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**UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULUM: THE CORPORATE CONTEXT**

**By**

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# UNDERGRADUATE CURRICULUM: THE CORPORATE CONTEXT

By Dr. Raj Agrawal<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

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Educated manpower is the greatest asset of a nation in the emerging knowledge economy of the world. The quantitative expansions of Management Education in India seen in that perspective is a major achievement and can be turned to a real asset for our country. Today, we not only have 900 or so business schools, there is also the variety of programmes- Post Graduate (MBA, PGDM) Under-graduates (BBA, BBM) etc. But there is no appropriate undergraduate programme to cater to the upsurge expected in the first line commercial positions in the burgeoning service industry.

It has been felt that the prevailing quality, orientation and standard of most of the under-graduate programmes did not lead to corporate employability. Our initial investigation also reveals that traditional undergraduate programmes in business education have disappointed the bright and dynamic youngsters as it fails to link with the competency needs of Business and Industry. Curriculum design is the most important component of pedagogy. There is need of launching a quality—oriented undergraduate programme with a curriculum focused on corporate needs. Identifying the emerging potentials in various sectors of business should assess corporate needs. Need- based approach should be translated in to developing the requisite skills and competencies. It should also include a range of functional specialialities and sectoral modules as electives using cafeteria approach so that student can be molded in line with profiles of employment opening up for the graduates. The delivery could use experts from the industry and include relevant Industry Interfaced projects. Functional specialization modules should be developed in accordance to the emerging market needs and with close collaboration with senior business executives. Curriculum design should incorporate the backward integration approach by assessing current issues of business. Curriculum design should integrate the major skills and competencies required to meet the corporate expectation.

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## 1. Background

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The major challenge of business education at undergraduate level is to develop an efficient and pro-active corporate oriented curriculum, which fine-tunes itself regularly to meet changing demand of business. This is something many business schools are struggling to achieve.

In India management education programmes are currently limited to Post-Graduate level and prepare students to assume managerial positions in the industry. Almost more than 900 AICTE/ University approved PGDM/ MBA programmes in the country are enough to fulfill the demand for such positions in the industry. While managerial vacancies are thus well provided for, there is no appropriate programme to cater to the upsurge expected in the first line commercial positions in the burgeoning service industry.

Various preliminary studies<sup>2</sup> also showed that the developed world would experience shortage of professional manpower due to aging and low population growth rate. To make up for the shortage, developed countries will compete to attract the right kind of skill sets- either through migration or by outsourcing. India is uniquely placed to optimize the gains arising from these new opportunities.

The major remote services, where most of these opportunities are emerging are primarily in sectors like IT services, IT enabled services, Tele-medicine, E-learning, tourism, healthcare services and education services. Other services include accountancy, auditing, book-keeping services, architectural services and urban planning and landscape architectural services, medical and dental services, services provided by midwives, nurses, hospital services, construction and engineering services, computer-related services, - consultancy services related to the installation of computer hardware, software implementation services, data processing services, data base services and other computer related services, insurance and insurance related services, banking and other financial services, hotels and restaurant services (including catering) travel agency and tourist operators services and maritime transport services.

These opportunities will simultaneously demand the new skill-set primarily at under-graduate level in front line jobs or commercial jobs in services sector. Undergraduate management education programmes like Bachelors in Business

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<sup>2</sup> India's New Opportunity –2020- Report of High Level Strategic Group; All India Management Association and Boston Consulting Group, page no-8

Administration (BBA), Bachelors in Business Management (BBM) etc, which were, introduced by some Indian universities, some years ago to fulfill such needs follows a curriculum patterned after MBA subjects. Both programme curriculums are not linked to the need profiles of first line positions in corporate. Our initial investigations also reveals that traditional BBA, BBM have disappointed the bright and dynamic youngsters as it fails to link with competency needs of Business and Industry. The prevailing quality, orientation and standards of most of the BBA and BBM programmes did not lead to corporate employability.

The issue here is that these students are teenagers and we already have a feeling that management education should be imparted to older people with work experience. There is need of providing a good undergraduate degree but oriented towards developing a commercial and managerial mindset, not another version of a post-graduate management programmes (MBA). Therefore, in curriculum design itself focus should be laid on fulfilling the corporate needs. Curriculum design may include a range of functional specialialities and sectoral modules as electives using cafeteria approach so those students can be molded in line with profiles of employment opening up for the graduates.

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## **2. OBJECTIVES**

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The major objectives of study based on current business environment are identified as follows: -

- To make a dispassionate assessment of the current status of the prevailing undergraduate business education programmes in many Indian universities and institutions.
- To assess the current structure of undergraduate programme course structure and reorient the same to serve the need of frontline commercial jobs in corporate, by obtaining the opinions of the business experts.
- At Under-graduate business education level itself, students should receive a broad business based management education. After completing the programme, students are expected to have good understanding about the economic, social, cultural, legal and political framework within which businesses and individuals operate, and also become sensitized to the drives and demands of employability in current business scenario. Curriculum design should focus on these aspects.
- Besides offering an undergraduate level business education, it should contribute to personal growth, build a large number of marketable skills, enhance career prospects, and create productive options for the future.
- Functional specialization modules should be developed with close collaboration with senior business executives. These should be an integral part of the entire programme. Specialization modules should provide an opportunity to students

for integrated working with industry and business on the one hand and teaching by industry experts. Actual projects should also be carried out with the support of corporate.

- Curriculum design will be different from the existing University/Institutions, BBA/BBM programmes in terms of :-
  - Specialization's in line with industry and business needs
  - Industry Interfaced projects
  - Foundation skills such as Communication, language, presentation etc.
  - Modular approach of awarding diplomas with total credits earned.

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### **3. HYPOTHESIS:**

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To ensure the development of an appropriate curriculum for sound business education is an important requirement. New courses have to be added and old courses, which are not relevant, have to be deleted in order to cater the needs of emerging sectors. It is not out of context to mention here that a good number of universities/ institutions have a tendency to pursue the same course structure for a long time without upgrading it<sup>3</sup>.

Most of the curriculums in Indian Universities and institutes are designed by giving emphasis on forward integration approach. By forward integration approach, we mean that general, business and specialization courses are identified and distributed in various terms/semesters. These are not identified and integrated by assessing current corporate and business needs. This approach is known as traditional model of curriculum design. In most of curriculum, we find that in first semester, foundation courses like Quantitative Methods, Economics etc are taught. And in subsequent semesters, integrative courses like Operation Research, Strategic Management etc are included and finally specialization and application – oriented courses are taught.

In last decade, global and domestic business environment has changed rapidly. Issues related to business have changed. There is complete paradigm shift. The kinds of skills and competencies required to operate in this dynamic global environment are different than earlier era. Most of the time, these courses do not match the skills and competencies required by corporate. For example students learn marketing whether they develop competencies or not. The delivery mechanism of these is also based on traditional methods like classroom teaching; teacher and memory-centered approach, limited use of industry experts', no use of

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<sup>3</sup> Sivaramakrishna K. and K. Ramesh; Technical Education and the New Millennium: Role of HRD Interventions; Delivering Service Quality edited by M. Raghavachari and K.V. Ramani, Macmillan, page no, 296

corporate labs etc. It has been generally felt that these kinds of products lacks practical knowledge and hardly have any early interaction with companies, and often the theoretical expertise is outdated. Initial investigations also reveal that industry is often an unwilling partner with management education and this is applicable not only in Indian case but at a global level also<sup>4</sup>.

In the curriculum design instead of adopting the prevailing forward integration approach, there is need of evolving backward integration approach. In backward integration, it is inevitable to identify the major business issues of business<sup>5</sup> for example privatization and emergence of WTO is current issues for Indian business. Secondly, competency and skills should be identified and linked with business issues in accordance with changing corporate requirements. Corporate have also changed or changing with the changes in domestic and global business environment. Thirdly, major identified competencies and skills should be incorporated in curricula design. Above discussed backward integration approach would be more appropriate in this dynamic global environment and also ensures the emerging needs of corporate from business education.

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#### **4. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

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All the companies in sectors like IT services, IT enabled services, Tele-medicine, E-learning, tourism, healthcare services, auditing, book-keeping services, data processing services, data base services and other computer related services, insurance and insurance related services, banking and other financial services, hotels and restaurant services (including catering) travel agency and tourist operators services and maritime transport services, FMCG sector etc constitute the universe for the study.

In the first instance, a cross-section of six hundred and fifty companies covering different emerging business areas like insurance, banking, FMCGs, tourist's operators, hotels and restaurant, and transport etc were selected from the private and public limited companies. The sample size of the study is given in table –1. In the second stage, a cross-section of senior executives likes senior HRD managers; production executives were selected to conduct and administered the questionnaire.

#### **Table-1**

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<sup>4</sup> Natrajan N. Chairman, All- India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), Inaugural Session, 7th Directors' Conclave organized by All-India Management Association in Collaboration with Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies, 29<sup>th</sup> November, 2002

<sup>5</sup> Pritam Singh ; Keynote Address;7<sup>th</sup> Directors' Conclave organized by All-India Management Association in Collaboration with Narsee Monjee Institute of Management Studies , 29<sup>th</sup> November ,2002

## **Sample for the Study**

S.No	Companies	Sample size
1	Insurance	40
2	Banking	80
3	Travel related	40
4	IT related	150
5	Hospitality related	100
6	FMCG	150
7	Others like sports,leisure etc	90

The Delphi Technique was used primarily on experts from, business to identify a set of initial needed skills and competencies.

The process was done in two stages, in first stage through discussion with like minded experts, a list of skills and competencies were prepared. In the second stage, by conducting a brain storming session, further only such skills and competencies, which should be related to needs of corporate, were selected in the preparation of questionnaire.

The questionnaire on a 10-point scale designed with a focus on ranking of listed skills needed for a front line position (office/executive) in the services and industrial sector. The format of questionnaire is given in annexure-1. The identified skills were divided into two parts: - 1- General Skill's 2- Knowledge based skills or competencies. (For complete list see Annexure –1). In covering letter itself it was made very clear that BBA programme design would be developed to fulfill the needs of large number of front line commercial jobs expected to open up in the emerging service sector. Conducting personal interviews and personal contacts also helped in collecting data. The empirical aspect forms the most important feature of the study. The questionnaire, personal interview constituted the major tools for the data collection for the present study.

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## **5. Observations and Findings**

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The response and observations received from the cross-section of three hundred fifty six companies are shown in Table –2. Skills and competencies are ranked in term of total response. The ranking of various skills by corporate have highlighted the need of integrating the basic skills.

Ranking of knowledge-based competencies is exhibited in table-3, we can conclude that what are the new and emerging areas where, these new competencies are required and should be included to in the design of BBA level curriculum.

**Table –2**

### Ranking of General Skills by companies

S.No.	General Skills	Ranking	Total Response
1	English Communication	2	170
2	Competence in Information Technology	3	140
3	Man Management	5	125
4	Negotiation Skill	11	70
5	Trouble Shooting	12	20
6	Conceptual Skills	10	84
7	Planning Skills	9	90
8	Organizing Skills	8	110
9	Monitoring Skills	7	118
10	Controlling Skills	6	122
11	Motivation	1	200
12	Decision Making	4	135

**Table-3: Knowledge Based Skills**

S.No	Knowledge Based Skills	Ranking	Sample Size of companies
1	Product Sales	4	300
2	Accounting/Finance	3	275
3	E-Business	2	275
4	Export/Import	7	300
5	Marketing of Services	1	275
6	Starting Small Scale Business	5	300
7	Public Relations/Event Management	6	300

The major findings of survey in terms of requisite skills, competencies, and specialization were integrated in development of curriculum. Specialization modules were selected from the sectors, which have shown high growth potential

in last five years. These sectors are hospitality business, E- Business, Small business, Services, international business etc.

Curriculum design was divided into three stages; 1- Inclusion of requisite skills, 2- Knowledge and competencies, 3- Specialization Modules. This approach is known as backward integration approach.

First year is divided into two semesters and major emphases on developing the required skills were given in curriculum. For developing motivation skills, which have been given top rank in survey, additional courses like 'Introduction of Humanities' were introduced in first year. Further to keep teenagers' motivated, proper care has been taken for including the industry–interfaced project with the support of corporate. It has been thought involvement of students in industry oriented projects will provide the sufficient motivation and work-orientation from very beginning itself.

Other ranked preferences were English communication and IT related skills. For developing English communication skills, courses like English writing, English Verbal, and communication were introduced. For IT related skills both theoretical as well as lab oriented courses were included from first year. In sum, major skill-oriented papers were introduced from first year itself. This approach is different from traditional-university based curriculum, where major emphasis has been given from very beginning in the knowledge based papers. The proposed curriculum design can be benchmarked with the traditional university based BBA curriculum, see (Annexure –2).

In the second year and third year, major competencies based courses as well as six specialization modules according to the need and expectations of corporate were introduced. These modules are well in accordance to contemporary issues of business and shown a high growth potential in last few years. It is also expected that major commercial/front lines jobs are opening in these areas and corporate are expecting that BBA Degree should include these areas with requisite skills and competencies. Specialization Modules for these sectors are E-Business, International Business, Hospitality Business, Marketing Management, Services Business, and Entrepreneurship and Small Business (see Box-1 to 6). This is one of the major and innovating findings of the entire study. The introduction of specialized modules in accordance with market requirement is the major innovation of proposed curriculum for undergraduate students. This is the most important departure from the traditional curriculums used by various universities/institutions.( See Annexure-2). Based on the findings and observation we can develop and propose new curriculum design for undergraduate segments in most of business schools in India. In new curriculum major emphasis was given in developing new set of skills, relevant competencies and specialized modules in accordance to corporate requirement.

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## 6. RECOMMENDED PEDAGOGY AND CURRICULUM

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### **6.1 ACADEMIC YEARS, SEMESTERS CREDITS, COURSES SPECIALIZATION MODULES AND PROJECTS: -**

The Programme should comprise of six semesters spread over three to four years. The programme should include 42 courses. There should be twenty-eight general & Business courses. From six specialization modules, students should select ten courses. For effective industry interface, students should do two Industry Interfaced projects consist of 4 courses. Each course consists of four credits. A4-Credit course consists of about 32-34 sessions, each of 70 minute duration. Each credit is equivalent to 8-9 sessions. Total numbers of credits for the programmes are one hundred and sixty eight. The credit distribution was benchmarked with most of prestigious BBA programmes in abroad like London Business School, University of Bradford (UK), Northwood University (USA), Thames Valley University, London etc. The parity in credit equivalence may facilitate the credit transfer even at international level from one institute to another. The process of globalization in emerging markets in undergraduate

- From second year onwards students have to choose ten electives from two of the six specialization streams on offer.
- Completion of 10 electives 5 each from two specialization streams will lead to dual specialization.

The distributions of courses in each semester are as given below in Table 1.

**Table 1**

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>SEMESTER NO</b>	<b>GENERAL AND BUSINESS COURSES +SPECIALIZATION COURSES</b>
Ist Year	1	7
	2	7
Industry Interfaced Project I	During the IInd year	2
IInd Year	3	4+2
	4	4+2
Industry Interfaced Project II	During the IIIrd year	2
IIIrd year	5	3+3
	6	3+3

### **6.2 WEIGHTAGE OF SUBJECTS**

**No. of subjects**

Foundation subjects	14	37%
Business subjects	14	37%
Specialization subjects	10	26%
Total	38	100%

### FIRST YEAR

S.NO.	SEMESTER I	SEMESTER II
1	English writing	English Verbal
2	Introduction to I.T.	Computer Application Lab -I
3	Business Maths	Business Statistics
4	Understanding of Business Organizations	Micro Economics
5	Macro Economics	Accounting II (Cost Accounting)
6	Accounting I (Financial Accounting)	Project Writing
7	Introduction to Humanities (Psychology & Sociology)	Communication

INDUSTRY INTERFACED PROJECT – 2 COURSES  
**(GENERAL STREAM)**

### SECOND YEAR

S.NO.	SEMESTER III	SEMESTER IV
1	Concepts of Operations (Manufacturing & Services)	Management of Operations (Manufacturing & Services)
2	Principles of Marketing	Financial Management I
3	Business & social Environment	Organizational Behaviour
4	Business Application of Software & Lab. Work	Marketing Management
5	Elective I from modules	Elective III from modules
6	Elective II from modules	Elective IV from modules

INDUSTRY INTERFACED PROJECT – 2 COURSES  
**(SPECIALIZATION STREAM)**

### THIRD YEAR

S.NO.	SEMESTER V	SEMESTER VI
1	Financial Management II	Business Strategy
2	Human Resource Management	Entrepreneurship
3	Business Law	International Business
4	Elective V from modules	Elective VIII from modules
5	Elective VI from modules	Elective IX from modules
6	Elective VII from modules	Elective X from modules

### **6.3 SPECIALIZATION MODULES**

The Programme is enriched by specialization modules, which will bring better employability in corporate in emerging sectors. Specialization modules would provide an opportunity to students for evaluating theory in a corporate context, thus fulfilling the objective of providing a broad and integrative investigation of management. An illustrative list about the intention and specific inputs of modules are given in Boxes (1 to 6). Faculty members in close collaboration with industry and business would specifically develop these by taking into consideration, the need of employability of BBA students at relatively younger age

### **SPECIALIZATION MODULES**

1	2
<b>Marketing Management Modules</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertising &amp; brand management</li> <li>• Direct Marketing</li> <li>• Distribution channel Management</li> <li>• Marketing Research</li> <li>• Marketing of Services</li> <li>• Marketing on Net</li> <li>• Sales Management</li> </ul>	<b>E-Business Modules</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data Communication and Networking</li> <li>• Database Management</li> <li>• Systems Analysis and Design Methodologies</li> <li>• Web Technologies</li> <li>• Management of Information Technology</li> <li>• Fundamentals of E-Commerce</li> </ul>
3	4
<b>International Business Modules</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Export &amp; Import policy &amp; procedures</li> <li>• Export costing &amp; financing</li> <li>• International logistics Management</li> <li>• International Marketing</li> <li>• Foreign exchange Management</li> <li>• Import Management</li> <li>• Formation of an export company</li> </ul>	<b>Entrepreneurship and Small Business Modules</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government Business Interface</li> <li>• Small Business Marketing</li> <li>• Financing of Small business</li> <li>• Entrepreneurial Development</li> <li>• New Enterprise Management</li> <li>• Small business Environment and Management</li> </ul>
5	6
<b>Hospitality Business Modules</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principles of Travel and Tourism Operations</li> <li>• Introduction to Hospitality Industry</li> <li>• Foundation of Tourism</li> <li>• Tourism Enterprises (Operations &amp; Human Resources)</li> <li>• Tourism Marketing</li> <li>• Adventure and Sports Management</li> </ul>	<b>Services Business Modules</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial services</li> <li>• Retailing</li> <li>• Transport</li> <li>• Health Care Services</li> <li>• Entertainment Services</li> <li>• Corporate public relations</li> </ul>
Boxes 1 to 6	

## 6.4 PROJECTS

- Two industries project to be carried out simultaneously with teaching during second and third year.
- These projects should be completed before being admitted to the term end examination of 4<sup>th</sup> semester and 6<sup>th</sup> semester.

**7. Conclusions:** - Based on above observations, discussions and findings, it can be concluded that education, the world over is passing transition of sorts. Teaching methodologies have changed. Curricula and delivery systems are the key drivers in this highly competitive climate. Curricula should be designed by taking into account the existence of global and domestic business environment. It should also be linked with the employability in new businesses. Identifying the major sectors, where most of commercial or front line jobs are opening and undergraduate segments will fulfill such requirements, has developed the proposed curricula design.

## ANNEXURE - 1

### Part I : General Skills

Please rate (on a 10-point scale, 10 being the highest point) the importance of the following skills needed for a front line position (officer/executive) in the services sector:

1. English Communication  
1 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 10
2. Competence in Information Technology  
1 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 10
3. Man Management  
1 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 10
4. Negotiation Skill  
1 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 10
5. Trouble Shooting  
1 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 10
6. Conceptual Skills  
1 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 10
7. Planning Skills  
1 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 10
8. Organizing Skills  
1 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 10
9. Monitoring Skills  
1 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 10
10. Controlling Skills  
1 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 10
11. Motivation  
1 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 10
12. Decision Making  
1 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 10

### Part II : Knowledge Based Skills

1. Product Sales  
1 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 10
2. Accounting/Finance  
1 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 10
3. E-Business  
1 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 10
4. Export/Import  
1 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 10
5. Marketing of Services  
1 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 10
6. Starting Small Scale Business  
1 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 10
7. Public Relations/Event Management  
1 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_ 10

*N.B.-Please do mention and rate any other skill/s you would look for front line jobs. May kindly use separate sheet for a detailed feedback.*

## ANNEXURE - II

### BENCHMARKED AGAINST THE TRADITIONAL BBA UNIVERISTY PROGRAMME Year One

Semester I	NEW	Semester II	NEW
√1. English	English Writing	√1. Business Communication	Communication
√2. Computers in Management I	Introduction to IT	√2. Computers in Management II	Computer Application Lab I
√3. Quantitative Methods I	Business Maths	√3. Quantitative Methods II	Business Statistics
√4. Understanding Business Organization I	√ (only one paper)	X4. Understanding Business Organization II	Project Writing
√5. Economics I	Macro Economics	√5. Economics II	Micro Economics
√6. Accounting I (Financial Accounting)	√	√6. Accounting II (Cost Accounting)	√
√7. Principles of Management	Introduction to Humanities	X7. French	Speech

### Year Two

Semester III	NEW	Semester IV	NEW
X1. Quantitative Methods III	X	X1. Computers in Management IV	X
√2. Operations Management I	Concepts of Operations	√2. Operation Management II	Management of Operations (Manufacturing & Services)
√3. Marketing Management I	Principles of Marketing	√3. Financial Management	√ (two papers)
√4. Business Environment I	√ (only one)	X4. Business Environment II	X
X5. Accounting III	X	X5. Auditing	X
√6. Organizational Behaviour I	√ (only one)	X6. Organizational Behaviour II	X
√7. Computers in Management III	Business Application of Software & Lab. work	X7. Entrepreneurship	X

### Year Three

Semester V	NEW		Semester VI	NEW
X1. Accounting IV (Management Accounting)		Financial Management II	X1. Essentials of Investment & Tax planning or Merchant Banking & Financial Services	X
√2. Marketing Management II		Marketing Management	X2. Industrial Relations	X
√3. Human Resource Management		√	X3. Marketing Research II	Entrepreneurship
√4. Business Law		√	X4. Business Policy	Business Strategy
X5. Market Research I		X	X5. Computers in Management VI	X
X6. Computers in Management IV		X	√6. International Business	√
X7. Technology Management		X	X7. Advertising	X

**Note:**

1. **X** indicates that these papers are parts of traditional curriculum. In new Curriculum design, these have been omitted.
2. **√** Indicates that these papers are part of traditional curriculum, but their titles as well as contents would be changed according to current undergraduate students' requirement.
- 3 Most of Universities/ institutes has specialization's modules in BBA/BBM programme. Few of the Universities/ institutes offers specialization in traditional streams like HRD, Financial Management, Operation & Productions. This pattern of offering specializations is similar to MBA Programme and not based on the requirement of corporate.
- 4 In the design of new curriculum specialization's modules are included in accordance of opening of new front line commercial jobs opening in industry.