Bleas, Isabelle

The Governance, Regulation and Finance Division of The World Bank Institute (WBIGF) conducted a core course on *Competition Policy* in Washington, D.C., from December 13-18, 1998. This was the first training course offered by the Division on competition policy. The primary objective of the course was to improve participants' understanding of and problem-solving skills for competition policy measures that affect enterprise behavior and market structure. The course targeted competition policy practitioners from developing and transition economies, particularly economists and lawyers, who have been involved in the implementation and enforcement of competition law and policy. The intensive, 5-day course was divided into five topics: overview and policy towards cartels; market definition and policy towards horizontal mergers; policy towards market dominance and abuse of dominance; competition advocacy; and design and implementation options. The daily course work consisted of a combination of three major activities: lecture presentations in the morning; case studies and small group exercises in the afternoon; and a general wrap-up discussion at the end of each day. In the wrap-up discussion, participants shared experiences in their respective countries as a way of enhancing participation in the course. Fifty-two participants attended the course from 21 countries, including 15 women (28.8%).

The WBI Evaluation Unit conducted a course evaluation using two methods. First, a Level I end-of-course feedback questionnaire was used to assess the extent to which participants were satisfied with course content and delivery. A 5-point Likert type scale that ranged from 1=minimum to 5=maximum was used. Respondents' open-ended comments about the course were also recorded in the questionnaire. Forty-nine out of the 52 participants (94.2%) completed the end-of-course questionnaire, including 12 women (24.5%). Second, a Level II (participants' learning) evaluation was conducted using pre/post knowledge tests. The pre/post tests consisted of a total of 12 multiple-choice questions, each on a specific subject. The pre-test was administered during the course introduction at the start of the training course, and the post-test was given at the end of all sessions on the last day. Each participant was assigned an "evaluation code number" at the beginning of the course and asked to write it down on both his/her pre- and post-test forms. The number served to link participants' pre- and post- responses while maintaining anonymity. There were 44 respondents (89.8%) whose code numbers were matched between pre- and post-tests, and their results were used to assess whether there was a significant change in respondents' knowledge before and after the course.

Respondents' Background

- Respondents were primarily from the public sector (N=36 or 73.5%), representing national, state, provincial or municipal-level governments. Eight respondents (16.3%) represented private enterprises, and 5 (10.2%) were from either research institutions or other organizations.

- As the course had intended, participants who attended the course worked primarily in the field of economics and/or law. About 61% of all respondents (N=30) reported having worked in both the economics and law areas, while the remaining respondents...
worked only in either the economics (N=11, or 22%) or law area (N=8, or 16%). A detailed breakdown of experience by year showed that respondents’ years of work experience varied significantly: 21 respondents (42.9%) had at least 10 years of experience in either economics or law, 13 (26.5%) had 5-9 years, and 15 (30.6%) had less than 5 years of work in either one of the two areas. There were 5 respondents (10.2%) who had less than 1 year of experience in both fields.

Course Content and Delivery

- The overall usefulness of the course received a mean score of 4.45 out of 5.0. About 94% of respondents rated either 4 or 5 on this indicator, suggesting that a large majority of respondents were highly satisfied with the course’s design and delivery in general. Respondents identified the quality of lectures made by prominent experts in the area of competition as the most useful part of the course. In their written comments, respondents particularly appreciated the instructors’ practical approaches to dealing with real life problems. Among the course’s highest ratings given by respondents were the extent to which instructors were knowledgeable on the issues (mean=4.82), and the course’s relevance to respondents’ current work (mean=4.53).

- On the course’s instructional design, respondents found both lectures (mean=4.24) and case studies (mean=4.02) useful. However, many respondents pointed out possible weaknesses in the current method of case studies and related small group activities. When asked about the areas in which the course would require improvement in the future, more than half of the respondents (N=27) reported that case studies should be improved in the following ways: First, instructors should ensure a more balanced grouping of participants for small group activities. Two issues raised in this regard were: i) some groups could not have a meaningful exchange of views because of the unbalanced numbers of economists and lawyers in a team; and ii) work situations, as well as the level of familiarity with the issues, among the participants in some groups were too diverse to allow for useful debate. Second, instructors should try to make reference to as many examples and experiences as possible from different countries or regions for comparison, when presenting a case study of a particular country. Respondents noted that learning about instructors’ own approach to problems and their critique of the case studies would also be extremely useful. Third, respondents felt that more case studies should be presented during the course, and that more time should be spent on case studies, as opposed to theories and basic principles.

- Respondents’ comments also highlighted two key aspects of course delivery: timing of distribution of reading materials; and balance between the amount of materials covered and time availability. A number of respondents requested all reading materials be distributed in advance, particularly to prepare themselves better for case studies and related small group work activities (N=12). The course organizer is encouraged to take this point into consideration for future course offerings, particularly since many respondents in this course expressed that varying levels of knowledge and experience among participants often made small group activities difficult. By ensuring sufficient time for participants to digest the cases, participants can be more familiar with the issues before coming to the session, and small group discussions and exercises can be facilitated more effectively. Regarding the other aspect of course delivery, many respondents felt that the course covered too much material within a short period of time (N=12). Respondents’ comments included the point that the group wrap-up session in the evening was sometimes not as productive as they had hoped, as the daily course work schedule was intensive and participants felt fatigued by the end of the day. It was also pointed out that each instructor should respect the time allocated
Results of Pre/Post Knowledge Tests

- Pre/post cognitive tests of 44 matched respondents showed that the respondents scored, on average, 41.7% correct on the pre-test, and 61.2% correct on the post-test. This was an increase of 19.5 percentage points in the respondents' test score average. A paired sample Student's T-test was conducted to see if the difference between the two test scores was statistically significant. The result indicated that there was a significant difference between the pre- and post-test scores ($t=5.77$, $p<.001$), suggesting that the respondents, in fact, did better on the knowledge test after the course. It is also worth noting that this is the first course in WBIGF that has successfully measured learning gain.

- How well respondents performed on specific subjects varied across the questions. Among the 12 questions on the pre-test, for example, Q6 ("exploitative business practices") was answered correctly by only 4 out of the 44 matched respondents (9.1%). This question was the lowest scored item of all pre-test questions. Among the highest scored items on the pre-test were Q11 ("elimination of unnatural monopolies") and Q12 ("practical measures to enhance accountability of competition authorities"). About 64% of the respondents answered correctly on Q11 and 68.2% on Q12.

- Respondents' scores improved significantly on the post-test. Over 80% of respondents gave correct answers to Q1 ("goals of competitive policy"), Q5 ("steps to assess whether a horizontal merger harms competition") and Q12 ("education and publicity"). It was particularly notable that Q12 was answered correctly by all respondents (100%). The course organizer should note, however, that there were four questions on the post-test that were missed by more than half of respondents: Q2 ("market power"), Q3 ("reaching a cartel agreement among firms"), Q7 ("abuse of dominance"), and Q9 ("recommendation for authorities vis-à-vis natural monopoly industries"). Question 3 had a particularly low percentage correct; only 14% of respondents (N=6) were able to answer correctly. This suggested that the topics covered in the four questions may have been weak areas in participants' learning at the end of the course.