Industry Partnership for Business Analytics Programs: Role of Advisory Board Members

Panel

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ABSTRACT

This panel focuses on building academic partnerships and research collaborations between business schools and local businesses to support the business analytics (BA) programs. Besides providing real-world experiential learning opportunities for their students, a key challenge faced by public universities in particular is the decline of state funding, the rapid pace of change in the world around them, and increasing demands from different stakeholders. The goal of this panel is to discuss collaboration and partnership ideas at a strategic level and stimulate thinking on how business firms and higher education institutions can work together in new ways to enhance knowledge and skills in BA programs. The panelists are representatives of major Boston area companies which are collaborating the MS in Business Analytics program at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. They will explain their engagement with the program and how they are helping shape tomorrow’s workforce with collaborative research projects and their role as advisory board members.

Keywords

Business analytics, industry collaboration, educational, research partnerships.

INTRODUCTION

Following the 2016 recommendations from the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) which is urging business programs to focus on real-world current problems in partnerships with companies, universities are seeking new ways to interact with industry on a variety of levels and for a variety of reasons (Gilman, 2016). AACSB’s new directive urging schools to position themselves as “co-creators of knowledge” with their corporate partners. Business schools must now consider “whether the research we produce can actually solve the needs of companies,” according to Santiago Iñiguez, Dean of IE Business School in Madrid and incoming chairman of AACSB (Simons, 2016).

To meet these challenges and opportunities, many universities are seeking new ways to partner with industry by seeking funding in exchange for solving their real-world problems through research projects with a team of students and faculty. Such projects are often hosted through a research centers or labs. The MS in Business Analytics (MSBA) program at the University of Massachusetts Lowell is one example of this successful partnership in the making. Our MSBA program has forged partnerships with several local companies in Massachusetts, since the start of our program in 2016, through an advisory board. Data Scientist, Data Managers, Architects, CIOs, and Entrepreneurs with expertise in data analytics are guiding the faculty and students with a myriad of collaborative activities which include inputs in the program curriculum, provide use of their software platform, as guest speakers, mentoring student teams in partnership with faculty in solving “messy, real-life problems.” with coursework that has some experiential learning component. Given the location of the conference in Boston, we have an opportunity to hear from these industry experts about their goals and experiences in collaborating with universities.
Specifically, the panel goals are to provide answers to the audience on three key questions at the nexus of business analytics, experiential learning and job readiness: a) characterizing the changes in data analytics from industry in a variety of decision-making contexts, b) evaluating the role of BA programs in educating the next generation of data scientists, and c) identifying how BA research funding should complement business problem solving initiatives. These questions are provocative because they are rooted in a debate about whether industry can play a formative role in shaping the future of data analytics workers in the coming decades.

The panel discussion will focus on “how to form collaborations” and will stimulate a discussion to engage and encourage the audience to reflect on their own opportunities and challenges in possibly building their own business analytics programs. While there are several BA programs with research centers, there is insufficient articulation on the best practices for these collaborative partnerships in business analytics programs that result in a win-win for both industry and academic institutions and lead to BA knowledge and skills required for the industry. Consistent with the AMCIS 2017 theme, “A Tradition of Innovation”, we propose an industry panel from the local Boston area experts who can provide novel and unique insights for BA programs collaboration with industry.

Panels concerning Information System (IS) education issues and pedagogical recommendations are part of a rich tradition and they have been well attended at past AIS conferences. This panel hopes to continue this tradition by focusing on role of industry in business analytics curriculum. Specifically, this panel will: 1) give the members of the audience an opportunity to review state-of-the-art practices and innovative ideas related to role of industry in BA programs in, 2) obtain the business community input on BA curriculum, particularly the balance between concepts and skills, and 3) present novel approaches for industry-academia collaboration. This will in-turn stimulate a discussion that will encourage the audience to consider different industry inclusion options for their programs.

**PANEL APPROACH**

The total length of the panel will be 90 minutes. The panel will start with a brief overview of the panel theme and role of industry in BA programs by the moderator. After the introduction, the panel will continue with a discussion regarding the key role of industry in BA programs and curriculum. The conversation will start with an introductory comment by each panelist, on a specific topic area addressing the panel objectives, followed by some opening questions from the moderator to the panelists and then open up to questions from the members of the audience. Each participant below will then give a short presentation providing their background, their expertise in data analytics, and share their vision of academic partnerships and focus on a specific topic (see below) on how to improve student skills on data analytics. The panel session will end with some guiding best practices that can govern the role of industry in BA programs. At least half of the panel time will be allocated to questions and comments by the audience members.

**PANEL PARTICIPANTS**

**Luvali Motiwalla** (moderator): is a MIS Professor at the University of Massachusetts Lowell from 1998 and Chair of the Operations and Management Information Systems Department since 2008. His current research focuses on IT use and adoption in the mobile system context, organizational system assimilation in enterprise systems, information privacy and data analytics. He has received grants from NIH, NSF, U.S. Department of Education and funding from Oracle Corp, Davis Foundation, CT Department of Health Services, IBM, NCR and U.S. Army. As a moderator, he will open the panel discussion by providing an overview on the process of forming the of business analytics advisory board he has initiated at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. He will also discuss on the trends in BA research centers operations and introduce the panelists.

**Brian Bowman, Progress Software, Bedford, MA:** Brian Bowman has been working for Progress Software for over 20 years. He has performed database configuration, tuning and disaster planning for all sizes of customers around the world. Brian started in technical support. He was a manager for Progress in the European Technical Support Center and has also worked in product development and pre-sales. Currently he is a Senior Principal Product Manager in the OpenEdge business unit focusing on database and deployment. Brian has a Master’s of Science degree in Business Continuity and Emergency Management from Boston University. Brian will focus on the role of messy data and data quality and ETL cleansing in BA curriculum and use of ETL tools and mobile analytics. In addition, he will talk about the big-data problems that his company would be willing to be solved with faculty-student teams through the capstone projects.

**Jian Zheng, Vice President of Architecture, Chief Data Architect, Kronos Incorporated:** Jian is a 21-year veteran in developing workforce management solutions. He has global responsibility for the architecture and technology direction of all Kronos products. He also leads the Kronos data science team in their efforts to conduct research on applying leading edge machine learning methods to workforce management solutions. Kronos is a U.S.-based multi-national workforce management software and services company headquartered in Lowell Massachusetts, and employing more than 5,000 people worldwide.
Jian’s topic will focus on the major shifts occurring in data analytics industry and their impact on various decision-making contexts. He will also discuss the funding opportunities available from his company for academic institutions.

**John Santagate, IDC, Research Manager, Supply Chain & Manufacturing Insights, Boston, MA:** As a research manager, John Santagate is responsible for providing research, analysis, and guidance on key business and IT issues for manufacturers. John holds more than a decade of experience, including advising leading oil field services, medical device manufacturing, and automotive companies on critical supply chain processes. He holds a bachelor’s degree finance and management from The University of Massachusetts Lowell and an MBA from Rutgers Business School with a concentration in supply chain management. John will share his experiences on forming a business analytics academic and industry consortium he has formed at IDC to develop the next generation of business analytics talent. Specifically, he will discuss his experience with the creation of academic standards in BA courses and expected outcomes from this curriculum and standards for software applications for the coursework used in BA courses with the help of software vendors as program partners.

**Vibhu Walia, Data Scientist, Infor Dynamic Science Labs, Cambridge, MA:** Vibhu Walia is currently a Senior Director at Infor Dynamic Science Labs, the data science arm of Infor, which is the world’s largest privately held enterprise software company. He has over 15 years of experience building data science products for business across the US, Europe and Asia. Before joining Infor in 2014, he has worked for Oracle, EDS Corporation and HP Research Labs. Vibhu has a Masters in Advanced Computer Science from the University of Birmingham, England where he was a EU scholar and an MBA in Technology Strategy from the Indian School of Business where he was a Citibank Scholar. Vibhu will focus on list of knowledge and skills needed for the next generation of data scientist. Vibhu will focus on research projects at Infor and provide examples of projects at his lab and the collaboration activities with universities.

**Keith Soucie, CIO– Senior Vice President, Enterprise Bank, Lowell, MA:** Keith Soucie is an Information Services and Technology professional with almost 40 years in the financial services technology industry, working directly for banks and as a consultant. He has a solid record of achievement and career growth with a notable portfolio of leading edge initiatives, successful large-scale projects, industry renowned employers and bank clients. He is currently CIO & SVP of Enterprise Bank, a $3.5B, 24 branch, full-service bank offering a range of commercial and consumer loan products, deposit and cash management services, investment advisory and wealth management, trust, and insurance services. Keith will focus on communication and management skills needed by business analysts in eliciting the user and business processes of organizations. Specifically, he will talk about how banking problems are framed in a big-data context.

**Steve Richards, Co-Founder & COO, Podium Data, MA:** Prior to starting Podium Data, Mr. Richards served as the CFO of Peoplefluent where he was instrumental in driving growth and profitability of this $115M leading SaaS provider in the HCM software sector. Steve began his software career at Sybase as Senior Finance Manager. During his tenure company revenues grew from $150 million to nearly $1.0 billion. Steve then went on to serve with four consecutive Greylock Partners funded companies, most recently as CFO with Awareness, Inc., an innovator in social media marketing software. In addition, he served as CFO at ClearForest Ltd, a leader in text analytics software, which was sold to Reuters in 2007. Prior to ClearForest, Mr. Richards served as COO & CFO of netNumina Solutions and CFO of Tessera Enterprise Systems, both culminating in successful exits. Steve will focus on how BA faculty and students partner with start-up companies for commercializing their technology and seek entrepreneurial funding.

**CONCLUSION**

This panel hopes to highlight to the AIS audience the role of data analytics industry in business analytics program and discuss their role in improving the BA program curriculum and skillset. In addition, this panel will uncover the role of advisory board in supporting and funding opportunities for BA faculty and student for research in data analytics.

**REFERENCES**
