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Recommended Citation

Melton, James; Kumar, Anil; Verhulsdonck, Gustav; and Shah, Vishal, "Integrating AI into Business Schools: An Inquiry-Based Approach" (2020). *AMCIS 2020 TREOs*. 81.

https://aisel.aisnet.org/treos_amcis2020/81

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Integrating AI into Business Schools: An Inquiry-Based Approach

TREO Talk Paper

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Given the current and anticipated use of artificial intelligence (AI) in business (Wagner, 2018), one would expect relevant coverage in business school curriculum. After all, AI promises to impact fields as diverse as human resources, accounting, and logistics (Webb, 2020). Graduating students will confront AI and how to integrate it with their work throughout their careers. Yet AI concepts do not seem to have permeated general business curricula, as evidenced in several ways: 1) most business textbooks address AI only at the surface level, 2) an internal search of master course syllabi of a business school at a medium-sized R2 university revealed little to no explicit addressing of AI; and 3) AI content is not prominent in a survey of business school curriculum.

Information systems as a discipline is in a unique position to support the integration of AI into business curricula. Unlike computer science, IS maintains an intellectual and practical connection to all other business functions. And, unlike these individual business functions and their disciplines, IS offers a strong technical base, combined with systems thinking and practical application.

But how can AI be better integrated into curricula at colleges of businesses? We would argue against simply adding a standalone course here or there, as that would ignore the overall terrain into which graduate students will be stepping. Instead, we propose that business schools integrate the following questions throughout the business curricula, which can help both students and faculty understand how AI impacts individual disciplines as well as specific organizations and society: 1. Why should I learn about AI?; 2. What is AI?; 3. What are specific skills I need to develop to understand AI?; 4. How does AI create new possibilities for me in my professional career?; 5. How does AI impact society and what can I do to make a meaningful contribution?

In this talk, we explore the approach of posing questions to help students develop the practice of inquiry, which is essential as AI and its applications continue to evolve. In doing so, students can come to understand AI in theory and practice (Smith, 2018), including exploring ethical questions (McGrath & Gupta, 2018). We recommend general pedagogical strategies that can be followed in posing these questions and describe possibilities for future research.

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