FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

Institutional Quality Assurance Program (IQAP) Review

Executive MBA

Date of Review: October 7th, 2024

In accordance with the University Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), this final assessment report provides a synthesis of the external evaluation and the internal response and assessments of the Executive MBA program. This report identifies the significant strengths of the program, together with opportunities for program improvement and enhancement, and it sets out and prioritizes the recommendations that have been selected for implementation.

The report includes an Implementation Plan that identifies who will be responsible for approving the recommendations set out in the Final Assessment Report; who will be responsible for providing any resources entailed by those recommendations; any changes in organization, policy or governance that will be necessary to meet the recommendations and who will be responsible for acting on those recommendations; and timelines for acting on and monitoring the implementation of those recommendations.

Executive Summary of the Review

In accordance with the Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), the EMBA program submitted a self-study in September 2024 to the Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies to initiate the cyclical program review of its program. The approved self-study presented program descriptions, learning outcomes, and analyses of data provided by the Office of Institutional Research and Analysis. Appendices to the self-study contained the CVs for each full-time member in the department.

Two arm's length external reviewers and one internal reviewer were endorsed by the Dean, Faculty of Business, and selected by the Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies. The review team reviewed the self-study documentation and then conducted a virtual review on October 7th, 2024. The review included interviews with the Deputy Provost, Vice-Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies, Associate Dean, Grad Studies and Research, Director of the program and meetings with groups of current students, full-time faculty and support staff.

The Director of the program and the Dean of the Faculty of Business submitted responses to the Reviewers' Report (February 2025). Specific recommendations were discussed, and clarifications and corrections were presented. Follow-up actions and timelines were included.

- **Strengths**
  - Program design. Two-week intensive classroom experience followed by four-month intervals, allowing students to balance academic learning with professional responsibilities.
  - Responsiveness to student feedback, especially the separation of accounting and finance courses and the faculty's efforts to keep up with emerging trends in digital transformation.
  - Leadership coaching received during the program.
  - Strong sense of community within the cohort, fostering valuable networking opportunities.
  - Alumni involvement, with alumni expressing interest in continuing engagement with the program through lifelong learning events and mentoring new students. Alumni keen interest to support recruitment efforts, serve as guest speakers and program ambassadors.
  - Cohort size, typically between 25-30, as it fosters close-knit learning.

- **Opportunities for Improvement and Enhancement**

  - Refresh the program "to ensure it remains relevant in an evolving business landscape."
  - Incorporate new technologies and employ more content that is immediately and transparently applicable to organizations.
  - Improve the cohesion of the curriculum, eliminating repetitive frameworks.
  - Introduce more advanced concepts in the statistics course during residency and moving basic content to self-study, online timeframes (i.e. pre-residency).
  - Institute a broader array of active learning methods.
  - Enhance the consistency and rigour of the admission process, strengthening standards for admission.
  - Build-in more time for leadership coaching.
  - Institute career-coaching.
  - Integrating leadership and career coaching as a key program differentiator.

Recommendation #1: **Curriculum Refresh**: Introduce new content on emerging technologies (particularly more on AI and its impact) and ensure a more cohesive and integrated approach across courses.

Department's Response and Actions to be Taken: There were a few recommendations from the IQAP report concerning elements of a proposed curriculum refresh. They included: (a) improve coherency of the course offerings, reducing redundancy in coverage, (b) undertake a comprehensive curriculum review to introduce new content on digital transformation, leadership and wellness, (c) ensure more consistency in how instructors use the learning management system (Avenue to Learn), (d) align course dates on course deliverables to lessen burden on students, (e) include a physical and mental wellness component to the curriculum to support students during their residence.

(a) Enhancing coherency and reducing redundancy across courses will be achieved through the Academic Director reviewing course outlines and sharing them with program instructors so that all instructors know the content of what each other is covering, including readings, assignments (e.g., cases), models and frameworks. During the summer of 2025, a program review workshop will be organized with all program instructors to discuss content across courses, with an objective to enhance coherency, reduce redundancy and explore opportunities for new updated content. The course outline review and program review workshop will also focus on ensuring classes are highly interactive/experiential (i.e., "active learning") and that they are current with respect to the latest developments in applications of AI, machine learning and digital transformation. The review will look for evidence of significant innovation in course content and delivery.

(b) The program review workshop will consider the extent to which digital transformation, leadership and wellness are incorporated within and across courses and other venues (e.g. workshops, team-building exercises) and evaluated for sufficiency of coverage.

(c) The statistics course was identified by the reviewers as particularly in need of revision. Specifically, it was recommended that only advanced concepts and applications be taught during residency, moving basic materials to pre-residence where students can learn self-paced and on their own, perhaps with access to tutorial assistance or instructor office hours as needed. Moreover, students have asked for the content of this course connect more transparently with the theme of the program, digital transformation, using applied workplace examples spanning small, medium and large organizations. Replace this course (T711; Statistics for Analytics) with "Analytics for Decision Making" focusing on business applications, and secure an instructor best fitted to this new offering. These changes are anticipated to be made for cohort 10 (Fall 2025).

(d) A review of course outlines, complemented by discussions with instructors, will inform the Program Academic Director on the degree of uniformity in the way Avenue to Learn is used. Inconsistencies are to be addressed, with instructors encouraged toward uniform usage. A clear guideline document will be created that showcases the expected uniform usage of Avenue to Learn across all courses.

(e) Spreading out dates of deliverables across courses to avoid too many assignments being due around the same time is underway, with the Academic Director and Program Manager sharing deliverable dates with all instructors (as sourced from course outlines) and requesting changes to due dates to lessen concentration over short periods.

(f) For previous cohorts we have offered mindfulness, yoga and meditation sessions but have not done so recently. We will revisit whether to bring these back while considering other options. Students currently receive a workshop on workplace psychological safety and team-building. By moving some basic course materials to pre-residence where students can learn self-paced, more space can be created during a busy residency schedule to allow for integration of wellness activities.

(g) The EMBA leadership team will review how to better use the time spent in Palo Alto (module 3), with the aim of students spending less time in a formal classroom (which they can do at RJC) and more time visiting businesses (including start-ups) to explore current and emerging topics with senior leaders and ensuring that our faculty contextualize course material to incorporate the insights of these visits.

Dean's Response:

It is important to ensure that the curriculum is up to date to remain competitive and to provide the best educational experience to the participants. To this end, the idea about a program review workshop in summer 2025 to identify curriculum update and integration opportunities is an important step. For this review to be effective, it would have to be informed with input from alumni and other industry participants to provide us with the relative high-level content that instructors should think to incorporate in their courses. This should ultimately help support the program to recruit more students going forward.

This workshop should also be used to provide (resource/training/educational) support to instructor so that they are better able to integrate digital transformation and emerging technologies such as AI within their respective courses. In addition, there is a need for the EMBA leadership team to actively consider contemporary topics such as strategic supply chain management including its interface with digital technology, role of information via block chain technology, aspects of disruption stemming from political and economic factors.

Recommendation #2: **Admissions Review**: Increase the quality bar in admissions to ensure all students meet the program's high standards, preventing negative cohort experiences.

Department's Response and Actions to be Taken: IQAP reviewers were not specific concerning how the "quality bar" might be increased to ensure all students meet the program's high standards and preventing negative cohort experiences. The one exception is the suggestion to incorporate digital fluency/understanding of technology into admission decisions. The program leadership team will meet to consider how to operationalize "digital fluency/understanding of technology" and the appropriateness of using this in admission decisions. We believe that the current admission process is extensive and rigorous. The EMBA leadership team will review our process with the aim of identifying ways to improve on the rigour and validity of our pre-admission assessments to ensure that every EMBA candidate can be an active contributor to classroom discussions. For example, reconsider the use of personality assessment tool used in selection of cohort 9 students, potentially helpful in identifying individuals with interpersonal challenges, such as working well in teams.

Of course, we can be more selective on admission if we are able to increase our applicant/recruitment pool. See below (recommendation #6).

Dean's Response:

Given the focus of the program on senior business leaders most of whom would have basic digital fluency, the current admission process is extensive and rigorous. However, I am in support of the EMBA leadership idea of reviewing the process and identifying other measures to be used to ensure excellent classroom experience for participants.

Recommendation #3: **Enhance Career Coaching**: Expand the career and leadership coaching aspects of the program, making them more impactful and better integrated into the curriculum.

Department's Response and Actions to be Taken: There is no information in the IQAP report speaking to how to expand the leadership coaching aspects of the program and better integrating this coaching into the curriculum. This will require discussions among members of the program leadership team and the instructor providing the leadership coaching across all four modules, Dr. Teal McAteer. Alumni will also be consulted to better understand how best to expand and enrich career and leadership coaching and how to better integrate this into all of our course offerings.

Dean's Response:

The EMBA leadership team is encouraged to include sessions with alumni and/or engage personnel within reasonable extra financial burden to enhance career coaching for the participants.

Recommendation #4: **Alumni Engagement**: Leverage alumni for recruitment, guest speaking, and case study development. Offer post-program career and leadership coaching to alumni.

Department's Response and Actions to be Taken:
1. Beginning with Cohort 9 alumni are now involved as capstone sponsors: Specifically, capstone projects will be provided by alumni of the program. As in the past, capstone companies will be larger legacy organizations (private or public) but the key clients (sponsors) for the capstone companies are now alumni of our program. They have direct relevant experience with their own EMBA capstone journeys. This will help to ensure alignment in expectations and support. It also provides our alumni with an exciting and meaningful way to engage with the program.
2. Alumni involvement as capstone mentors: Starting in Cohort 9, each capstone team is assigned a small group of EMBA alumni mentors, which will provide student teams with advice concerning their experiences in interacting with sponsor, overcoming hurdles and staying motivated. This provides our students with extra support in their capstone experience and provides our alumni with another exciting and meaningful way to engage with the program.
3. Program faculty are (and will continue to be) encouraged to include alumni as guest speakers in their courses. For example, for Cohort 9, two alumni have agreed to be guests in T731 (Strategic HR Analytics; module 2).
4. The EMBA leadership team will solicit program alumni to help develop classroom cases drawing on their experiences with their employing organization.
5. The EMBA leadership team will discuss how, and at what cost, post-program alumni career and leadership coaching can be implemented.
6. The EMBA leadership team to review current slate of alumni events and consider how they might be expanded and enriched.

Dean's Response:

The EMBA leadership team is encouraged to actively engage alumni in different capacities, to host events to expand the network and improve program visibility, and to develop post-program

modules in career, leadership and contemporary topics of interest to this audience.

Recommendation #5: **Capstone Structure**: Reconsider the design of the capstone projects to ensure they are more integrative and less repetitive.
Department's Response and Actions to be Taken: In addition to EMBA alumni involvement as capstone sponsors and mentors, other major changes for the capstone (initiated with Cohort 9) include: 1. **Instructor change**: Milena Head is taking over as the lead instructor for the EMBA capstone course. Milena has been Academic Director and an instructor for the program since its inception and is well familiar with the topics/content of the program and its courses. As Academic Director, she reviews all course outlines before the start of each module and holds meetings with module instructors to better understand major deliverables, cases and topics covered. Having this perspective, she is in the best position to improve integration of capstone with course/program content and will ensure repetitiveness is reduced. She meets with Michael Hartmann on a regular basis, who oversees the mini-capstones as part of his T721 (Digitally-driven Entrepreneurship) course, and through these conversations explores effective ways to integrate learnings between the capstones and reduce redundancy. 2. **Integration of MDTRC insights**: Starting in Cohort 9, each capstone will utilize the expertise and tools available through the McMaster Digital Transformation Research Centre (MDTRC) to gain primary research insights. The neurophysiological tools available through the MDTRC can help enrich analysis and recommendations for capstone sponsors by gaining a deeper understanding of stakeholder experiences, journeys, challenges and drivers. Gaining experience with these tools and approaches can provide students with unique skill sets to further their own organizations and careers.
Dean's Response: Given her familiarity with the EMBA program both as an instructor and as the Academic Director, Dr. Milena Head is in an excellent position to lead the capstone course. The integration of tools and expertise available through MDTRC is a unique aspect of the DeGroote EMBA program and should serve the participants in good stead.

Recommendation #6: **Recruitment Resources**: Invest in more recruitment events and restore scholarships and corporate sponsorships to attract a larger and more diverse cohort.
Department's Response and Actions to be Taken: The EMBA leadership team will convene to determine additional strategies to enhancing our recruitment efforts, which, at minimum, will entail increasing the number of recruitment events held at RJC, in Toronto and virtually. Other options being considered include securing corporate sponsorships, creating incentives for alumni referrals, and offering frequent podcasts made widely available on current developments and applications in digital transformation, include machine learning, AI, and quantum computing. An additional approach might be to encourage instructors to leverage the media to convey their expertise in the field in a way that captures the attention of the business community. In September 2025, we will be hosting a Digital Futures Symposium at the RJC which will be a 2-day

event that brings industry, public sector and academic leaders together to discuss directions, impact and transformations that emerging digital technologies may bring to Canadians, the economy and society at large. This Symposium will highlight major digital transformation initiatives within the DeGroote School of Business, including the EMBA. This will serve as a celebration of 10 years of our EMBA program bringing together alumni, current students and prospective students. It is envisioned that this major event will help generate further awareness of the program to enhance recruitment efforts.

For cohort #10 we have instituted four scholarships, each worth $10,000 – one to be offered in each of the following four categories: Women in Business, Sustainability Leadership, Entrepreneurship/Intrapreneurship and Healthcare Leadership. To qualify for consideration prospective students much complete the full application process. The four categories are aimed to further increase diversity of backgrounds of entering students. The effectiveness of these four categories will be monitored and re-evaluated over time.

We will review our website from a marketing perspective with the aim of making it more effective at engaging the interest of prospective students, which might include, for example, updated profiles of alumni and students.

Collect information from those who started (including those who completed) the application process but discontinued (or declined our offer) to help understand why we did not secure these individuals for our program. This understanding will help inform changes to take to secure a higher retention rate.

Dean's Response:
The various initiatives proposed by the EMBA leadership team to improve recruitment are commendable. It is important for the program to increase the cohort size to provide optimal experience for the participants, and also to be financially viable.

While not one of the core six program recommendations the reviewers (page 15 of their report, section "System of Governance") noted that there is a need to clarify and streamline the governance of the EMBA program" and "The roles of the Academic Director and Executive Director should be reviewed to ensure they are complementary."

Department's Response and Actions to be Taken: The EMBA Academic Director and Executive Director have been working well together since the inception of the program. The Academic Director focuses on curriculum, faculty and student-related issues, including but not limited to recruitment, admission and alumni engagement. The Executive Director focuses on building industry connections for site visits, guest speakers and works with the Academic Director on student recruitment and alumni engagement and ongoing program/module design and development activities. To split the workload, the Academic Director has typically taken a lead in Modules 1 and 4, while the Executive Director has typically taken a lead in Modules 2 and 3. While the separation of these activities into two roles was particularly important to establish awareness and create connections/collaborations for this new program, consideration will be given to the feasibility of streamlining to one EMBA Director within 2-3 years.

Dean's Response:
As the program has matured, it is important to revisit and formalize its governance structure in the near future.

Implementation Plan

Recommendation	Action(s) to be Taken	Responsibility for Leading Action (specify the role(s) that will be responsible for each action item e.g. Program Chair.)	Timeline for Completing Action (indicate specific timelines (e.g. not 'ongoing') for action)
Recommendation #1: **Curriculum Refresh**: Introduce new content on emerging technologies (particularly more on AI and its impact) and ensure a more cohesive and integrated approach across courses.	**a)** A program review workshop will be organized with all program instructors to discuss content across courses, with an objective to enhance coherency, reduce redundancy and explore opportunities for new updated content. The course outline review and program review workshop will also focus on ensuring classes are highly interactive/experiential (i.e., "active learning") and that they are current with respect to the latest developments in applications of AI, machine learning and digital transformation. The review will look for evidence of significant innovation in course content and delivery. **b)** Determine program content to incorporate to provide more	Academic Director	Completed by August 2025.

	coverage of leadership coaching, digital transformation and personal wellness.	Academic Director	Completed by August 2025
	c) Replace (T711; "Statistics for Analytics") with "Analytics for Decision Making" focused on applying basic and advanced statistical concepts and procedures and analytics to inform decision making.	Academic Director	Implemented for Cohort 10 (approval process during Winter 2025)
	d) Attain uniformity among instructors on their use of Avenue to Learn. A clear guideline document to be created that showcases the expected uniform usage of Avenue to Learn across all courses.	Academic Director	Completed by July 2025.
	e) Spread out dates of deliverables across courses to avoid too many assignments being due around the same time	Academic Director	Completed January 2025
	f) Revise curriculum to integrate more wellness activities.		
	g) Better use the time spent in	Academic Director	

	Palo Alto (module 3), with the aim of students spending less time in a formal classroom (which they can do at RJC) and more time visiting businesses (including start-ups) and contextualizing course material to incorporate the insights of these visits.	Academic Director	Integration in Cohort 10 Initiated for Cohort 9 (April 2025)
Recommendation #2: **Admissions Review:** Increase the quality bar in admissions to ensure all students meet the program's high standards, preventing negative cohort experiences.	Review current admission processes to consider how the "bar can be raised" to ensure greater uniformity in quality of admitted students.	Academic Director	Completed by August 2025 (for implementation in selecting students for cohort 11).
Recommendation #3: **Enhance Career Coaching:** Expand the career and leadership coaching aspects of the program, making them more impactful and better integrated into the curriculum.	EMBA leadership team to meet and discuss, in the context of other curriculum changes, how leadership coaching can be enriched and expanded. Also consider whether, and how, post-graduation career counselling can be introduced.	Academic Director	Completed by August 2025.
Recommendation #4: **Alumni Engagement:** Leverage alumni for recruitment, guest speaking, and case study development. Offer post-program career and leadership coaching to alumni.	*Capstone alumni sponsoring capstone projects *Have alumni mentor capstone projects *Alumni as guest speakers *Solicit alumni to help develop classroom cases *Evaluate structure, form and	Academic Director Academic Director Course instructors Academic Director and Instructors Academic Director	Implemented for Cohort 9 Implemented for Cohort 9 Implemented and ongoing Initiated in 2025, 1st case completed by December 2025 Completed by December 2025

	feasibility of offering post-program alumni career and leadership coaching. *Review current slate of alumni events and consider how they might be enriched and expanded.		Completed by December 2025
Recommendation #5: **Capstone Structure**: Reconsider the design of the capstone projects to ensure they are more integrative and less repetitive.	*Assign an instructor (i.e. Academic Director) who is familiar with the topics, content and supporting activities of the program to lead the capstone course. Instructor to collaborate with Michael Hartmann who oversees the min-capstones to ensure integrated coordinated learning with minimum overlap.	Academic Director	Completed and in place for Cohort 9.
	*Have each capstone utilize the expertise and tools available through the McMaster Digital Transformation Research Centre (MDTRC) to gain primary research insights and provide students with unique skill sets to further their own organizations and careers.	Academic Director	Completed and in place for Cohort 9.
Recommendation #6: **Recruitment Resources**: Invest in more recruitment events and restore scholarships and corporate sponsorships to	*Hold meetings to determine additional strategies to enhance student recruitment efforts, to include at minimum more recruitment events held at RJC,	Academic Director	Current and ongoing. These meetings have begun with some new strategies being implemented. No "completion date".

attract a larger and more diverse cohort.	in Toronto and virtually.		
	*Initiate drive to secure corporate sponsorships, create incentives for alumni referrals, offer frequent podcasts on current developments and applications in digital transformation, machine learning, AI and quantum computing.		Complete by August 2025. Podcasts and webinars are currently underway with more being planned.
	*Encourage faculty to acquire media exposure for their expertise, adding visibility to the EMBA program (incentives?).	Academic Director and Dean	Complete action plan by August 2025.
	*Mount Symposia in the digital transformation space at RJC and downtown Toronto.	Program Directors	Complete a one-year schedule of symposia by August 2025. One such symposium is scheduled for September 2025 at the RJC.
	*Institute scholarships in areas aligned with strategic priorities of the DeGroote School of Business.	Academic Director	Completed and in place for Cohort 10.
	*Review and update the EMBA program website to better engage interest of prospective students.	Academic Directors, Program Managers and Media Relations	Completed by August 2025.

	* Analyze data on prospective program applicants who dropped out of the application process or who declined an admission offer to better understand their discontinuance of engagement with the EMBA program.	Academic Director	Complete report by December 2025.

Quality Assurance Committee Recommendations

McMaster's Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) reviewed the above documentation at the March 27, 2025, meeting. The committee recommends that the **Executive MBA** graduate program should follow the regular course of action with an 18-month progress report and subsequent full external cyclical review to be conducted no later than eight years after the start of the last review.