Assignment 2: Program Evaluation Proposal

LHA1828H

Deanne Saunders

University of Toronto
Program Overview

The program I am proposing to evaluate relates to the application process for admission to Rotman Commerce (a four-year undergraduate business program that leads to a Bachelor of Commerce degree). Students seeking admission to Rotman Commerce must complete a supplemental application; this supplemental application is made separately, and in addition to, the student’s application to the University of Toronto which is administered centrally through the Ontario Universities’ Application Centre. In determining a student’s candidacy for admission to Rotman Commerce, admissions assessors consider the student’s supplemental application alongside their academic record/transcript (i.e., their high school marks); that is, applicants must meet the minimum academic requirements and obtain a favourable ‘score’ on their supplemental application.

The supplemental application is completed online and includes two short written questions and a video “essay” – completion of all components is mandatory. Before commencing the formal application, applicants are given the opportunity to access sample questions in order to familiarize themselves with the application’s format and for practice purposes. Once the applicant formally begins the application, however, their responses are timed and in the case of the written questions, limited to specific word counts. The questions themselves are meant to draw on an applicant’s personal experiences, views, aspirations, etc.; in other words, they do not require any advance study or preparation. Questions might include, for example:

- What accomplishments outside of the classroom are you most proud of?
- Where do you see yourself five and ten years after graduation?
- Describe the last time you were so excited to do something that you stayed up late. What was the activity and what does it mean to you?
- What do you consider to be your greatest non-academic achievement and why?
The supplemental application was introduced for the 2014 admissions cycle (i.e., for those seeking admission to the Rotman Commerce program for September 2014). Prior to its implementation, admission was granted on the basis of one’s academic record only (i.e., high school grades). Given the quasi-professional nature of the Rotman Commerce program, however, the leadership felt that the reliance on grades as the singular criterion for admission was limiting and may have contributed to the exclusion of otherwise eligible candidates who possessed relevant skills, knowledge, and experiences. By focusing narrowly on academic achievement, it also suggested to prospective students that success in the program hinged on grades alone, overlooking the importance and relevance of individual characteristics and experiences such as passion for the subject matter; engagement in one’s community; leadership; effective communication; outstanding personal accomplishments (athletic, artistic, entrepreneurial, etc.); and resilience. The leadership hoped that through a broader and more holistic evaluation process, it might admit students who embody the attributes identified in the program’s mission, vision, and values statement, namely, “a diverse group of talented and engaged students who share a commitment to excellence, a demonstrated capacity for leadership, and a passion for the world of business” (Rotman Commerce Mission, Vision, and Values Statement, n.d.).

To date, the supplemental application has been used to evaluate three incoming first-year classes. The first cohort of students admitted with the supplemental application will graduate in 2018.

**Personal Interest in the Program**

The program – that is, the supplemental application process – interests me because I was actively involved with both the proposal to broaden the criteria for admission to Rotman Commerce and its eventual implementation. My involvement included initial consultations with
various stakeholders (internal and external to the organization) and presentations to various committees and governance bodies from which we required approval in order to proceed. I was also charged with selecting the online platform provider and ensuring that the application met institutional privacy and security requirements. Moreover, I worked collaboratively with senior leaders, faculty, and staff to develop the content, format, and rubric for the application and hired/trained assessment staff. While my extensive involvement with the project informs my interest in part, I am also very much interested in the application’s capacity to help identify and select students who will thrive academically, personally, and professionally in the Rotman Commerce program and bring a diversity of talents, experiences, and perspectives to the student population.

The Change Model

Figure 1. Change model for Rotman Commerce supplemental application.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intervention</th>
<th>Determinant</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prospective student applicants must complete and submit a supplemental application (in addition to their academic record) in order to be considered for admission to the Rotman Commerce program.</td>
<td>An applicant's candidacy for admission to the program cannot be determined on the basis of academic information alone. A supplemental application can assess for other relevant qualities and characteristics such as passion/commitment, community engagement, leadership, and resilience.</td>
<td>Admissions assessors are able to evaluate for and admit students who possess the both the requisite academic skills as well as personal qualities, characteristics, and accomplishments that will allow them to thrive in the Rotman Commerce program.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
According to Chen (2015), a program’s change model comprises three distinct components: its goals or outcomes; a determinant; and an intervention or the activity or activities that directly aim to change the determinant (2015, p. 71). Figure 1 depicts a simple change model for the Rotman Commerce supplemental application process.

The Logic Model

Figure 2. Logic model for Rotman Commerce supplemental application process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inputs</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Outputs</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| - Money for online application platform, development, and client support  
- Full-time and part-time admissions assessment staff  
- Equipment (computers, telephones, data storage, etc.) | - Prospective students complete and submit online supplemental application  
- Admissions assessors review applicant submissions and evaluate based on established criteria/rubric | - Offers of admission are extended to applicants who are both academically qualified and demonstrate evidence of other relevant qualities/characteristics  
- Students who are likely to thrive – academically, personally, and professionally – in the program accept the offer of admission and enrol in the program | - The Rotman Commerce community benefits from a student population that is diverse, talented, committed to excellence, and possess a passion for the world of business  
- Admitted students successfully complete the four-year program in good academic standing and with the skills/knowledge to become innovative leaders and engaged citizens |

A logic model, as explained by Prince, Alkema & Frank (2009) is “a communications tool that graphically represents a program’s resources, activities, priority target audiences for change, and anticipated outcomes” (2009, p. 317). The basic components of a logic model
include inputs (or the resources required to run the program), activities, outputs, and outcomes (Chen, 2015). A logic model for the Rotman Commerce supplemental application process is shown in Figure 2 and includes at least two examples for each of the model’s four components.

**Recommended Evaluation Type**

As discussed earlier, the Rotman Commerce supplemental application was implemented just three years ago. Although a number of changes and enhancements have been made to the application since its original implementation, the initiative is still very much in its infancy. Indeed, the first cohort of students admitted with the supplemental application requirement will not graduate from the program until 2018; it will then be at least another year or two until these graduates secure employment and/or gain admission to post-undergraduate study. In other words, more information regarding student outcomes is required in order to make any final determination regarding the application’s impact and effectiveness. Moreover, the program’s leadership remains committed to the notion of a broad-based or holistic approach to admissions, with a strong preference for continuous evaluation and improvement of the supplemental application as opposed to making any immediate determination regarding its continuation. For these reasons, I propose a *constructive outcome evaluation* approach (Chen, 2015). As Chen explains, this approach “is useful for improving the program’s chance of success, but it stops short of judging the overall effectiveness of the program” (2015, p. 12). The emphasis on improvement and enhancement suggests that a *constructive outcome evaluation* is more appropriate for the supplemental application at this relatively early juncture than a *conclusive outcome evaluation* might be, for example.
References

