From Principles to Practice:
Analyzing a Student Learning Outcomes Assessment System

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The College of Business Administration (CBA) is part of a mid-sized urban university with a primary focus on teaching. It had recently decided to develop a process for defining student learning objectives and outcomes, measuring success in achieving these, and using the results of those measures for continuously improving the quality of student learning. Its aim was to design and develop a system which could automate data collection and streamline the processes of course effectiveness evaluation and course/curriculum enhancement. Even though many challenges still existed for the college, it nevertheless launched into a logical design of the Student Learning Outcome Assessment System (SLOAS). Alexis, the college's IT Manager, was assigned the responsibility for managing this project. She determined this system would be used for data collection and reporting in order to provide evidence that student learning outcomes were being achieved at the course, college, and potentially university levels. Amid the lack of internal development resources, insufficient IT support, constantly changing standards and policies, budget issues, and so forth. Alexis knew that she was faced with a challenging project.

Keywords: case study; data modeling; database analysis and design; information system analysis; IS life cycle; IS management issues; IS project management; IS project development; IT resources management; organizational use of IS; prototype; rapid application development (RAD); student learning outcomes assessment; systems manager activities; user requirements analysis

BACKGROUND

The College of Business Administration (CBA) was housed within a public, mid-sized, urban university located in its state's largest city. The mission of the university was to promote scholarship, and excellence in teaching, research, creativity, and service. Working towards this mission, the college's faculty, administration, alumni, and community partners were dedicated to advancing the quality of learning and academic distinction of the university, while being actively engaged in using their talents and knowledge in service to their local and statewide communities. In recognition of their dedication and commitment to quality by AACSB International (Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business), the CBA was awarded its accreditation in 1995.

The CBA was composed of six academic departments: accounting, business administration, computer information systems (CIS), economics, logistics, and public administration. It offered associate and bachelor's degrees in each department, a certificate in logistics, a master's degree in business administration (MBA), a master's degree in public administration (MPA), and a Master's of Science (MS) in logistics and global supply chain management. The college was also the home of several research, outreach, and economic development centers. These centers focused on social and economic research, international business, small business administration, regional economic policy and development, and international business education. The CBA served the local, state, and global communities by training and educating the workforce, by promoting and inspiring excellence in public, private, and non-profit management and related business disciplines, by providing professional assistance and advice to these organizations, and by conducting basic, applied, and pedagogical research.

The CBA had more than 1,300 students of which approximately 15% were pursuing one of the two-year associate degrees or a certificate, 75% were pursuing four-year baccalaureate degrees, and 10% were in one of the three graduate degree programs. Nearly 50% of the student body was considered non-traditional, either working towards their degrees on a part-time basis, or attending classes solely for personal or professional development. Part-time students typically required six to seven years to complete a baccalaureate degree program.

In 1987, the university was included in a state government-mandated consolidation that resulted in the merger of the regional community colleges with the university. One result of this merger was the partitioning of faculty into two distinct categories: faculty members from the community colleges were categorized as bi-partite faculty whose job responsibilities would include teaching and service, while faculty members from the original university were classified as tri-partite faculty whose responsibilities, in addition to teaching and service, would also include research. Faculty members have since unionized, with bi-partite and tri-partite faculty members represented by separate unions. The CBA had 46 full-time faculty members of which 12 were bi-partite and 34 were tri-partite.

SETTING THE STAGE

The stated objectives of the college for its CBA baccalaureate program were as follows:

- to provide a broad-based business education;
- to prepare students for professional and managerial careers in regional, national and international job markets; and
- to foster lifelong learning.

The objectives of the CBA master's degree programs were similar, but also include a primary emphasis on preparing students for leadership roles in organizations.

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