to allow them to rationally complete their degree program based on the commitment made to them when they enrolled. However, such a work-out plan should have clear, but fair, deadlines that appropriately motivate students to move forward with deliberate action and speed to meet their degree requirements. Ideally, a work-out plan for each student should be developed to guide SPSU students in meeting their degree requirements. SPSU courses must be delivered in accordance with the work-out plan.

It is noted that SPSU degrees will be conferred on students completing degree requirements through August 2015. Therefore, the work-out plan must address those that can complete their degrees at SPSU by the 2015 deadline separately from those that cannot and must be integrated into Coles’ business programs. It is my opinion that given the nature of the mandate for the consolidation from the Board of Regents, AACSB accreditation processes and reviews will provide some flexibility in the work-out plans for those SPSU students who must complete their degree requirements beyond the 2015 deadline. The goal in the work-out plan must be to minimize the negative impact on currently enrolled SPSU students as they work to complete their degree requirements. At the same time, SPSU students must be held responsible for meeting

the spirit and intent of their respective degree programs in accordance KSU expectations and AACSB standards.

Issue 2: Student Admissions and Progression Policies (AACSB Standard No. 4 Student Admissions, Progression, and Career Development)

New-student admission criteria need to be established quickly relative to SPSU's status. Since all newly admitted students at this point of the consolidation process are most likely to complete their degree program at KSU after the consolidation is completed, new admissions to degree programs at SPSU should not be made until agreement is reached on admission standards for all degree programs offered by the surviving institution.

I am particularly concerned about the admission criteria for graduate business programs at SPSU. The SPSU criteria are significantly below student admission standards at AACSB accredited schools in terms of standardized test scores, prior academic achievements (GPA, prerequisite degree and/or course requirements, etc.). Student admission and progression standards must be consistent with the mission, strategic management plan, and expected outcomes of AACSB accredited business schools and accounting programs. Furthermore, Coles operates in a significant competitive market in the greater Atlanta area and beyond in which it has achieved an impressive degree of success and recognition. This success of Coles as evidenced by its growing national and international reputation, rankings, etc. is an important asset for KSU; therefore, admitting business students consistent with these achievements going forward is critically important. This benefits current and future students enhancing the value of all degrees granted and to be granted in business and accounting by KSU.

Issue 3: Business Degree Program Portfolio of Surviving Institution

As shown in Table 1, the degree programs at KSU and SPSU have somewhat similar names. However, for the surviving institution, the degree portfolio must be sensible and clear to current/prospective students and employers. Furthermore, it is my opinion that "less is more" and keeping the portfolio with easily understood names and structures makes the most sense. With this in mind, there is no basis for sustaining two differently named masters' degree programs in accounting. The delivery mode (traditional or on-line) is a separate decision and should have no bearing on this decision.

The same applies to the undergraduate business degree portfolio. SPSU has four different degree titles, the Bachelor of Applied Science, BS-Business, BA-Accounting and BA-Management. Different names present a confusing set of choices complicating

decisions of prospective students. The Coles College of Business has a clear portfolio of undergraduate degrees in business disciplines. Therefore, it is my recommendation that each undergraduate degree program/major of the surviving institution have only one bachelor's degree option/name that is clear to current/prospective students as well as to potential employers. This simplifies the implementation of the consolidation going forward and clarifies the academic opportunities for prospective/current students and employers. The BAS program is addressed under Issue 4.

Issue 4: Mission Alignment-Degree Programs (Standard 1 and A1 Mission, Impact, and Innovation and Standard 4 Student Admissions, Progression, and Career Development, Standard 9 Curricula Content, and Standard 11 Degree Program Educational Level, Structure, and Equivalence)

One degree program that is a concern is the Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS) program which is marketed by SPSU as a business degree for students holding a two-year Associates' Degree. The Associates' Degree is a pre-requisite for entrance into this program; however, the composition of the content of various Associate Degrees that may be used as the foundation for the BAS program is not clear. For example, it is not clear if principles of accounting, microeconomics and macroeconomics are part of the total degree program. These courses among others are fundamental foundations for a business degree and normally found in undergraduate degree programs that operate in AACSB accredited institutions. There may be other areas of deficiencies.

The BAS program is based on the laudable goal of increasing the number of individuals holding a bachelors' degree in Georgia, but in its current form and based on limited information, it does not appear to be in alignment with AACSB curricula expectations. In addition, the program does not fit well into the degree portfolio of a doctoral granting business school. If the program is to survive in the consolidated institution, I recommend consideration of two possible options:

- The BAS program could be consolidated into one of Coles' existing programs assuming Coles' mission is consistent with such a program. In this option, I do not recommend having a uniquely named undergraduate business program that does not fit into the surviving institutions' degree format which as noted earlier should be clear to all key stakeholders. Furthermore, in this option, the program should have a curricula design aligned with AACSB Standard 9 for content and Standard 11 ensuring the majority of business classes taken for the degree are earned in Coles.
- Alternatively, the BAS program could be repositioned as an institutional program of KSU operating under the administrative control of another unit such as one

focused on continuing/adult education. In such a setting, the BAS program could possibly be expanded to embrace other fields. However, the program would need some restructuring to reduce the business content to less than 25% of the total credit hours, including electives, (AACSB Eligibility Criteria D) to remove it from the scope of any future AACSB review. In this context, the program could be offered as having a “business minor.”

Issue 5: Mission Alignment-Scholarship (AACSB Standard 1 & A1 Mission, Impact, and Innovation and Standard 2 & A2 Intellectual Contributions, Impact, and Alignment with Mission)

In reviewing the mission statement of the Department of Business Administration at SPSU, there is a singular focus on delivery of degree programs and no mention of scholarship/research as required by AACSB Standards 1 (A1) and 2 (A2). A review of the faculty vitae of SPSU business faculty indicates varying levels of research/scholarship, but a number are quite active. However, the work of SPSU faculty is generally not aligned with that of a doctoral granting institution that also offers a significant array of masters’ and undergraduate business programs. Therefore, my assessment is that there are significant differences in the culture of scholarship at Coles versus the SPSU Department of Business Administration. Given these differences, the consolidation must address how the faculty members from SPSU are to be incorporated into the Coles’ teaching/research culture and provide faculty development support to assist continuing SPSU faculty to be successful in supporting Coles’ mission expectations. It is vitally important for Coles to sustain and grow its research/publications outcomes consistent with a doctoral granting business school. Ideally, the consolidation of faculty resources can contribute to this effort. If not, this will be a concern.

Issue 6: Standard 4 Student Admissions, Progression, and Career Development

AACSB Standard 4 is clear that student support services and career development/placement services must be provided to students at all locations and delivery modes consistent with mission, expected outcomes, and strategies. Though final a final decision has not been made on the delivery of business programs at both locations, if one or more business degrees are offered at both locations, the delivery of student support services at both locations with appropriate quality and comparable results is an important expectation.

Issue 7: Standard 5 and A4 Faculty Sufficiency and Deployment

AACSB Standard 5 states expectations that accredited business schools must deploy sufficient faculty to support the classroom teaching function and to support the curricula development, course development, curricula management, and other mission components. Therefore, an important consideration in the implementation of the consolidation and the delivery of degree programs, faculty sufficiency must be carefully assessed and AACSB objective guidance on deployment of faculty be monitored to ensure alignment with the standard in all locations, disciplines, programs, and delivery mode.

Issue 8: Standard 6 Faculty Management and Support

AACSB Standard 6 states expectations for effective faculty management and support policies and procedures supporting the school mission across all of its dimensions. Ensuring the policies that support the consolidated entity will be important to ensure support for the mission across all of its dimensions.

Issue 9: Standard 7 Professional Staff Sufficiency and Deployment

AACSB Standard 7 states expectations that business schools are appropriately supported by highly qualified professional staff (i.e. student support services, information technology, research support, etc.) and that these staff are deployed appropriately at all locations. If business programs are offered at both locations, attention must be given to effective deployment of professional staff to support business programs at both sites.

Issue 10: Standard 8 and A5 Curricula Management and Assurance of Learning

Based on prior knowledge, Coles has established a solid curricula management and assurance of learning program. These efforts must continue in the consolidated entity reflecting stakeholder input and demonstrating degree programs are current and relevant for the needs of students and their career objectives.

Issue 11: Standard 9 and A6 Curricula Content

Post consolidation, curricula content of all degree programs must meet the spirit and intent of this standard.

Issue 12: Standard 10 Student-Faculty Interactions

Post consolidation, if business degree programs are delivered at both locations in part or in-complete form, curricula and other activities at both locations, if applicable, must demonstrate high levels of student-to-student and student-faculty interactions.

Issue 13: Standard 11 Degree Program Educational Level, Structure, and Equivalence

Post consolidation, curricula content of all degree programs must meet the spirit and intent of this standard. There also earlier section on the BAS program relative to this Standard.

Issue 14: Standard 12 Teaching Effectiveness

Post consolidation, policies and procedures for evaluating teaching effectiveness as well as the development and improvement of teaching must be effective and support continuous improvement.

Issue 15: Standard 13 Student Academic and Professional Engagement

Post consolidation, curricula and other activities at both locations, if applicable, must demonstrate high levels of active student learning and student engagement. Experiential learning activities should be evident for all business students.

Issue 16: Standard 14 Executive Education

SPSU does not appear to be involved in delivery of non-credit executive education in business areas; however, if such activities continue, the spirit and intent of this standard must be applied to these activities.

Issue 17: Standard 15 and A9 Faculty Qualifications and Engagement

AACSB places significant expectations on accredited business schools to deploy highly qualified faculty in support of its mission, particularly classroom instruction delivering current and relevant learning experiences to students. Faculty qualifications are a function of initial academic/professional preparation and experience and then sustained, significant faculty engagement/development activities over time. A faculty model is articulated in Standard 15 (A9) which details AACSB expectations. In particular,

significant focus is placed on the deployment of “academic scholarly” faculty who maintain their qualifications through research and publication activities. This is particularly important for business schools that offer doctoral programs as Coles with its DBA program. There is flexibility in the standard, but this will be an important dimension of the substantive change report to AACSB and in the next review in terms of how the SPSU faculty are being incorporated into Coles and their impact on its faculty qualifications reporting. If SPSU faculty members are not aligned with Coles’ expectations, faculty development plans consistent with appointment status and contractual provisions must be developed, implemented, and supported to align faculty qualifications with Coles’ mission and degree expectations. AACSB standards assume an accredited business school will support faculty to maintain their faculty qualifications. A key aspect of the consolidation will be to establish and implement such a plan for continuing SPSU faculty who do not meet Coles’ expectations and all SPSU faculty are incorporated into the faculty management/support system of Coles. These expectations extend to all locations where business degrees are offered.

Issue 18: Standard A7 Information Technology Skills and Knowledge for Accounting Graduates

Coles accounting programs hold AACSB’s accounting accreditation status which leads to the necessity to align with AACSB Accounting Accreditation Standards. Standard A7 is a unique standard for AACSB accounting accredited programs. As the consolidation is completed and degree programs finalized, alignment with this standard will be important for all accounting degree programs offered by Coles.

Issue 19: Standard A8 Faculty Professional Credentials

AACSB Accounting Accreditation Standard A8 states expectations that faculty members supporting degree programs in accounting should appropriately hold relevant accounting certifications, licenses, etc. reflecting the profession of accounting. This does not mean “all faculty,” but the post consolidation faculty must demonstrate alignment with this expectation consistent with the mission, strategies and expected outcomes of the accounting programs.

Issue 20: Delivery modes

AACSB business and accounting accreditation standards apply to all business and accounting degree programs regardless of delivery mode. Therefore, any degree programs delivered in any format, including distance delivery, must meet AACSB standards. I cannot comment on the status of the on-line programs delivered by SPSU

as this decision is not related to AACSB standards except in regards to demonstrating standards alignment, overall high quality, and continuous improvement. Furthermore, given the SPSU on-line programs are at the graduate level, their continuation must be supported by evidence of quality appropriate for graduate business education with learning experiences, qualified faculty, and learning outcomes appropriate for such programs aligned with Coles' mission, expected outcomes, and strategies. Security and integrity of these programs is also a concern as well as faculty development efforts focused on ensuring faculty are appropriately prepared to successfully lead and impact learning in this environment. The implementation of the consolidation must consider if the mission, strategic outcomes, and strategies of Coles appropriately embrace or does not embrace this mode of delivery. If distance delivery is embraced for SPSU programs that are consolidated into the degree portfolio of Coles, my recommendations on the surviving degree names cited earlier also applies here. Keep it simple so prospective students are not confused.

CAVEAT

The opinions expressed in this report are my own and reflect my professional judgment only. They do not represent any official position of AACSB International. Such opinions can only emerge from appropriate due process in accordance with AACSB policies, procedures, and operations effected through its peer review processes.