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PANEL SESSION ON IS 2002.1 — FUNDAMENTALS OF INFORMATION SYSTEMS

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Perhaps at a conference such as AMCIS, it likely goes without saying education in IS concepts is a distinct and vital element of business education, and serves as a lead-in to majors and minors in information systems. However, there are some who believe that this is not necessarily the case - witness the efforts that had to be taken by leaders in the IS discipline to make sure that IS/IT concepts were codified as part of the AACSB accreditation standards (cf. Ives et al., 2002). Further, some may believe that elements that comprise the IS core course can be better delivered by disaggregating them and distributing them among other academic units, e.g., the e-commerce modules offered by some Marketing departments. Furthermore, at some universities, accounting systems courses often bear a striking resemblance to MIS courses, creating an apparent duplication of efforts and waste of faculty resources.. Given the tight budgetary and resource constraints facing business school deans, we believe that it is vital to discuss and elaborate the why and what of MIS knowledge and pedagogy. This panel is an attempt to focus the discussion and discover positive steps that MIS professionals and academics can take to enhance the understanding of non-MIS faculty and administrators regarding the importance of fundamental MIS knowledge to the success of all business students.

There are a variety of possible reasons that could help explain why some of these issues exist with respect to the IS core. One that we suggest is that perhaps IS departments may not be doing the most effective job of explaining to others in the business school what is the distinctive contribution of IS in the business core. Some excellent efforts have been offered to fill this breach (e.g. Ives et al., 2002), but these efforts have apparently not been transposed to the courses we offer at the Introduction to MIS level. We have at times been too willing to define our discipline in terms of the most current technology (e.g. e-commerce, m-commerce, u-commerce); hence we have focused not on our distinctive foundational intellectual contributions, but upon the technical application aspects of IS as new technologies become available. We are sometimes seen as “the place where students learn word processing, PowerPoint and spreadsheets”, to quote one unnamed colleague.

Another possible problem is the wide range of perspectives on what IS actually is (cf. Benbasat and Zmud, 2003). While we will not delve into the research aspects of this issue here, we think that the problem is also reflected in what the IS discipline is and is not as pertains to teaching the core course. For example, the IS 2002 curriculum model currently lists thirteen names for our discipline at various institutions, which may make it difficult to clearly identify to outsiders a common intellectual heritage (Gorgone et al., 2002). In particular, while Marketing has its “4 p’s”, Accounting has A=L+OE, Finance has “the rule of 72”, and Management has “Porter’s 5 Forces”, IS as a discipline (at least as reflected in some texts and some course deliveries) has had difficulty making it clear why we offer a menu of core concepts that adds something distinctive to the curriculum (as opposed to just technology-related applications of other disciplines’ concepts).

In an attempt to help continue the creation of a shared reality about what is the core of IS, this panel will do the following:

- (1) Present the findings from a survey to be performed this summer to ISWORLD participants asking them to rate how their courses at the intro level map into suggested IS2002 specifications. This survey will capture data on the extent of coverage, and which academic units offer the coverage. Further, this survey will capture responses about any interesting aspects of the delivery of these modules. Finally, the on-line survey will capture (using an open-ended question) the beliefs of faculty members represented by ISWORLD as to what they believe are the “core” of the MIS discipline. The presentation of these findings will be followed by a discussion.

- (2) Engage the audience in a discussion about the core course, and what fundamentals need to be in it. This discussion will involve the co-chairs, and 2-3 “guest panelists” (i.e. leading IS academics) offering their positions on various possible issues such as:
 - a. A discussion about what are the “core” issues of the discipline that every business student should have (what are our “4 p’s” or “5 forces”?)
 - b. The relevance of the MIS core course as perceived by schools of business
 - c. Should we be concerned that we need to defend our discipline seemingly at every turn?
 - d. What can we do to enhance the perceived relevance of our core course, perhaps by transposing the efforts of our colleagues (e.g. the CAIS paper) into our courses?
- (3) The co-chairs will describe some of the practical issues involved in delivering the core MIS course at their respective institutions:
 - a. Delivery of a systems project assignment
 - b. Understanding of technical concepts
 - c. Concerns about academic honesty issues that may be relevant to MIS, such as so-called “dishonest outsourcing”
 - d. Handling students with diverse MIS backgrounds and interests (e.g. MIS majors versus non-majors)
- (4) Finally, the co-chairs will introduce a mechanism to keep this discussion ongoing; the ISWORLD *Introduction to MIS Course Page*, which will be edited for now by a rotation of Salisbury, Huber and Piercy.
 - a. Syllabus pages
 - b. Assignment pages
 - c. Text book reviews
 - d. Issue discussions (e.g. what are the core issues)
 - e. Other? (to be determined by discussion at AMCIS)

References

- Benbasat, I., and Zmud, R. (2003). The identity crisis within the IS discipline: Defining and communicating the discipline’s core properties. *Management Information Systems Quarterly* 27(2): 183-194.
- Gorgone, J. T., Davis, G. B., Valacich, J. S., Topi, H., Feinstein, D. L. and Longenecker, H. E. (2003). IS 2002 model curriculum and guidelines for undergraduate degree programs in information systems, *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, Volume 11, Article 1, January.
- Ives, B. Valacich, J., Watson, R. T., Zmud, R. et al.¹ (2002). What every business student needs to know about information systems. *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, Volume 9, Article 30, December.

¹And a plethora of other excellent IS academics who for the sake of brevity will not be listed here.