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PANEL 3

APPROACHES TO THE MBA CORE COURSE IN INFORMATION SYSTEMS

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Panelists
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Most MBA programs, at least in the United States, require that all students take a set of "core" courses that include basic topics such as economics, accounting, management, marketing, and finance. A growing majority of business schools in the United States have added a course in Information Systems to their list of core requirements. In part, this may have been stimulated by the accreditation requirement of the American Association for Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) that all MBA students should satisfy a computer proficiency requirement. However, in the vast majority of MBA programs, the core IS course does much more than provide computer proficiency. It helps prepare students for a world in which, increasingly, they will need to use computers, make information technology investment decisions, and consider the possibilities that computer and communications systems provide to modify and improve their organizations.

The IS core course has a complex role to play. On the one hand, because many students will not take any other course in information systems in their MBA program, there is a need to teach "everything an aspiring manager should know about computers and information systems in organizations." On the other hand, there is a demand for a shorter term focus in which students learn personal computing skills that can be of use to them in other courses in the MBA curriculum as well as in their first jobs.

Achieving either or both of these long- or short-run goals is made difficult by rapid changes in the technology and in the environment of business firms. Local factors such as the educational philosophy of the school, the needs of students in a particular region or country, and the skill level of the student body also affect the design of the core course. It is unlikely that there is any one core course design that will serve the needs of everyone.

As a result, the IS core course is usually considered a difficult course to teach and, perhaps more than any other core course, it has been the subject of continuous updates and changes in both objectives and content. This state of affairs can be expected to continue until a solid conceptual basis for the information systems field can be discovered. In the indefinite future then, the best we can do is to evolve and adapt the course to satisfy many conflicting and shifting demands. Given this state of affairs, much can be gained by a discussion and comparison of notes across different programs.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PANEL

The major objective of the panel discussion is to develop insights concerning the philosophy, content and directions for the IS core course in the MBA program. Specifically, we hope to shed some light on alternative approaches in the following areas:

- 1) Role of the IS core course in the MBA curriculum
- 2) Specific course goals and objectives
- 3) Topic areas covered
- 4) Pedagogy (cases, lectures, tutorials)
- 5) Resources used (computing, audio-visual, cases)