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Standards: Opportunities, Responsibilities, and Challenges for the IS Discipline

John Mooney
University of California

Joe Valacich
Washington State University

Fred Niederman
Saint Louis University

M. Lynne Markus
Bentley College

Richard Watson
University of Georgia

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Moderator:
John Mooney
University of California, Irvine
jmooney@uci.edu

Joe Valacich
Washington State University
jsv@wsu.edu

Fred Niederman
Saint Louis University
niederfa@slu.edu

M. Lynne Markus
Bentley College
mlmarkus@bentley.edu

Richard T. Watson
University of Georgia
rwatson@uga.edu

Background

The closing 5 years of the 20th century elevated the IS discipline to unprecedented dizzy heights. The widespread adoption of the Internet for eCommerce and eBusiness, the prosperity of the IT industry, talk of the New Economy, and dot com mania in general combined to fuel enormous interest in academic courses and research that were focused on this new phenomenon. The IS discipline, still recovering from the negative press associated with the IT Productivity Paradox and short CIO tenures in the early 1990s, seized upon the significant opportunities presented during the late 1990s to offer new courses and programs. Student enrolments, corporate endowments, funded chairs, and the desire to aggressively position business schools for the New Economy combined to generate an abundance of new IS academic positions. These were the best of times. And then the bubble burst.

The past two years have seen a dissipation of the IS euphoria. Courses and programs designed for the apparently defunct New Economy suffer either low student enrolments or cancellation. Funding for promised academic positions has been withheld or redirected. The MBA core course has again come under challenge in many business schools. Another Dark Age cometh for the IS discipline, apparently.

But hark, a new source of light is evident. Following a timely intervention by the Association for Information Systems, the 2003 Accreditation Standards of AACSB International (approved on April 28 2003) include more specific mention and import to information and IT than previous AACSB standards. The changes of significant interest for the IS discipline are as follows:

- Under "Assurance of Learning Standards," Standard 15 sets out general knowledge and skills goals for undergraduate education. This now includes "***Use of information technology***" as an additional learning goal.

- Standard 16 identifies the management-specific learning goals for undergraduate education. This has been changed in two ways: (a) one of the goals has been modified to read "Creation of value through the integrated production and distribution of goods, services, ***and information***," and (b) a goal has been added that requires learning related to "***Information technologies as they influence the structure and processes of organizations and economies and the roles and techniques of management***."

- Standard 18 which sets out the management-specific learning goals for general management master's programs (e.g., MBA degrees) has been modified in the same way as for Standard 16, and "presupposes" the base of general knowledge and skills appropriate to an undergraduate degree (see Standard 15 above).

These standards appear to offer attractive opportunities for the IS discipline to strengthening its position within the Business School, and to provide a new focus for its educational offerings. Equally, the standards will create expectations and responsibilities that the IS discipline must satisfy, or suffer the consequences. Pursuing the opportunities and assuming the responsibilities will likely create significant teaching and research challenges. The purpose of this panel session is to provide a forum at AMCIS to explore the future opportunities, responsibilities and challenges for the IS discipline that are suggested by the new AACSB accreditation standards.

Panelist Positions

Joe Valacich will draw from his experiences on the AIS Executive Committee for Model Curriculum and the Board of Directors of the Computing Sciences Accreditation Board to provide more detailed insights into the rationale for why accreditation matters to the IS discipline in general, and the particular significance of the AACSB and CSAB initiatives. In addition, Joe will share his views on the opportunities, responsibilities, and challenges for the IS discipline presented by the new AACSB standards, and the potential conflicts that may emerge as IS departments attempt to satisfy multiple accreditation standards.

Fred Niederman will draw insights from his ISWorld initiative to consider the opportunities and responsibilities that the new AACSB accreditation standards have for the MBA core IS course in particular, and for MBA IS courses in general. He will also discuss the extent to which the new standards may help to resolve the reservations about the concept of a core IS course within a general management MBA program, and provide insights on its content.

Lynne Markus will draw in part from her position as AIS VP for Education and in part from her extensive teaching and research on the management of IT-enabled change and the consequent impacts on organizational processes and business value to offer her views on the opportunities, responsibilities and challenges associated with the new standards.

Finally, **Rick Watson** will comment on the extent to which his views about "what every business student needs to know about information systems" are reflected in the new accreditation standards, and outline his views on an appropriate agenda for the IS discipline that addresses the consequent responsibilities and challenges that the new AACSB standards present.

Panelists' Biographies

M. Lynne Markus is Trustee Professor at the Department of Management, Bentley College. She is VP for Education of the Association for Information Systems (AIS) and has served as VP for Academic Community Affairs for SIM (Society for Information Management) International.

John Mooney is a Visiting Associate Professor at the Graduate School of Management, University of California, Irvine. In September 2003, he will join the Graziadio School of Business and Management at Pepperdine University. He served as AIS Council Member for Region 2 from 1998-2001, and will Co-Chair the 2003 ICIS Doctoral Consortium.

Fred Niederman serves as the Shaughnessy Endowed Associate Professor of MIS at Saint Louis University. He serves the committee chair for computer personnel research in the special interest group on MIS through the ACM.

Joseph S. Valacich is The George and Carolyn Hubman Distinguished Professor in Information Systems in the College of Business and Economics at Washington State University. He serves on the Executive Committee for Model Curriculum, the Board of Directors of CSAB, Inc. (Computing Sciences Accreditation Board), and is Conference Co-Chair of ICIS 2003.

Richard T. (Rick) Watson is the J. Rex Fuqua Distinguished Chair for Internet Strategy in the Department of MIS at the University of Georgia's Terry College of Business, where he is also the Director of the Center for Information Systems Leadership. He is conference co-chair for ICIS2004 and Vice President of Communications and President-Elect for the Association for Information Systems.