

: Beyond Grey Pinstripes

INTRODUCTION

On October 21, 2009, The Aspen Institute Center for Business Education released the 2009-2010 edition of *Beyond Grey Pinstripes*, its biennial alternative ranking of business schools. On November 6, in New York City, CBE held a two-day event to honor schools in the Global 100, which featured an awards breakfast, celebratory cocktail party, and workshops on current issues in business school education.

This two-day celebration represented the culmination of one of Aspen CBE's major program activities: a survey data collection and analysis process, each cycle of which takes 18 months to complete. Held regularly since 1998, the scope of the data collected has become progressively more ambitious, and the number of participating schools has steadily grown, totaling 149 in the 2009-2010 round. *Beyond Grey Pinstripes* draws media attention to social and environmental issues in business and to the schools that are placing these issues front and center in their curricula. Furthermore, more often than not it proves to be a rewarding experience for the schools that participate.

WHY ANOTHER RANKING?

MBA rankings are a controversial topic in business education. While they are typically popular among the alumni of schools that consistently rank highly, and they can provide a concise synopsis for prospective students, they can also contribute to a myopic view of what makes a business school the "best," may sometimes be based on unsound research, and can lead to a misallocation of student interest, alumni funding, and faculty and administrator attention.

Whereas a major purpose of many rankings is to generate "buzz" that will sell magazines, *Beyond Grey Pinstripes* has a different aim: it is undertaken as part of Aspen CBE's broader effort to ensure that MBA programs are preparing future business leaders to both identify the opportunities and mitigate the costs of business' relationship with society and the environment. Specifically, the program has two main goals:

- To provide a detailed "map" of what is currently taught, so that faculty, administrators, students and alumni can benchmark their schools and identify best practices from around the world
- To offer public recognition of the faculty, departments, and schools that are doing excellent work, which may encourage schools to allocate greater resources to this aspect of MBA education

HOW TO PARTICIPATE

To be ranked by *Beyond Grey Pinstripes*, schools that meet a certain set of qualifying criteria must opt in to the process and submit data. Schools that have full-time, AACSB- or EFMD- accredited programs are eligible to participate. Aspen staff engage with these accreditors to identify contacts at eligible schools and reach out them directly. Before the submission period opens, Aspen staff work to assure that each business school that has not replied to our initial invitation receives further information via email or phone. Schools that meet our eligibility criteria and have communicated an interest in participating are given a personalized username and password, with which they can access the *Beyond Grey Pinstripes* online survey site.

To opt in to the 2011-2012 *Beyond Grey Pinstripes* survey or to become your school's point of contact in the process, email Justin Goldbach at justin.goldbach@aspenninst.org.

WHAT ARE WE LOOKING FOR?

From start to finish, *Beyond Grey Pinstripes* is an exhaustive process. The survey seeks to identify all classroom teaching, faculty research, and extracurricular activities that are related to the social and

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environmental impacts of mainstream business. Aspen CBE hires a contingent of business Ph.D. students to act as research fellows and score the data. To score school data, all information is stripped of school and faculty names to the fullest extent possible, and is rated “blindly” by multiple reviewers. Aspen staff also spot-check the fellows’ scoring decisions.

Out of all this information, we seek to answer the following set of questions:

- **If students want to take courses related to social and environmental issues, do they have the opportunity?**

This metric measures the raw number of courses that a school submitted in the survey, regardless of course length or core/elective status, that meet a basic threshold for consideration. Only courses that have some clear linkage to such issues are considered – although reviewers use the widest possible interpretation of social and environmental issues, including social entrepreneurship, diversity, labor rights, pollution, nonprofit management, etc.

- **Given the total amount of teaching that takes place in the MBA program (i.e. course hours per student multiplied by number of students), how much relates to social or environmental issues?**

For each course submitted, schools submit information on how many credit hours the course is worth, what percentage of the course relates to social and environmental issues, and how many students are enrolled. Scoring for this metric is thus adjusted for class size and length of program.

- **Do particular courses specifically teach how mainstream, for-profit business can be used as a force for social or environmental good?**

Whereas other metrics give credit for courses that are not directly focused on profit-making business (for example, courses in nonprofit management), this metric measures the development of mainstream business leaders who will consider social and environmental issues. This is the most subjective of the metrics, but we review each individual course blindly, and use multiple raters who come to consensus in assessing each course.

- **Are faculty committed to academic inquiry regarding the social and environmental impacts of business, as indicated by their publications?**

In the 2007-2008 survey cycle, for the Faculty Research section, schools were asked to submit the names of faculty members who were conducting scholarly research in social, environmental and ethical areas. We then cross-references all faculty names with the articles published in 70 top-tier academic journals, selected by Aspen Institute staff in consultation with a faculty advisory board, during the applicable calendar years.

In this survey cycle, however, we aimed to be more inclusive by counting relevant scholarly articles published in any peer-reviewed, business journal. All schools were asked to submit an Excel spreadsheet containing the names of faculty, articles, journals, journal ISSN numbers, edition, volume, abstract, etc. Our Research Fellows then reviewed all article titles and abstracts using similar criteria to the “Availability of Relevant Courses” metric.

For more detailed information on survey methodology, please visit the [Beyond Grey Pinstripes web site](#).

BENEFITS TO SCHOOLS

Apart from the excitement among schools that rank in the Global 100, and in addition to the value of contributing to a major rigorous research effort aimed at improving MBA education around the world,

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representatives from MBA programs that participate in the *Beyond Grey Pinstripes* consistently cite four benefits to their school that come from participating in the survey:

1. **Standardized assessment and benchmarking** of a school's achievements in teaching on social and environmental issues. Many schools have never conducted a thorough review of these topics before. The *Beyond Grey Pinstripes* survey allows a school to do so, using a standard format that can easily be compared to peer schools.
2. **Reward for faculty and staff** who have worked on these issues. At many schools, *Beyond Grey Pinstripes* serves as an opportunity to internally praise and raise the profile of individuals who have built powerful programs in an area sometimes considered to be out of the mainstream.
3. **National PR / Marketing** The 2007-2008 *Beyond Grey Pinstripes* survey was covered by *The Financial Times*, *Business Week*, *The Economist*, *The Washington Post*, *the Chronicle of Higher Education*, and many other publications. Coursework from participating schools is also frequently featured in our white paper series, *A Closer Look at Business Education*, which reaches 20,000+ thought leaders. Our websites record 1,000,000 visits per year.
4. **Internal Marketing / Alumni Relations** Schools very often report on outcomes from the research survey in alumni magazines and via local press outreach. Alumni are increasingly interested in learning how their schools fare on social and environmental issues.

Aspen CBE is grateful to the schools that participate in its *Beyond Grey Pinstripes* survey, and enthusiastically welcomes new participants! Please contact Justin Goldbach at justin.goldbach@aspeninst.org to learn more about the program, the survey methodology, and the benefits of participation.

RESOURCES

BeyondGreyPinstripes.org – World's biggest MBA database, including detailed records on thousands of courses and information on extracurriculars, university centers, and more, for 128 schools on six continents.

CasePlace.org – A free and practical on-line resource for up-to-date case studies, syllabi, and innovative teaching materials on business and sustainability. Created for the educators who will shape our next generation of business leaders!

A Closer Look is a regular series of briefing papers on topical issues in MBA education, based on the research and programs of the Aspen Institute. The Aspen Institute's [Center for Business Education](http://CenterforBusinessEducation.org) encourages future business leaders to innovate at the intersection of corporate profits and social impacts.

→ Contact Justin.Goldbach@aspeninst.org to order reprints or to offer feedback.