The Current State of the MIS Course: A Study of Business Program IS Curriculum Implementation

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INTRODUCTION

In December of 2002, an article was published in the Communications of the Association for Information Systems entitled "What Every Business Student Needs to Know About Information Systems" (Ives, Valacich, Watson, and Zmud, 2002). This article was the result of work by a task force of 40 prominent information systems educators and was written in response to draft accreditation guidelines prepared by AACSB International (AACSB International, 2002). These draft guidelines, in the opinion of Ives, Valacich, Watson, Zmud, et al. did not address or reflect the "essential and growing role of information systems and technology in the future careers of business school graduates". The article goes on to propose a set of "core information systems requirements for all business school graduates". This extensive list of key information systems concepts and associated learning objectives provide the conceptual basis for essential information systems education in the context of business schools and programs. In terms of the delivery of these key concepts the task force recommended that "in most cases, these concepts and principles are best delivered in an integrated and comprehensive course" (Ives, Valacich, Watson, and Zmud, 2002). It is this "integrated and comprehensive" course that is the focus of this research. Implicit in the work of the AIS Task Force is the fact that this method of implementation of a "information systems knowledge requirement" is not universally used or (more importantly to the task force) mandated by the AACSB. Thus, this paper specifically addresses the issue of how Business schools and program have chosen to implement the concept of a "information systems knowledge requirement" by either using a course (or courses) based on these key concepts or via the more traditional "tools or applications" course.

This research will examine business school degree programs to determine the degree to which the "MIS" course or other information systems courses are used to satisfy the requirement of providing an information systems body of knowledge that is essential for all business school students.

A survey research plan was developed for the purposes of discovering the current state of the art with respect to the degree to which each category of information systems proficiency courses was used to provide this core knowledge. Also of interest in this study are the names used and the content of various curricular implementations.

DISCUSSION

In general, Business degree programs require one or more courses in order for students to satisfy what is often referred to as the "information systems knowledge requirement". These courses typically fall into one of two broad categories: (1) computer applications or "tools" courses, and (2) information systems concepts or the "MIS" course.

The Tools Approach

Historically, the most common means of curricular implementation for the "information systems knowledge requirement" for business pro-grams has been to require students to complete computer applications or "tools" courses. At an earlier point in time (late 1980's through the 1990's) this was the most reasonable approach. During this period the microcomputer was in the process of replacing larger computer systems as the platform of choice for infusing information systems knowledge into business degree programs. Student populations during this era were not uniformly aware of or competent in the use of basic computer technologies since the cost of these technologies had not yet reached the point where they were universally available to individuals as well as primary and secondary level educational institutions (It is recognized that a "digital divide" does exist and that this statement is primarily accurate with respect to the experience of institutions in the United States). Thus the computer applications or "tools" course was the easiest and most cost effective way of implementing a requirement for "technology proficiency" in a business degree program. It is, however, the nature of the information systems discipline to evolve. According to Landry, et.al:

"Such IT innovativeness comes from an attempt to move beyond the confines of traditional academic and disciplinary boundaries to meet the breadth of knowledge needed ..." (Landry, et.al. 2003)

For business programs attempting to include a relevant "information systems knowledge requirement", this evolution took the form of the recognition that students were entering university level degree programs with a knowledge of many of the skills and applications included in the "tools" course. As such, it has become increasingly popular to allow students to demonstrate proficiency via an examination or to simply assume or require technology proficiency. It is this evolution (among other trends and issues) that motivated the AIS Task Force report (Ives, Blake, and Zmud, 2002).

The "MIS" Course

The "core information systems requirements for all business school graduates" described above have been included in Business School curricula, in most instances, in the form of a course or courses. The names given to these courses and their content vary widely in spite of the fact that they all reside in business school/program curricula and are based on curriculum standards established by academic and professional organizations devoted to the promotion of information systems education (for example the IS 2002 Model Curriculum which was developed jointly by the Association for Information Systems, Association for Computing Machinery, and the Association for Information Technology Professionals). The course used to fulfill this requirement is often (and most commonly) referred to as the Management Information Systems (MIS) course. Of the 185 universities surveyed in this research (that chose this approach) the course title "Management Information Systems" was used by 80.

Of these two approaches, only the "MIS" course implementation satisfies the "core IS requirements" described earlier. It stands to reason,

Figure 1 – Survey Research Results

Curricular	Used By		
Implementation	Only	Both	Neither
MIS	183	72	45
%	61%	24%	15%
Applications	158		
%	52%		

therefore, that the way in which business programs implement the "technology requirement" in their curricula, would produce insight about how well business schools and programs are satisfying the "core IS requirements" proposed by the AIS task force.

The Research Question

This question posed by this paper is, to what extent have business schools and programs chosen to use the "tools course" or the "MIS course" to implement their "information systems knowledge requirement" and thus to what extent have these programs used the "core IS requirements" approach proposed by the AIS task force. As a means of measuring this level of acceptance, the number of business schools and programs which have chosen each method should provide an accurate indication.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used was survey of the curricula of business schools and programs throughout the United States. The survey was accomplished via the examination of curricular documents provided by the universities housing the business schools and programs, either through the university web site or catalog. The schools surveyed were chosen from the listing of U.S. Universities by State found on the University of Texas web site (http://www.utexas.edu/world/univ/state/). A search of the web sites found on this list was conducted resulting in a compilation of information from a representative sample of 302 universities. All universities that were surveyed can be categorized as "not for profit" institutions and include a business school or program. The web sites were examined for curricular content with respect to information systems courses which provide the "technology proficiency" component of business bachelors degrees and to determine the extent to which degree programs provide courses which satisfy the "core IS requirements" described above.

RESULTS

Of the 302 Business degree programs surveyed, a total of 186 include the "MIS" course in the core business curriculum while 158 programs require one or more "Applications" courses. This equates to 61% and 52% respectively. A total of 72 (or 24% of Business degree programs) require both an "Applications course and an "MIS" course while 45 programs (or 15%) require neither. These results are summarized in Figure 1 below.

CONCLUSION

Given the results shown above, it is apparent that the call for the inclusion of a set of "core IS requirements" in business school curricula has been taken to heart by colleges and universities across the United States. Thus, the efforts of the AIS task force are supported by the faculties and administrators of these institutions. It can be argued that we are at the "maturation stage" of a cyclical trend which will see the business programs of colleges and universities opt out of using teaching information systems tools or applications in favor or the approach or teaching a set of "core IS requirements" which represents a more academically appealing option at the college or university level.

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