Information System Programs: Academic Myopia?

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AN EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Marketing is the process by which a product or service is conveyed from the producer to the customer. For your business to survive in this global economy someone must purchase your output. Admittedly being cognizant of the demand, academic programs are producing students in the field of Information Systems (IS) with various programming and concept skills. The programming skills may include .NET, JAVA, or Oracle while concept skills may include System Analysis, Database Design, Network Architecture and Project Management. These programs are designed to prepare entry-level programmers and systems analysts. Even though both domestic and global economic development do require these skills, IS academic departments may have been oriented and misled by the Information Technology (IT) industry to be myopic, narrowing their vision towards only fulfilling a small requirement of their actual needs. Is this the same as a phenomenon in the business world in early 50's to the 60's, that motivated Theodore Levitt, Professor at the Harvard Business School to introduce a concept, called "Marketing Myopia."?[1]

Until recently, the IT job market was booming. Jobs were plentiful both in the business application development area as well as in software engineering. There was little or no competition from other countries for high tech jobs. IS academic programs were in demand and a ticket to secure, highly-paid jobs. Many of these programs were revamped in a hurry to capitalize on the "dot.com" boom. A completely different scenario is now in place. The U. S. information technology sector has lost 403,300 jobs over the last 3 years (Srivastava and Theodore, 2004). The "dot.com" bust and the loss of subsequent jobs to outsourcing and off-shoring have left most IS programs "high and dry." Are IS programs becoming myopic?

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[1] Levitt, T. "Marketing Myopia," *Harvard Business Review*, July-August 1960, pp-24-47.

In the last four to five years IS programs throughout the United States have seen a mini-revolution of sorts, and face a challenge. Compared to standing-room-only in the past, classrooms seem empty now. One serious problem is that enrollments in the undergraduate programs declined by 40 to 70% and in some cases this situation has been further aggravated with enrollment caps at the college level due to AACSB requirements. In a time of restricted budgets, some IS academic departments have been under downsizing pressure from other academic disciplines in their own institutions, citing a decline in employment in the IT industry. In the State of Texas, from Fall 2000 to Fall 2003, the number of IS majors has declined from 7709 students to 5298 students. This is an overall decline of 31.2% (http://www.thecb.state.tx.us).

This paper examines the future role of the IS program, and the importance of market segmentation, targeting, and brand management, to gain differentiation and subsequently sustain competitiveness, within the context of these programs. Also, there is a closely related issue that is needs to be addressed, though it may be quite contentious and upsetting. Whether the answer is positive or negative, there is a need to be thoroughly and thoughtfully explore the question "Should Information Systems remain within the College of Business?"