

COPLAC business programs strive to ensure students have broad access both to a holistic, integrated education and to socio-economically diverse communities. Business programs at public liberal arts universities offer students and faculty significant curricular and professional opportunities. We want to graduate people who are engaged with more than finances; we seek to graduate and employ people who live critically examined lives. Because students, staff, and faculty who are good at their jobs often end up managing budgets and people, the basic business principles at the core of our programs connect directly to academic offices and other departments.

AREA ONE -- Key Assets of Business Programs at Public Liberal Arts Universities

1. *Because of the relative size of enrollments and of student-faculty ratios at COPLAC institutions, our business programs have a strong ability to focus on students in ways that larger public universities cannot. We show this focused attention particularly in:*
 - a. *Job acceptance rates for our program graduates*
 - b. *Career readiness and options for our alumni*
 - c. *Recruitment of prospective students by faculty and deans*
 - d. *Involvement of graduates with subsequent alumni relations, internships, guest speakers, volunteering, executives in residence, donations, etc.*
2. *Our programs are able to employ active and explicit connections between business and the traditional liberal arts. For example, some of our programs actively develop courses, certificates, and modules that focus on business and psychology; business and rhetoric; business and public policy or philosophy or ethics or economics or statistics, etc. Because business is derived from these fields, we believe that our curriculum should emphasize the contextual and historical relationships that we have to the liberal arts. The social/behavioral sciences often look at causation; business management is the application of those causal studies. Business IS the applied liberal arts. Working with business studies, for example, history programs, with their focus on context, causation, consequences, increase their practical application.*
3. *Because our business programs happen within the framework of a deliberate liberal arts curriculum, we believe that:*
 - a. *our students experience greater congruence between what they expect from their education and the skills organizations expect from their employees.*
 - i. *Students in business programs at COPLAC campuses experience a closer alignment between the critical thinking, collaborative problem solving, and writing skills that both the liberal arts and contemporary employers expect.*
 - ii. *Students in business programs at COPLAC partner campuses have the benefit of a T-shaped knowledge system -- breadth and depth. This helps our business students with the adaptability that their career trajectories require.*
 - b. *our students experience a “service course mentality” less often in the classroom. That is, they are NOT taught by faculty in other departments who are indifferent to a business major/minor’s education. Instead, most instructors on COPLAC campuses consider students from any major to be first “their student”. Such instructors have a passion for a field of study and they want to communicate that passion to all students, not just to those in one major and see students outside that major as part of an unremarkable service course.*
4. *Business alumni frequently make considerable financial contributions to our colleges. Our alums drive donations to our departments, to athletic teams, and frequently to special projects on our campuses.*

AREA TWO -- Key Vulnerabilities of Business Programs at Public Liberal Arts Universities

1. *COPLAC business programs can sometimes be perceived by other departments and other business programs as:*
 - *less competitive given our size and often rural locations.*

- *not being part of a university's core mission. There is a potential lack of respect from campus colleagues who perceive business programs as only caring about money (we are money huggers, the major where you go to get a job).*
 - *producing scholarship, research, and creative work that is not of the same caliber generated in other academic departments.*
2. *COPLAC business programs can sometimes experience:*
- *Jealousy from campus colleagues over the program's fiscal health, viz., the amount of alumni donations received, the state of our facilities, the number of students in business majors, the salary models used for business faculty or for executives-in-residence, etc.*
 - *Misperceptions because most COPLAC business programs are smaller than those at larger public or private universities -- we do not have the resources to support certain specialties. Students often perceive our business programs as offering limited depth because of fewer full-time faculty. In turn, a smaller student body means fewer number of electives, as well as sometimes limited choices or insufficient choices.*

AREA THREE -- Key Risks for Business Programs at Public Liberal Arts Universities

Together with the other academic programs at our member institutions, we face challenges from:

- *Declining public funding.*
- *General skepticism about the value of higher education.*
- *Bias against the word "liberal", let alone "arts". Instead, we need to talk about a holistic, integrated, multi-disciplinary education.*
- *Demographic shifts for both student and faculty recruitments.*
- *High schools or transfer schools with better educational facilities than our campuses offer.*
- *The pressure to grow from Boards, elected leaders, and/or peers within our state-wide college systems. We encounter an intense message that "we will be growing, merging, shrinking, or closing."*
- *The closing tuition gap between public and private colleges. As other schools offer discount rates or generous financial award packages, the historical cost difference between public and private education narrows. Students can prioritize something other than cost now and can choose to attend another university.*
- *Online education. We need to compose models of online or hybrid education that foreground what we value in a public liberal arts based education.*

AREA FOUR -- Key Opportunities for COPLAC Business Programs in the Future

1. *On campus, we have unique opportunities to be collaborative partners with other academic programs on campus -- e.g., with English, Psychology, Economics, Statistics; with Rhetoric/Communication, with New Media/Visual Communication, with Computer Science, and with the Arts.*
2. *One way we can be collaborative partners is to develop and cross list courses between academic programs -- e.g., Gender Studies and Business, Music and Business, Sports and Business, Biology and Marketing, Arts Management and Entrepreneurship, Rural Studies and Marketing, Environmental Studies and Business, etc.*
 - a. *Both 1 and 2 represent unique recruitment opportunities for minors in business.*
 - b. *For COPLAC programs with an MBA, cross-listed courses can help fulfill prerequisites for the MBA. We need to structure existing undergraduate course offerings to feed into our graduate programs.*
3. *Another way to achieve this is to work with online education. By and large, we represent academic programs that can be done effectively through online instruction. Our facility with this teaching platform means we can be efficient about moving students through a degree program conducted at the student's convenience and not just at ours (viz., through hybrid, synchronous, asynchronous online courses)*
4. *Moreover, the new COPLAC Shared Online Course Guidelines mean that we can share online business offerings to students across our consortium -- we deepen the business offerings of each others' programs.*
5. *Off campus, we can be collaborative partners with local small business and regional economic development offices. Through these efforts we can each see what the other is doing (awareness of best practices); we can seek out speaking opportunities with each other; we can look for the broad-based community involvement and economic engagement through our programs.*
6. *And off campus, business programs have the ability to go out and raise money when needed.*