

Integrating Information Technology in a School of Business Core Curriculum: A Collaborative Strategy

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Abstract

There is little consensus among business schools about the appropriate role of information technology (IT) in the business core curriculum. New IT tools continue to evolve at a rapid pace imposing a need for the continuous review of which tools to include and where in the curriculum they should be offered. This paper presents a dynamic strategy using web-based survey forms for collaborative curriculum design, evaluation, feedback, and redesign.

Keywords: Curriculum, technology integration

1. INTRODUCTION

Some business schools make the study of technology a central focus in the core business curriculum; others argue that the study of technology has no role in a business school (Frueling 1997). Currently most business schools have a required freshman-level Information Technology (IT) course (Silver 1995). Gordon and Chimi (1998) investigated the impact of removing an existing Introductory Information Systems course from the Business School curriculum and

concluded that the course was too valuable to remove it from the required course list. A systematic approach to developing and maintaining an IT curriculum appropriate for an institution's stakeholders is needed.

2. METHODOLOGY

The foundation for the IT curriculum design model presented here is a series of online surveys designed to gather feedback from:

- Students
- Alumni

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- Faculty
- Employers

Examples of web-based survey documents (webforms) used to gather faculty input are shown in Figure 1 below. Similar webforms are available for students, alumni and employers (See <http://ives.csis.american.edu/users/jbarlow/fit.cfm>).

Webforms are a convenient medium for identifying technology skills for business students. All

stakeholders in the business curriculum can use webforms to describe their needs and contribute to a collaborative design of the information technology curriculum. Faculty, students, alumni, and employers are invited to submit as many webforms as desired and can do so at their convenience. All stakeholder input is stored in a relational database via the webform and is immediately and permanently available for processing.

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL http://ives.csis.american.edu/users/jbarlow/fit_fac_menu.cfm. The page header features the Florida Tech School of Business logo and the title 'Technology Integration Project'. Below the header, there is a navigation menu with three main sections: 'Current Computer Skills Requirements School of Business Courses', 'Wish List of Computer Skills for School of Business Courses', and 'Faculty Technology Integration Profile'. The 'Current Computer Skills Requirements' section is highlighted. The main content area contains the following text: 'Please help by filling out web forms for your courses! We need your input about information technology skills used in your current courses and as skills that you would find useful for your students and/or employees. Click on the box for the type of form you want to submit.' Below this, there is a dropdown menu for 'Please click here to select your name.' and a section titled 'Select a course that you currently or often teach from the list below:' with a list of courses: BUS3601 – Marketing Principles, BUS3603 – Advertising and Promotion, BUS3703 – Business Research, BUS3705 – Managing Small Business, and BUS4401 – Investment Analysis. A warning message reads: 'Click Here or At Bottom of Form When You Are Finished – or your DATA will be LOST!'. The form includes a table for 'Software Used' and 'Please describe the related useful computer skills for this course. Write as much or as little as you like.' The table has three rows: 'Windows' (checked), 'Word' (checked), and 'Excel' (unchecked). The 'Windows' row describes skills like copying files onto diskettes. The 'Word' row describes skills like word processing, grammar, and spell checking. The 'Excel' row asks if the user would have to teach it.

Figure 1: Sample faculty version webform used to suggest specific skills to be included in information technology courses

Webforms are used to learn through survey:

- what entry level IT skills are currently required for each School of Business course
- what IT skills are currently used in each School of Business course
- what IT skills should be added to the overall curriculum
- the IT skill levels and habits of School of Business faculty, students, and staff
- entry level IT skills for new employees

- Word processing
- Spreadsheets
- Presentation graphics
- Database
- Web publishing
- Internet research tools

Information gathered via the webforms provides an IT skills inventory and identifies where each occurs in the curriculum. This allows the IT team to present technology skills in the classroom prior to their use in other School of Business courses and allows other

The fundamental set of IT skills includes:

business faculty to focus on core course content rather than technology skills.

The content and skills presented in information technology courses are changing much faster than the rest of the business curriculum (Alavi 1995). This makes it essential to have a curriculum

design strategy which acknowledges the dynamic nature and the role of IT skills in business. The changing nature of IT skills will be reflected in the webform data. Figure 2 demonstrates the dynamic feedback model used in this study.

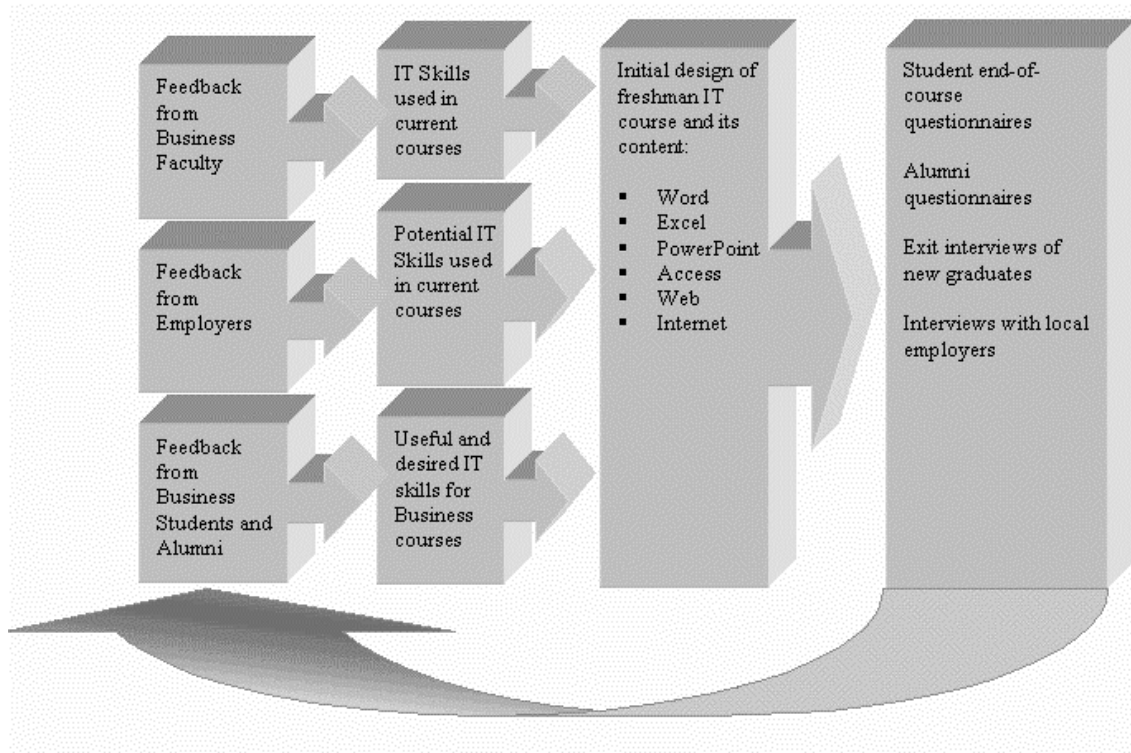


Figure 2: Feedback from School of Business faculty, students, alumni and employers identifies the required IT skill set for both a successful business education and future employment.

3. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Information technology is a fast-changing field. Although it is important that business student are comfortable and competent using today's latest software tools, in the long run, it is more important that they have the ability to learn and discriminatingly use new technologies as they become available. Identifying the appropriate role of IT in the business core curriculum requires a dynamic, long-term plan with feedback and an ongoing evaluation process. There is a need for knowledge of new technology tools for both students and faculty.

Web-based survey documents are a convenient forum for gathering data from students, faculty, staff, alumni, and employers. These webforms are currently being used by the business faculty at Florida Institute of Technology to assess technology curriculum issues and also to identify a number of IT skills that faculty would like to learn for their own professional development. For example, many business faculty expressed an interest in learning internet and web publishing skills.

Finally, the webforms provide a forum where all stakeholders have a voice in identifying the appropriate set of IT skills for business students. The webforms are self- documenting and provide a mechanism for auditing how the set of IT skills for business students is changing and evolving over time.

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