1. Executive Summary

Describe program

The EDB is an executive-style, part-time cohorted program that prepares students to conduct interdisciplinary, scholarly research on applied topics. It is premium priced program and competes against other DBA programs at other North American R1 schools. The program recruits a limited number of working professionals with substantial managerial experience. The curriculum is designed to be completed in lockstep over three academic years (although some students may take up to five years to complete their dissertations). One of the distinctive features of the curriculum is the inclusion of group project “lab” courses where students learn research techniques and tools by using them in groups under the guidance of a designated faculty member. Some of the best-known and most accomplished researchers and teachers of the Robinson College of Business participate in the EDB program. Graduates of the program may remain in their current high-level roles or may change careers, including transitioning to university teaching/research. Graduates report a high degree of satisfaction with the program, including their use of research in their careers. Some alumni continue to conduct scholarly research and publish results in peer-reviewed journals or present at academic conferences.

One reason for the success and excellent reputation of the program is the leadership and faculty. Lars Mathiassen is widely viewed as a leader of this new and growing segment of the business school industry. Louis Grabowski is also well-known and respected in the industry and in organizations such as the Executive DBA Council (EDBAC).

Primary recommendations

The primary recommendations from the program review team are summarized below. The report elaborates on these and other recommendations.

- The program must attempt to increase the number of applications by engaging in more aggressive marketing strategies at the local and national level.
- The name of the degree (Executive Doctorate in Business, EDB) awarded is inconsistent with the vast majority of competitors. To avoid limiting applications and causing confusion,
we recommend that the EDB should be renamed to the common name, DBA (Doctorate in Business Administration).

- The university should work to increase the clarity of the program’s financial contributions and consider relevant benchmarks for the appropriate effective contribution to the university (i.e. tax) and tuition for students.
- The program should encourage more faculty to participate in advising and teaching, including non-tenure track faculty with considerable industry experience and active research program. The College should also consider encouraging more mid-career and junior faculty to participate in the program, if this can be done without diminishing progress toward building a research record necessary for promotion and tenure.

2. Contributions to the Discipline

a. To which subfields of the discipline does the program make the most significant scholarly, creative, or clinical contributions?

Looking at the titles of the EDB dissertations since 2012, one sees that most business disciplines are covered, while other fields outside traditional business areas are occasionally included. Consistent with the objectives of the program, many of the dissertations are multidisciplinary and applied. Certain fields such as marketing and Computer Information Systems (CIS) receive more attention.

b. To what extent are the faculty number and composition sufficient to support the research and educational missions of the program?

The research expectations of the EDB program support GSU’s strategic plan. One of the Core Values stated in “Vision 2020” is Rigor and Relevance which is expounded as: “We produce rigorous and relevant research that stimulates the academic world and allows us to deliver educational experiences that inspire current and future business leaders to advance, innovate and transform business practice.” The EDB program squarely helps working professionals to conduct scholarly research, thus helping enhance the connection between rigor and relevance.

The Robinson College of Business has approximately 200 faculty of which approximately 120 are tenure track. There are approximately 25 “core” faculty participating in the EDB program in a typical year. The core faculty meet regularly and are responsible for teaching all 12 courses, for mentoring all students, and for chairing EDB dissertations. The number of faculty is deemed to be sufficient for the size and structure of the program today, albeit more faculty would be needed if the plan is to grow the program and admit more students.

There is no plan for the EDB to grow beyond a cohort of 24 with an expected total enrollment reaching an average 60. If the college decided that it should increase the size of the program then additional resources, including more participating core EDB faculty, would be needed. Given the overall faculty size and the number of tenure track faculty plus the option of using non-tenure track faculty and faculty from other colleges and recently-retired faculty, it is realistic to believe that sufficient faculty exist for some growth beyond what is planned. However, unless the size of the faculty increases, greater participation in the EDB will mean less activity elsewhere.

Currently, few associate professors and no assistant professors are advisors to students in the EDB. The college should consider the benefits of encouraging more mid-career and junior faculty to participate, while recognizing the potential risks to careers if the work load is not carefully
managed. If junior faculty participate, serious consideration should be given to requiring their teaching/advising to be counted as in-load to prevent distraction from their traditional research program. Moreover, non-tenure track faculty with substantial industry experience and an active research program could be invited to participate in the program as members of dissertation committees, thus enhancing the industry (applied) component of the dissertations.

A relatively small number of faculty are invited to act as advisors for group research projects. Groups are assigned to advisors who have an appropriate methodological background. This system works in most cases, but there are occasions where a better fit might be found if more faculty were available from which to select. These project-advising faculty are expected to become dissertation advisors for all three students in each group. The program should consider if it would be beneficial to provide additional faculty choices to student groups and provide more flexibility to students to select advisors and chairs of their dissertations that are more closely aligned to their topics.

c. Based on your knowledge of similar programs, evaluate its overall strength.

The focus of the program is engaged interdisciplinary scholarship so the research expectations for its students are applied and rigorous. This gives the program a strong place among North America’s premier executive business doctorates. Many of the faculty teaching and advising students are among Robinson’s best-known faculty, including Regents professors of the University of Georgia system and university distinguished research professors.

GSU’s location in Atlanta is a strength of the program. The major airport hub makes it practical for students from other states and even other nations to enroll. Atlanta is home to many Fortune 500 companies, which helps create a stream of applicants and provides access to corporate data and a rich repository of real-world business problems.

To support students who desire to teach part-time or full-time, the EDB has organized a teaching workshop as an optional component of the program. The workshop is taught by nationally recognized teaching expert, Harvey Brightman. Access to this expert who is a former Robinson faculty member is a competitive advantage.

Student surveys indicate that students are generally highly satisfied. Alumni surveys also indicate that graduates of the program are very satisfied with their experience. These observations are consistent with the statements from students and alumni during the program review visit. While very positive, it is not possible to objectively compare student/alumni satisfaction against those of other schools. In addition, there is not sufficient data to conclude that meaningful trends in satisfaction exist. The program should continue to track student and alumni perceptions over time.

The program leadership is strong. The team especially recognizes the visionary leadership of Lars Mathiassen in creating and developing the program. Dr. Mathiassen and Dr. Grabowski are also strong advocates for DBA programs and well known for leadership by faculty and directors at other business schools.

3. Quality of the Graduate Program

a. Evaluate the quality and currency of the curriculum in terms of disciplinary standards and trends.
The content of the curriculum is appropriate. It is balanced between theory and methods and didactic coursework and project-based labs, allowing students to focus their research using both quantitative and qualitative methodology. The courses and labs are intentionally interdisciplinary, which is appropriate for this type of degree. Students spend the first three semesters learning how to conduct research in groups, while the final three semesters conducting research individually under the supervision of a faculty mentor.

The program leadership and faculty have revised the curriculum to keep it up to date. They have also introduced co-curricular activities such as the previously mentioned teaching workshop. Other curricular innovations include a series of short workshops called “lunch and learn” which cover topics such as “ethics in research” and “research resources in a modern university library.” Another innovation is the use of the previously mentioned group projects. These lab classes teach students research methodologies and the use of tools (e.g., SPSS) through hands-on experiences.

**b. Evaluate the quality of both incoming and graduated students in the program, relative to discipline-specific norms.**

Incoming students have substantial management experience (about 14 years on average), and they have a strong business background. This compares favorably to some of the best DBA programs in the country.

The quality of the graduates is also very high, in part, due to the strength of the curriculum in terms of theory and content, methods, research labs. The strength of the graduates is also demonstrated by the quality of the published doctoral dissertations that are publicly available on the website of the EDB program. Besides, several publications have resulted from the students’ dissertations, which are also publicly posted on the website of the EDB program.

Though a master’s degree is required for admissions, a master’s degree in business or a related field is not a requirement for admission, so program leadership might consider whether additional courses/seminars with business content would be useful.

Graduation rate of 76% within five years is commendable and a clear indication of the high quality of the students. It is consistent with other high-quality DBA programs in the nation.

In item 1b.1 in the self-study report, between 2015-1016 and 2017-18, both admitted/applied and enrolled/applied ratios increased. In the former case from 67% to 78% and in the latter case from 26% to 53%. The program’s leadership has provided evidence that this is not an indication of less strict admission standards. However, it does show that the number of applicants has declined. This is a concern.

Appendix 2 shows a decline in all SLO’s (in the dissertation chairs’ view) over the reported three years. The program’s administration explained that learning outcomes have only been measured with the current, formal system for three years. Faculty expectations have increased over that period as the system and its use became clearer. While this explanation may be valid, the program leadership should carefully monitor SLO performance as the process and goals become clear and stable.

Almost all EDB students are employed throughout the program and may continue in their same jobs after graduation. Therefore, the program does not use the percent employed shortly after graduation or salary after graduation as a metric of success. A significant number of students
change jobs after graduation for personal satisfaction rather than for increased responsibility and compensation. The program uses survey data from students and alumni to demonstrate that the program teaches skills that are frequently used by its graduates. These surveys also indicate a high degree of satisfaction with the program.

c. Based on your professional experience, are the enrollment, retention, and graduation rates appropriate? If not, what changes might the department make to improve them?

The program uses a high degree of mentoring and has a research focus. Given these characteristics, it has an appropriate enrollment given its structure and goals. The number of students is in the range of other DBA programs with a research focus and expectations of an original individual dissertation. Also, like other high-quality, research-oriented DBA’s, the EDB has most of its attrition during the first year as students more fully understand the expectations and time requirements.

As mentioned in the previous section, graduation rates are not only appropriate but are also commendable. The program self-study reports a notable retention rate of 84% since the beginning of the program.

As previously reported, the number of applications to the program is declining. While it still enrolls a quality class at the desired size, further decline in applications may lead to smaller classes or lower quality. The program administration is taking steps to better promote the program through more intensive marketing efforts including targeting students with a digital marketing program. It should expand these efforts and increase high quality applications for the program.

d. Are there appropriate resources and support structures for the program?

The program enrolls 58 students currently and has 98 alumni. To support current students, the program employs a strong, diverse set of faculty advisors and instructors. The program has expanded its staff to provide tutoring and other services for students. The Robinson College rents space in a building in Buckhead with the program contributing to the cost of this space. These and other available resources are appropriate.

There are also resources primarily for alumni. In December 2016, the Center for Engaged Business Research (CEBR) was approved. This Center is organized around current research projects that are being addressed by alumni and faculty. It provides a sense of community and provides research resources to alumni of the program. This is a very promising Center that is poised to engage the EDB alumni, facilitate the publishing of completed dissertations in journals and conferences, and encourage new research projects with EDB alumni and current GSU faculty and PhD students. To date CEBR is about to hold its 3rd research workshop and has 15 active Research Associates, 12 Faculty Research Associates, and 14 ongoing research projects.

A summary of the revenue and expenses that the EDB will experience if its goal of having an average of 60 total students enrolled is achieved is presented in Appendix 1. This shows that students in that scenario will contribute $2.1M through tuition. Total direct expenses during the year are estimated to be $1.6M. These expenses include personnel, rent in Buckhead, marketing, etc. This leaves $0.5M to contribute to GSU, which bills the program for tuition and fees in the amount of $0.9M. While the EDB does not generate surplus revenue to cover the full amount billed by GSU, the university would lose $0.5M annually if the program did not exist. The program review team recommends that the university clarify that the program makes a positive financial
contribution. In addition, the team recommends that the university considers the amount that it bills the program. Based on our experience and knowledge of other off-campus, overload-teaching degree programs in which the program pays for faculty overloads and facilities, the university “tax” and fees assessed by GSU in the order of about 40% is deemed extremely high.

e. Evaluate the potential for growth.

There is strong demand for executive business doctorates from potential students across the country, but the number of these programs is rapidly increasing. There is strong demand for graduates with the knowledge and skills that come from the DBA degree. The most significant hindrance to further significant growth of the EDB is resources with faculty being the most important resource and marketing being the next most important.

Research doctorates in business schools are generally small as compared to those of colleges of science and engineering. The size of business doctorates is constrained by the size of the school’s research active faculty. The Georgia State EDB is a research doctorate and so the Robinson College has no plans to expand enrollment beyond an entering cohort of 24 with an expected total enrollment of about 60. This decision is important to assure that the EDB can maintain its research focus and its quality, plus a larger cohort could facilitate the financial viability of the program.

4. Quality of the Research Culture

a. Based on your knowledge of the discipline, what is your assessment of the quality of the department’s faculty?

As indicated in our response to 2.c, Robinson’s best-known faculty, such as Regents professors and distinguished university professors are teaching and mentoring in the program and are chairing dissertations. Thus, the quality of the faculty teaching and mentoring in the EDB program is deemed excellent.

b. From a disciplinary perspective, what is your assessment of the research areas in which the department is already strong, and areas with the potential for further growth?

The EDB program makes a strong contribution to the interdisciplinary research portfolio of Robinson and GSU through the peer-reviewed articles published by the EDB students under the guidance of the faculty. Within the interdisciplinary framework, there are relatively few faculty and research projects related to accounting, finance, and operations management. Robinson’s faculty is particularly strong in research by faculty in marketing and CIS based on publications on the widely known UT-Dallas list. Further growth could arise from other areas, particularly as the EDB program recruits faculty from other areas to teach and mentor in the program.

c. What is your assessment of the support structures for faculty and student research (e.g., grant writing support, travel grants, laboratories, student funding, administrative support, etc.)?

The review team believes that there is sufficient administrative support, data and library resources for current students. Many of the students participate in conferences and seminars. While these activities are valuable and add to research productivity, the program does not have sufficient resources to support student travel to conferences. However, given the executive nature of the program, students are generally able to fund their own way to conferences.
d. Do you have any recommendations for improvements in the research culture, productivity, and results?

The EDB program has a strong emphasis on academic scholarly research. However, given the practitioner (applied) nature of the EDB program and the background of the students, perhaps including more practitioner-oriented faculty with strong industry experience could help the program, such as non-tenure track faculty and senior faculty with an applied research focus. Moreover, emphasis on practitioner-oriented journals (in addition to academic outlets) could be valuable for students and faculty to publish their research. These outlets might include prestigious practitioner outlets such as the Sloan Management Review and Harvard Business Review. In addition, they might include discipline or trade specific journals/magazines and general popular outlets. It might also include self-created and published podcasts to accompany dissertations or other publications.

5. Goals

a. Are the goals outlined in its self-study appropriate for the unit?

The program uses guidance from GSU's strategic plan in decisions about the continued development of the EDB., especially:

- “Strengthen and grow and base of distinctive graduate and professional programs.”
- "Become a leading public research university addressing the most challenging issues of the 21st century."
- “Achieve distinction in globalizing the university.”

The program has adopted these internal goals:

- Raise the quality of the students by increasing the number of applications. Target prospective students through effective digital marketing strategies.
- Work to further develop the profile and mentoring of EDB advisors through collaborative seminars and by instituting a formal system of feedback from advisees.
- Continue to grow CBER as a mechanism to increase collaborative research and enhance the dissemination of knowledge and publications by alumni and students. In addition, mechanisms should be expanded to advance virtual networks and bridges with alumni and the world business community.
- Monitor through EDBAC and other research business schools, DBA programs offered throughout the world. Innovate the structure and curriculum of the program as necessary.

b. Are they in accord with disciplinary trends?

The goals for executive business doctorates across North America vary. Many provide advanced knowledge and skills but have limited expectations for research. The GSU EDB is a leader in its chosen focus on more rigorous scholarly research with an applied focus.

c. Are the priorities reasonable?
The most important priority for the EDB is to increase its quality while maintaining a research focus. Its research focus has the central idea of engaged scholarship with an applied focus, which is improving the reputation of GSU and its business school while improving the lives of its graduates and society more broadly. The priorities are reasonable and in line with the priorities of Robinson and GSU

d. Are the resource needs realistic?

The EDB program seems financially self-sustaining, and the resource needs are realistic. By slightly increasing the size of the student body with better marketing and recruiting, and with a corresponding increase in the number of core DBA faculty the program can help to increase the resources needed to be more financially viable.

e. Are any changes or additions warranted?

In our opinion, the name of the program (Executive Doctorate in Business) is problematic in terms of marketing the program and positioning itself in the market. Increasingly the term DBA (Doctorate in Business Administration) is the norm for such programs. A change in the program name would be useful to better promote the program and enhance student and alumni satisfaction and career prospects. It would eliminate the confusion caused by a unique degree name.

Moreover, given the desire of several EDB students to pursue some teaching opportunities after the program, additional teaching resources, such as workshops and other teaching training may be useful to increase the value of the program.

6. Summary and Recommendations

a. Summarize the major strengths and challenges.

The program has a strong body of senior and accomplished faculty who teach the EDB courses and mentor the EDB students and chair their dissertations. The leadership of the EDB program is strong, passionate and stable, and it is committed to the success of the program. The administration of the Robinson School is also supportive of the EDB program. And the EDB program supports the business school’s connection to industry and practice and its outreach efforts. The goals of the EDB program are consistent with the overall strategic goals of the University and the Robinson School.

In terms of challenges, the name of the program (EDB) may be confusing to the market and prospective students. This may explain the drop-in applications given the increased competition from newly-created DBA programs. Second, the financials of the EDB program may be challenging to the school given the tuition and fees subsidy required by the University, particularly for out-of-state students. Given the importance of increasing the diversity of the program and recruiting nationally and even internationally, the financials of the program may create a problem for the Robinson College of Business. Accordingly, increasing the number of students to raise tuition relative to the fixed costs (teaching, staff, facilities) may help to promote the long-term viability of the EDB program. Third, including more Robinson faculty as “core” EDB faculty may be needed to address the mentoring of EDB students and provide more personalized advising to students that better relates to their research interests.

b. List your recommendations.
• The program must increase the number of applications and accordingly increase the cohort size to about 24 students. The program relies on events such as information sessions and web-based events to inform and recruit students. These should be continued, but they do not seem to generate new interest to a large extent. The program has recently contracted with a company to develop and implement a digital marketing strategy. The team encourages GSU to continue and expand the use of digital marketing to enhance the local and national marketing of the program.

• The name of the degree awarded is inconsistent with the clear majority of competitors. To avoid limiting applications and causing confusion it should adopt the most common terminology, DBA.

• The university should work to increase the clarity of the program’s financial contributions and consider relevant benchmarks for the appropriate effective contribution to the university (i.e. tax and fees). The program should also reconsider how faculty are compensated. Many off-load executive programs use a fixed compensation rate for faculty that do not depend on a percentage of the salary of each faculty member.

• Encourage more faculty to participate in advising and teaching. The College should consider encouraging both non-tenure track faculty with a solid research program and also mid-career and junior faculty to participate in the EDB program, if this can be done without diminishing progress toward building a research record necessary for promotion and tenure for tenure track faculty and publications in relevant outlets for non-tenure track faculty.


Appendix I

**GSU EDB PROFORMA** (IN $ 000)

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<th>TUTION COLLECTED</th>
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<tr>
<td>STAFF</td>
<td>$ 500</td>
<td>(3 STAFF/10% OF ACADEMIC DIR.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>OTHER (MEALS, MKTG, PKG, ETC)</td>
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<td>ADVISING/COMMITTEES</td>
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**CONTRIBUTION TO GSU**

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**PROGRAM LOSS AFTER ALLOCATIONS**

($358)