

# The *ETS*® Major Field Tests

Assessing Learning.  
Demonstrating Effectiveness.

## WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY



Bob Hatfield, Associate Dean of Graduate Programs and Research, Gordon Ford College of Business, Western Kentucky University (WKU), oversees MBA student learning outcomes (SLOs).

### Challenges in assessing student learning outcomes and program effectiveness

Hatfield explains, “We have SLOs for our undergraduate program and our MBA program. Identifying the precise learning outcomes we seek is probably the most complex challenge.” He describes the iterative process involving several faculty committees, and adds, “The review of the MBA SLOs is on a five-year cycle with different stages of review for each of the years. In this way, we are continuously improving.”

### Using test results to improve curricula

“We want to make sure we are continuously offering courses, and content within courses, which meet the demands of employers. The *ETS*® Major Field Test (MFT)

for the MBA does an excellent job of defining such content,” Hatfield says.

He continues, “We also offer the MBA in multiple delivery formats: online, weekend executive format and accelerated face-to-face format. The MFT helps us assess whether there are any meaningful differences in learning found based upon such format differences.”

And Hatfield finds the comparative data invaluable, saying: “Our students are told that the prior cohorts have scored above average — often much higher — and that they are receiving a great educational value at WKU.” Comparative data also has driven important discussion about curricula. Hatfield relates, “While our overall score is sometimes in the top 10 percent, our lowest score is repeatedly in the finance area.” When faculty compared the MFT finance section to the program’s finance syllabus, they found that two areas included on the MFT are not in their curriculum. The finding drove an important discussion within the Finance department to determine whether to adjust course syllabi or make more careful interpretations of the annual score for finance. “The outcome, which may not be as important as the conversation, was to more carefully interpret the MFT finance subscores,” Hatfield concludes.

“By using the *ETS*® Major Field Test for the MBA, we benefit from national norms computed from a wide list of schools.”

# How Major Field Tests help students and institutions succeed

Hatfield highlights some of the reasons the Gordon Ford College of Business chose the Major Field Test for the MBA and how it supports student and institutional success:

“We had used the MFT for undergraduates at a prior institution and, on balance, I thought it was a superior product. We appreciate the professional efforts of ETS in preparing and updating this exam. For us, assurance of learning (AOL), curriculum management and admissions criteria are all interrelated in terms of understanding student learning.”

Concerning score reports, Hatfield says, “We consider the MFT MBA exam a very important part of our AOL and curriculum management efforts. We really like this standardized approach. We would not otherwise know where our learning rates fall compared to other programs.

“Being able to see the individual scores and the aggregated scores is useful to us. For instance, one of our MBA programs had an aggregate overall score on the MBA MFT that was below average. When we adjusted the aggregate score by removing the scores of students who do not speak English as a first language, the aggregate (cohort) score rose to above average. This provided useful feedback about the language skills of our international students. We continue to assess the language standards.”

Major Field Test results help the Gordon Ford College of Business demonstrate the effectiveness of its MBA program. As Hatfield explains, “We share on our website things like ‘rated in the top 10 percent of schools on a standardized exit exam on MBA learning.’ Since our school is not nationally known like an Ivy League school, assuring high-level learning is a meaningful aspect that is positive for WKU.”

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