
BUSINESS ADVISORY COUNCIL

RESOURCE KIT



ACCREDITATION COUNCIL FOR BUSINESS SCHOOLS AND PROGRAMS
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June 2014

Page 2

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	4
A. Why Form a Business Advisory Council.....	5
B. Organize and Operate Your BAC to Make It a Strategic Asset.....	7
Keep It Simple, or Not.....	7
1. Begin With The Business School's Mission.....	8
2. Determine The Council's Objectives.....	8
3. Establish Membership Criteria and Member Responsibilities.....	9
4. Determine Structural and Administrative Details.....	11
5. Determine Meeting Format and Content.....	13
6. Establish Practices That Keep Members Engaged Between Meetings.....	14
C. Business Advisory Councils as Accreditation Assets.....	16
D. Bibliography.....	18
E. Appendix	19

BUSINESS ADVISORY COUNCIL - RESOURCE KIT

Introduction

Higher education today operates in a world in flux. Institutions must deal with shifts in funding sources, changing demographics and increased governmental scrutiny. Those challenges are coupled with rapid technological developments, the evolving impact of globalization, ever increasing expectations to identify and meet economic and workforce needs, and the overarching need to keep our programs relevant and effective in the face of such brisk change. A well planned, well run Business Advisory Council (BAC) is one tool that can assist deans in navigating an effective course through the shifting landscape.

There is no “one size fits all” plan for a BAC. There is not yet a clear consensus on the “best practices”. There is, though, a growing understanding of the key considerations that should be addressed as you create or revamp a BAC, and a body of advice from those who have been operating dynamic and highly effective BACs. This Resource Kit is meant to provide the resources to generate discussion and offer enough varied examples so you can design and operate a BAC that will be most effective for your school.

Each section of this Kit is designed to offer enough information to trigger the robust discussion needed to make choices and shape a BAC that works well for your school. Perhaps most helpful are the many sample documents from existing BACs included in the Appendix. These will provide examples and inspiration as you develop the unique model that best fits your circumstances and best serves your program’s needs.

The desire to provide an effective resource to deans to enhance their work with BACs led the ACBSP Business Industry Relations Committee to embark on the project to develop this Kit. Each of the editors of this Kit, who are listed on the previous page, served on this Committee during the time this Kit was developed. Other members of the Business Industry Relations Committee developed related projects that support the work of BACs, including a Skills Gap Survey and presentations for the special focus track on Business Advisory Councils at the 2014 Annual Conference. This Resource Kit was released and reviewed during one of those concurrent sessions.

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June 2014

BUSINESS ADVISORY COUNCIL - RESOURCE KIT

A. Why Form a Business Advisory Council

Some in business argue that changes in the competitive environment of higher education and an over-emphasis on analytics rather than skill development and experiential activity have eroded the relevance and value of business programs. Potential employers often say they want more focus on practical issues and skills—those related to leadership, globalization, communication/presentation, and problem identification in ambiguous environments.

A Business Advisory Council (BAC) can be an effective mechanism to hear and explore solutions to all such concerns. A BAC forges a direct link, a continuous feedback loop, with the business community. Well-functioning BACs work closely with school leadership to bring relevance to the curriculum and the classroom, and to champion the school to prospective donors and students, business colleagues and the community.

Developing a BAC can present some issues. Forming and maintaining an effective BAC requires time and effort that may not, initially, be valued by the institution. However, while a BAC involves some costs associated with logistics and material supplies, as well as a little time commitment from faculty and staff, the benefits of establishing a BAC outweigh the comparatively small investments of money and time.

BACs are not governing bodies. A BAC has no legal authority or governance responsibility for a school or program. Although the role and responsibilities of a BAC varies widely from institution to institution, the common thread is that it is comprised of committed, engaged, and well-connected business leaders who can provide to the dean insight, advice and advocacy, and act as ambassadors for your school to the business world.

A well-functioning BAC can:

- Provide insight into the competitive environment affecting business education.
- Assist in the ongoing strategic planning process.
- Serve as a sounding board for internal projects, educational programs, and external activities.
- Identify opportunities for faculty and student research, consulting and experiential learning opportunities.
- Build relationships with corporate and business leaders, governmental officials and other key constituencies.

June 2014

BUSINESS ADVISORY COUNCIL - RESOURCE KIT

- Advocate with governmental bodies.
- Act as ambassadors to inform and educate the professional and business communities about the capabilities of your school and the caliber of its students---in other words, help to build your brand.
- Provide a source of guest speakers, site visits, and experiential opportunities for students.
- Provide ongoing engage with outside stakeholders to facilitate assessing outcomes and provide feedback.
- Assist in developing financial resources.
- Provide an experienced, knowledgeable and tested source of future governing board candidates.

Be certain:

- Roles and responsibilities are defined clearly enough so each member understands its advisory role and appreciates its importance to the schools growth and success.
- Its composition and organization structure are designed to function effectively for your school and its circumstances.
- The structure and operational rules are not so cumbersome that they impede either the BAC's effectiveness, or the dean's ability to contain a BAC that goes astray.
- It is structured and operates so members feel comfortable sharing candid advice and insights, but you have the ability to prevent it from becoming unmanageable or obtrusive.

B. Organize and Operate Your BAC to Make It a Strategic Asset

As is illustrated in the array of sample documents in the Appendix, there are many approaches to organizing a BAC. Some rest on lengthy and detailed organizing documents and some are much more simply organized. Some institutions must ensure compliance with state statutes. Privately-funded and state-funded institutions operate with different constraints and may develop BACs with very different considerations and objectives. The diverse nature of business schools necessitates diversity in the organization of BACs. The code key to an energetic and effective BAC is a design that sets in play a council that serves the needs of your school.

While there is no “one size fits all” singular set of best practices, there are essential elements to consider in the planning or revamping process, considerations that should be addressed, and a body of advice from those operating effective BACs.

Keep It Simple, or Not.

Most BACs have bylaws or guidelines that define its objectives, structure, composition and operation. As the Appendix documents reveal, some have very lengthy and quite detailed documents. Some have no written documents at all. While each school must determine what level of structural detail works best for it, the most effective practice for most schools lies somewhere between those extremes. Simpler structure and less operational detail make a BAC more facile in responding to changing conditions and, frankly, easier to operate. Of course *if there are statutory or regulatory requirements that apply to a school, those must take precedence* over simplicity of design and operation.

In general, the steps in the formation process flow as follows:

1. Begin with the business school’s mission.
2. Determine the council’s objectives.
3. Establish membership criteria and member responsibilities.
4. Determine structural and administrative details.
5. Establish meeting format.
6. Establish practices that keep members engaged.

1. Begin with the Business School's Mission.

A BAC is useful only if it is helping your school achieve its mission. It is axiomatic that planning a BAC must begin with the school's mission in clear relief. The school's strategic goals and its objectives for realizing its mission should guide all decisions as you define and shape a BAC.

2. Determine the Council's Objectives.

Clearly expressed objectives for a BAC will ensure members understand their role. A BAC is not a governing body and members must understand that. Though not governance, your bylaws or guidelines should set out exactly what the objectives are for the council.

You will be recruiting smart, busy people to serve on the BAC. Each of them will want a clear understanding of the role being asked of them, and each will want a clear understanding of what they need to do to successfully fulfill that role. Additionally, such clarity lessens the likelihood that a BAC will be tempted to overstep its bounds and attempt to directly affect administrative matters.

Section A of the Resource Kit and the Appendix documents identify many possible objectives and roles for a BAC. What specific objectives and roles should be adopted in formative documents is entirely dependent on a school's strategic mission, vision and objectives.

Once adopted, though, a BAC's objectives should be restated and reinforced regularly to its members. As time passes and members change, it is imperative to remind all players of the BAC's purpose in order to maintain its focus and effectiveness.

Advice or Fundraising? One key decision that should be made early in the planning process is whether the primary goal in forming a council is truly to gain advice and guidance or whether it is fundraising. Either may be appropriate. However, if you frame the council as a means of obtaining advice and guidance from the business community, but your real purpose is raising funds, the result will be frustration for all parties and likely failure on both counts. The structure, operation and composition of a council intended to act as a fundraising tool would differ significantly from a BAC designed to act primarily to serve the dean by providing advice and insight.

3. Establish Membership Criteria and Member Responsibilities.

How many members: The size of existing BACs varies widely. Some have fewer than 10 members; some have over 50 members. Since a BAC should contain mostly successful business people who have full calendars, assume that 20-50% of them will be unable to attend any given meeting. Given that, if the number of members is too small, there may be too few members at meetings for the BAC to function in a vigorous fashion. If the number of members is too large, there is a diffusion of responsibility and many members will fail to participate actively; the council can become a passive audience rather than a robust, interactive group. Meetings like this become more show-and-tell than meaningful discussion. It then becomes difficult to retain members or, if they remain on the BAC, to keep them engaged.

When the number of members begins to reach 25-50, it is difficult to manage a group of that size without a significant committee structure. With lots of committees, the risk then arises that meetings will become nothing but committee reports, leaving little time for meaningful contribution, and members soon become bored and disengaged.

When the number of members rises above 20, it is harder for each member to believe that the insight and guidance from his or her participation on the BAC is truly important to the school's success. Further, a large group is inherently less selective and less prestigious. It may then be more difficult to recruit the high-level individuals a school most desires on its BAC.

The growing consensus suggests a BAC have 15-25 members. That number is large enough to expect sufficient attendance at each meeting for vigorous discussions; but small enough to aide recruitment and keep the members engaged.

Who should serve?: Careful consideration should be given to the composition of the BAC. As with other decisions, strategic goals and objectives should guide the choices. Advisory councils may be comprised of alumni, business leaders and government officials; all of whom may be potential employers for the school's graduates.

A balanced and diverse membership is essential to an effective BAC. Consider diversity across business sectors, skill sets, geographic region, gender, age, ethnicity, nationality, and contacts with key constituencies. Consider balance among regional businesses, opting for representatives from large corporations including non-profits, as well as local entrepreneurs

June 2014

BUSINESS ADVISORY COUNCIL - RESOURCE KIT

Among the Appendix documents, you will find several examples of matrixes that can aide your analysis.

You should aim high. Seek the most senior-level management individuals from organizations. Members of the BAC should be peers. Retired executives who remain active and well-connected in their industry could be considered.

Alumni should participate, but that should not be a requirement to serve. Limiting service on the BAC to alumni also limits the range and perspective the input you will receive, as well as the reach available for recruitment on the BAC. You should be aiming for diversity of thought and perspective.

Member responsibilities: Require that your members attend meetings themselves rather than send representatives. It is the input of those specific business sector and community leaders you seek, their insights, their abilities, and their ambassadorial services you want—not just someone from their organization to warm a chair. On the other hand, don't automatically remove a member from the BAC if they cannot always make it to meetings. They may provide other talents, contacts, or assets that would be foolish to loose from the BAC.

Should you require a minimum financial contribution?: A minority of schools requires advisory council members to make an annual financial contribution to the school; most do not. If fundraising is one of your major BAC objectives, you may want to consider requiring it. Those in favor of a minimum contribution believe it ensures 100% board participation and makes clear to members the financial expectations that accompany BAC membership. Setting a minimum contribution too high, may discourage service on the BAC. If you are seeking diversity of opinion and perspective on your BAC, it may include individuals who are not yet sufficiently involved and invested in the school to commit to large annual gift. If you have successful start-up executives on your BAC, they made not yet be able or comfortable committing to a large annual sum. If you set the minimum contribution too low, you may risk “leaving money on the table.” BAC members capable of giving higher sums may feel they have given what was required and, so, feel no need to give more. One alternative, which you will see in some of the Appendix documents, is to let BAC members know that they are not required to make a contribution; but, like all those affiliated with the school, they may be asked by the foundation or development team consider to making a gift.

BUSINESS ADVISORY COUNCIL - RESOURCE KIT

Note: Many of the individuals you will seek to recruit for your BAC may serve on corporate boards that pay fees and cover expenses. Unless your school has the funds to do otherwise, be sure it is clear that members are responsible for their own travel and other expenses related to participation in the BAC.

4. Determine Structural and Administrative Details.

While some BACs have no structural or operational documents, the better practice is to have at least some written description of purpose and procedures in place. Most BACs do have a document that outlines its purpose, structure and broad operational terms--that document could be bylaws, a charter, or guidelines.

As illustrated by the Appendix documents, some structural/operational documents are very precise and detailed, and some are written to provide only the broad parameters for operation. Some schools are required by statute or regulations to have formal bylaws for an advisory council. If a BAC is intended primarily for fundraising, rather than primarily to provide advice and act as a sounding board for the dean, you should strongly consider more formal and detailed documents. Schools that are not required to have formal bylaws may prefer the flexibility of a simple charter or guidelines. Since BACs are generally intended to be a valued resource to the dean, a structural style that is easy to operate and calibrate is often preferred. The objectives for the BAC, the traditions of your school, any legal or regulatory requirements, and school administration preferences are among the factors to consider as you decide what works best for your school.

Whatever format is selected, the document should address at least:

- a) Purpose and objectives of the BAC
- b) Number of members
- c) Role and responsibilities of members
- d) Method of appointing or electing members
- e) Member term and whether renewable
- f) Frequency of meetings

Consideration of the purpose and objectives of a BAC, the number of members and their roles and responsibilities of members were discussed in earlier sections.

Appoint or Elect: For most BACs, those with less formal and detailed operational documents, members are appointed by the dean. Recommendations may come from current BAC

June 2014

BUSINESS ADVISORY COUNCIL - RESOURCE KIT

members, other business people, alumni, or faculty. This method allows the school the greatest flexibility to shape, and re-shape, the BAC as changing circumstances warrant.

More formally structured BACs may want to consider a self-perpetuating method, by which the council members nominate and elect new members. As long as the BAC is functioning smoothly and remains as asset to the school, this method removes from the dean's shoulders some duties related to member recruitment. However, this method also could make it much more difficult for a dean to ensure the BAC members reflect the business sectors, skills, and general diversity essential to an effective BAC, or to remedy problems arising from a dysfunctional member or group of members.

Of, course it is possible to craft any number of hybrid processes that include some combination of appointed and elected members. The pivotal consideration is always what method works best for your school's needs.

Member Terms: Unlike a governing board, it may not be as essential to continually refresh the composition of the members of a BAC. Indeed, many BACs do not establish fixed terms for their members. That practice, though, can lead to sticky problems without ready solutions. For example, a member who loses interest or whose business or personal priorities have changed significantly may simply stop attending meetings. Similarly a member might become an extremely negative or disruptive element. It may be problematic, for any number of reasons, to ask such members to resign. So, a dean is left to find a more complex resolution to resolve the situation. If members serve for fixed terms, then there is always the ability to thank them for their service at the end of the term and appoint a new member, which provides a simple resolution to a potentially complex situation.

Some deans are concerned that term limits mean they would be forced to lose valuable council members. That concern is addressed to some degree by making the term renewable. The next consideration is whether there should be an established limit on how many times the term can be renewed without a required period of time off the council. Such a required "time-off" is common, and most agree important, to assure a properly functioning governing board. The considerations may be a little different for an advisory council. So some BACs have fixed renewable terms, without any mandatory time-off; leaving the dean free to continue to reappoint any member who continues to bring value to council. With a little finesse, a dean can still thank a non-productive member at the end their term and not reappoint the problem.

June 2014

BUSINESS ADVISORY COUNCIL - RESOURCE KIT

Who chairs the BAC?: It is very common for the dean to chair the BAC and run its meetings. The emerging best better practice is to have the BAC and its meetings chaired by a BAC member. Members feel more vested, engage more actively and speak more freely at the meetings when chaired by one of their own. The chair could be elected by the members or appointed by the dean.

The chair should have strong leadership skills, be able to manage conflict, and be able to control dominant personalities. A good chair should be skilled enough to keep the meeting moving, and to maintain a positive and upbeat tone. The chair should also be able maintain objectivity, and be good at brainstorming and problem-solving.

Committees: A large BAC may not be able to function without a committee structure. Typical standing committees often include: executive, nominating/membership, marketing, and development. The advice from well-functioning BACs is to keep committees to a minimum. Consider creating committees only on an as-needed basis, designed to function for limited times and purposes. Avoid turning meetings into a series of committee reports, because what you are really seeking is open, robust of discussion and innovative ideas.

Smaller BAC can generally operate very well with no standing committees. Create task forces, with set deadlines, to deal with specific issues or projects as they arise. The goal is to keep the entire BAC engage and interacting.

Frequency of Meetings: Most BACs meet twice to three times per year. Some meet only once a year; a few meet monthly—but, both of these are the exception rather than the rule.

BAC members are business people with lots of responsibilities and full calendars; they will not likely commit to a BAC that takes up too much time. Aim for enough meetings to accomplish the objectives and ensure members remain engaged; but not a schedule of regular, frequent meetings that will require a burdensome time commitment. The people you most desire to serve on your BAC do have not time for that.

5. Determine Meeting Format and Content.

The timing, format and content of your meeting should be shaped by the logistical needs and the interest of your members. The size of your BAC, the geographic range of your members, and the timing of your committee meetings will all influence what works best. Ask you

June 2014

BUSINESS ADVISORY COUNCIL - RESOURCE KIT

members what they prefer. The Appendix materials contain sample agendas, and sample interest surveys.

Most BACs meet for 2-3 hours, up to half a day. Some, whose members have long distances to travel, gather in the evening for dinner (and perhaps committee meetings), and then meet for some portion of the next day.

There should be some social component to your meeting. You want to get to know them, and you want them to get to know each other. You want to develop a collegial bond among the group. But, remember that you must also be respectful of members' time.

Remember you are gathering a BAC to gain insight and feedback from the members. So, don't overwhelm them with faculty and staff reports; minimize the "dog and pony shows" from faculty, students and staff. The school side of the house should talk less and listen more. Similarly, don't make the meeting simply a series of committee reports. The aim is to engage the members in discussion so you can reap the benefit of their perspective and insights. Be sure there is plenty of time for questions and answers.

The most effective BACs ask members to discuss strategic issues, provide feedback on proposed new initiatives, or to make suggestions for better engaging the business community. Most important, make sure they feel their time is being well-spent, that it is of value—if it does not seem so, they will not stay engaged.

6. Establish Practices That Keep Members Engaged Between Meetings.

While schools should keep the number of formal meetings to a minimum, regular contact between meetings will help to keep the members engaged.

If a member misses a meeting, call the member to give an update on the action items. Invite members to the school's holiday party and to graduation, or arrange for the BAC to sit in the president's box once a season for athletic events. Invite members to speak to classes, or to attend student award ceremonies. In short, make members understand they are of value to the school.

Among the Appendix documents, you will find several examples of council self-evaluation forms. Each year, members should complete a self-evaluation and an evaluation of the BAC

June 2014

BUSINESS ADVISORY COUNCIL - RESOURCE KIT

as a whole. This practice can provide very useful feedback on BAC operation and generate some suggestion for improved interaction. It also offers a chance for a disengaged member to assess whether it is time to recommit or to gracefully withdraw.

C. Business Advisory Councils as Accreditation Assets

Because it can be such an effective sounding board and provide pivotal feedback, a BAC can be a strong asset in accreditation preparation. The business community, which must have a readily available, well-educated and properly prepared pool of employees to operate successfully, is certainly a major stakeholder for any business program. A well-organized BAC reflects that group of major external stakeholders for a business program and can play an important role in all phases of accreditation, including the initial self-study, interim quality reports, and the reaffirmation process.

ACBSP Standard 3 requires a business school or program to have a systematic procedure to determine the requirements and expectations of stakeholders, gauge their satisfaction, regularly listen and learn from the stakeholders, and to utilize that information to develop increasingly effective programs, offerings and services. Advisory councils are comprised of alumni, business leaders and government officials, and all of whom could be potential employers for the school's graduates, and all of whom have a stake in assuring that the schools programs are graduating students whose education prepares them to step into available jobs and to contribute to economic growth through successful careers.

BAC input can be invaluable in aiding a school in developing in its students the skill sets and knowledge-base potential employers look for in new hires. Since the business community provides the market for a school's graduates, information gleaned from a BAC may be viewed as a roadmap for student success in the workplace. Regular input from this key stakeholder group can help a school achieve continuous improvement and organizational learning as well as partnership development. These are core values of ACBSP accreditation.

Throughout the initial accreditation process, advisory councils can help the school in a number of ways, including assistance in developing or expanding strategic planning efforts, creating and documenting stakeholder feedback loops, and potentially reviewing sections of the school's self-study.

During the evaluation team's site visit, advisory council members may be interviewed to ascertain the level of activity and engagement in school functions. Questions the ACBSP Evaluation Teams could ask the BAC members during a site visit to validate an institution's self-study report may include:

1. What role they serve on the committee.

June 2014

BUSINESS ADVISORY COUNCIL - RESOURCE KIT

2. What goes on in their meetings?
3. How many times does the committee meet per year?
4. Why do they serve on the Advisory committee?
5. Is there a rotation schedule for the committee?
6. Why do they stay on the committee?
7. Review the minutes from their minutes.
8. Who is in charge of the meetings?
9. Do you elect a chair, *etc.*?
10. Why do you believe the advisory committee is important?
11. What contributions does the committee provide to the school?

The site team may also use council members' input to gauge the school's influence in the regional business community.

Advisory council members are a good resource during a school's bi-annual quality reporting process. Stakeholder activities are one of the areas of accreditor focus, and reporting data on council interaction with faculty and students can provide evidence of this activity.

The level of involvement between a school and its advisory council should develop over time. Initially, as a council is formed, contact may be limited to the council and school administrators, such as the dean or department chair, or the person responsible for developing the council. Opportunities should be sought out to encourage both formal and informal interaction between students and council members. Finally, developing and documenting regular interactions between faculty and council members can illustrate to accreditors that the school is obtaining and using the feedback necessary to keep course content and curricula current in a rapidly changing business environment.

Depending of the size and nature of the school, it may be useful to create different councils at various levels in the organization. There may be program specific councils, for example, accounting, as well as department or college level councils.

A BAC can play a role in program review and curricular change, providing insight and suggestions to ensure content relevancy and currency. A BAC can strengthen the bond between town and gown, between theory and practice, and can serve as sounding boards for change. In summary, a BAC, planned-well and used effectively, offers a critical tool that can assist your school in meeting accreditation standards.

June 2014

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June 2014

E. Appendix

Included in the Appendix are a wealth of sample documents from existing BACs. The documents include charters, bylaws, agendas, survey forms, self-evaluation forms, and more. These documents can provide examples and inspiration as you develop the unique model that best fits your circumstances and best serves your program's needs.

Name of Institution and Appendix Page Number

Alaska Anchorage, University of 1	Florida State University 200
Amarillo College 2	George Washington University 218
American University in Cairo 6	Georgia College and State University 233
Appalachian State University 35	Georgia, University of 242
Arizona State University 39	Hanover College 248
Arkansas Fort Smith, University of 42	Hawaii, University of 251
Bentley University 47	Hull, University of 265
Berry College 59	Illinois State University 270
Bloomsburg University 63	Ithaca College 331
Boise State University 68	John Carroll University 333
California State University, Channel Islands 73	Kennesaw State University 338
Canada College 78	Lone Star College 340
Catawba College 106	Louisiana Monroe, University of 365
Chicago, University of 113	Marshall University 370
Cincinnati, University of 114	Maryland Eastern Shore, University of 381
City University of New York 116	Maryland, University of 386
Clark College 132	McNeese State University 400
Clemson University 148	Michigan State University 403
Collin College 151	Michigan Technological University 404
Copenhagen Business School 161	Missouri Rolla, University of 407
DePaul University 163	New Hampshire, University of 412
Dubai, University of 165	North Carolina Pembroke, University of 415
Eastern Connecticut State University 168	North Carolina State University 418
Emory University 169	Northeastern University 423
ENAE Business School 181	Ohio Northern University 425
Fairmont State University 186	Ohio University 427
Florida International University 189	

June 2014

BUSINESS ADVISORY COUNCIL - RESOURCE KIT

Old Dominion University 431	Southern Indiana, University of 561
Pepperdine University 436	Southern Mississippi, University of 570
Portland State University 448	Southern Polytechnic State University 581
Prairie View A&M University 449	St. Edward's University 586
Queen's University Canada 456	Stanford Graduate School 591
Quinnipiac University 460	Sydney, University of Technology 593
Radford University 470	Temple University 594
Regis University 473	Texas Dallas, University of 609
Rhode Island College 480	Texas San Antonio, University of 616
Richmond, University of 483	Utah State University 624
Rochester Institute of Technology 495	Valdosta State University 627
Rowan University 496	Vermont, University of 632
Salisbury University 505	Warwick Business School United Kingdom 636
Samford University 507	Washington State University 640
San Diego, University of 512	Webster University 649
Santiago Canyon College 513	Wellington, Victoria University of New Zealand 657
Seton Hall University 517	Western Kentucky University 660
Shidler College 519	Western Ontario, University of Canada 666
Shoreline Community College 523	Xavier University 694
Simmons College 529	
Slippery Rock University 535	
South Florida, University of 539	
Southern Illinois University 558	