Panel: Attracting, Retaining and Placing IS Students in an Economic Downturn

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ABSTRACT

Many information systems (IS) programs have been touting the positive economic outlook and opportunities for IS graduates as a strategy for increasing enrollment. Today, the unemployment rate is the highest it’s been in 25 years with the unemployment rate for college graduates the highest since the U.S. government started keeping records (Yang 2009). The purpose of this panel is to discuss strategies for attracting, retaining and placing IS majors in an economic downturn. Since business support is critical to these endeavors, we will also share strategies for engaging the business community. Panelists include 5 people who have successfully lead their departments’ initiatives in these areas: Hope Koch, Mark A. Fuller, Craig Van Slyke, Richard Watson and Rick L. Wilson.

Keywords

Education, enrollment, retention, placement and fundraising

TOPIC AND TARGET AUDIENCE

Over the past few years, the information systems (IS) community has been striving to increase enrollment in IS programs. Many enrollment initiatives tout the positive economic outlook and job opportunities for IS graduates (Granger et al. 2007; Firth et al. 2008; Street et al. 2008; Scott et al. 2009; Choudhury et al. Forthcoming). Since October 2008, many economies have taken downturns. Massive layoffs fill today’s headlines and some say this is the worst economic climate in 27 years. While the prospects look better for IS graduates compared to other majors, many companies that were looking for IS graduates are no longer hiring. Recruiters who were willing to sponsor events are now more careful with their corporate resources.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this panel is to help the IS community increase enrollment in IS programs by sharing best practices for improving the three phases of a student’s lifecycle within an IS program. These phases are attracting students to the IS major, retaining them and placing them. Business resources are central to all 3 phases. We see this as a cyclical process where an IS department can use student success stories, placement and salaries to market the IS major to new students. Figure 1 shows this panel’s organizing framework.
ATTACTING STUDENTS
How are you attracting students to the IS Major?

RETAINING STUDENTS
What actions are you taking to retain students?

PLACING STUDENTS
What actions are you taking to place students?

How do you muster business support for the IS program?

Figure 1. IS Student Lifecycle

FORMAT

The panel will follow the organizing framework and allow time for audience discussion.

Overview: Craig Van Slyke will introduce the panel. He will explain the current economic conditions and how this is affecting IS enrollment, job placement and business support. Dr. Van Slyke will explain the trends in IS enrollment from 2000 until today and that the panel will follow the organizing framework. (7 minutes)

Attracting Students: Rick Wilson will discuss strategies that Oklahoma State University is using to attract students to the IS major. These strategies focus on early intervention projects for high school students and awareness campaigns for college students. These programs have lead to a 30% increase in IS majors over the past year. (10 minutes)

Retaining Students: Rick Watson will discuss how the University of Georgia in retaining students by creating a superior experience for IS majors. The experience involves the IS leadership certificate, a summer program in a Chinese software park and close linkage between the students and faculty. As a result of these initiatives, the University of Georgia tripled the number of students entering the major in two years. (10 minutes)

Placing Students: Mark Fuller will discuss strategies Washington State University has initiated to place students during this economic downturn. This includes making IS students valuable with special opportunities (i.e., a fellows program and a chair’s list), close industry ties (i.e., an active advisory board) and conveying job opportunity information. As a result of these programs, Washington State University places a high percentage of their IS majors. (10 minutes)

The Process: Hope Koch will discuss a leadership program and an IS Summit that Baylor University has implemented to improve all phases of an IS majors’ experience from attracting students through job placement. These programs have lead to a 293% increase in IS majors, a high retention rate and more than $75,000 in business support. (10 minutes)

Business Relationships: Each panelist will share their strategies for cultivating business relationships to support the IS student lifecycle. (10 minutes)

Audience Participation: The audience will share their own best practices, success stories and questions. (15 minutes)

Lessons Learned: Hope Koch will summarize the key lessons learned from the panel. (3 minutes)

PANELIST BIOGRAPHIES

Mark A. Fuller is the Chair of the Department of Information Systems at Washington State University, the Director of Professional Business Programs and holds the Philip L. Kays Distinguished Professorship in IS. Dr. Fuller’s research has appeared in outlets such as Information Systems Research, Management Information Systems Quarterly, Journal of Management Information Systems, Decision Sciences, Journal of the Association for Information Systems and Decision
Support Systems. Professor Fuller has won multiple teaching awards, has published a textbook on IS project management and has taught graduate and undergraduate courses on a variety of topics, including global IS and collaborative technology.

As department chair, Dr. Fuller has been active in a variety of efforts related to enrollment management. These include the management information systems (MIS) Fellows Program, the MIS Chair’s list, strategic faculty selection, the Spring MIS professional development event and the fall MIS recruiting banquet. In addition, Dr. Fuller has developed an active MIS Advisory Board, constantly monitors the MIS curriculum and conveys job opportunity information to stakeholders on an ongoing basis.

Craig Van Slyke is an Associate Professor of Information Technology Management and Chair of the Decision Science/Information Technology Management department at Saint Louis University. He also serves as Associate Dean for Academic Programs. In the last two years, his department has doubled the mean enrollment in IS electives and is seeing an increase in the number of applicants who are intending to major in information technology management. Dr. Van Slyke’s current research interests include investigating efforts to increase enrollments in IS programs. He has co-authored a number of papers in this area in outlets such as Communications of the AIS and the Journal of Information Systems Education. He has also been a panelist and presenter on the topic of increasing enrollments at conferences such as the Americas Conference on Information Systems and the International Academy of Information Management Annual Conference. He is a past board member of the AIS Special Interest Group on Education and is Past-President of the Southern Association for IS.

Richard Watson is the J. Rex Fuqua Distinguished Chair for Internet Strategy and Interim Head of MIS in the Terry College of Business at the University of Georgia. He has published over 100 refereed journal articles, written books on electronic commerce and data management, and given invited presentations in more than 30 countries. His most recent research focuses on IS leadership and the role of IS in creating ecologically sustainable practices. He is a consulting editor for John Wiley & Sons, a former President of the Association for IS, the international coordinator for the PhD in IS at Addis Ababa University, a visiting professor at the University of Agder in Norway and co-leads the Global Text Project.

In his first two years as Interim Head of MIS, Dr. Watson tripled the number of students entering the MIS major. He attributes this success to the development and implementation of a marketing strategy in the fall of 2006. The essential features of the strategy involve first raising awareness of the MIS major and then creating a superior experience for MIS majors. Dr. Watson is continuing to develop the core features of the strategy.

Rick L. Wilson is the W. Paul Miller Professor of Business Administration and Chair of the Department of Management Science and Information Systems (MSIS) in the Spears School of Business at Oklahoma State University. As founding head of the MSIS Department, Dr. Wilson has helped facilitate an environment where an extremely talented set of faculty have accomplished great things in teaching, research and outreach activities. Most recently, the faculty have joined forces with corporate supporters to ‘get the word out’ about the need for MIS majors and the exciting career opportunities they have upon graduation. These marketing activities include holding a campus MIS Day, hosting high school students for ½ day programs, developing freshman scholarship programs, creating a summer camp for underrepresented high school students and team-teaching high school IT classes. Through these efforts, Dr. Wilson has increased enrollment in the MIS program at OSU. He is planning additional programs for the future.

Panel Facilitator: Hope Koch is an Assistant Professor of IS at Baylor University. In January 2007, Dr. Koch began leading the IS department’s recruiting efforts. Since that time, enrollment in the IS major has increased by 293%, student retention has increased and business relationships have strengthened. The essential components of the strategy center around a service-based learning experience for exceptional MIS students. Dr. Koch has developed a MIS career development program where current MIS students execute initiatives to increase enrollment, retain students and develop business relationships for job placement and funding. Dr. Koch’s current research interests center around attracting, retaining and placing IS students. She’s presented her research at the Americas Conferences on Information Systems, has several working papers in the area and regularly consults with leading companies in this area.

EQUIPMENT NEEDS

We’d like a room with 2 elevated 8ft tables at the front to seat the panelists. We’d like a laptop with PowerPoint, a projector, a projection screen, a microphone and an audio recording system.
REFERENCES

Choudhury, V., A. Lopes and D. Arthur (Forthcoming) IT Careers Camp: An Early Intervention Strategy to Increase IS Enrollments, Information Systems Research.


