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## An Analysis of IS Programs Accredited by ABET

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## **An Analysis of IS Programs Accredited by ABET**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*As of April 2008 there were 30 Information Systems (IS) programs at 23 universities accredited by the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET). This paper compares these ABET accredited IS programs to a sample of 20 IS programs randomly chosen from 251 IS programs in the United States listed by ISWorld. The data was collected by visiting the web pages of the selected IS programs. This paper includes a study of the required IS courses, elective IS courses, required programming courses, required business courses, the title of the IS program (IS/MIS/CIS), the department and college where the IS program was located and the year of ABET accreditation. It is interesting to notice that only two of the ABET accredited IS degrees are BBA degrees. This study points out several significant differences between the ABET accredited IS programs and the typical BBA IS programs at the sample universities.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Over the past few years there have been several interesting articles written about the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) accreditation of IS programs in IACIS (Kohum & Wood, 2004; Jones, 2004; MacKinnon & Butler, 2005), ISECON (Hilton & Stone, 2003; Hilton, Johnson, & Kasper, 2004) and JISE (Kohum & Wood, 2003; Challa, Kasper, & Redmond, 2005). The Jones' (2004) article gives a good analysis of the IS curriculum at the seven accredited programs up to year 2004 and Hilton and his associates presents an interesting analysis of both the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) accreditation and ABET accreditation (Hilton & Stone, 2003; Hilton, et al., 2004; Hilton, et al., 2007). Gorgone has been involved with IS accreditation as long ago as 1987 and he has had a significant input into the ABET IS accreditation criteria (Gorgone, 2003; Gorgone, 2004). Since the Computing Accreditation Commission (CAC) of ABET approved formal criteria for accrediting IS programs in 2001, there have been 30 IS programs at 23 universities accredited by ABET. In Hilton's study (2007) of IS programs, it is interesting to note that 92% of the IS programs surveyed had their business school or college accredited by AACSB and less than 1% of these IS programs were accredited by ABET (Hilton & Lo, 2007).

This paper investigates characteristics of the ABET accredited IS programs and compares them to a sample of 20 other typical IS programs that were randomly chosen to see similarities but more importantly, any significant differences between the ABET accredited IS programs and other IS programs.

## METHODOLOGY AND DATA ANALYSIS

As of February 2005 there were 251 universities with IS programs that were listed on the U.S. IS departments web page of ISWorld (IS Departments, 2005). A sample of 20 of these universities, by selecting every twelfth university listed by ISWorld, were selected to compare with the 23 ABET accredited IS programs.

The analysis of comparing the IS programs in two categories was done by examining their web pages. There is often a lag between the time when the changes are made in an IS curriculum and when these changes are listed on the department web page, so the current IS curriculum requirements by the program may not be exactly in agreement with the department web page. In comparing business requirements, there are wide variations on each university counts its business courses. At some universities Economics is counted as a business course and at other universities it is counted as an arts course. At some universities programming is taught by the IS department and is counted as a required IS course while at other universities programming is taught by the Computer Science (CS) department and is counted as a required course but not counted as a required IS course. For this paper, the number of credits for IS, business and programming courses are counted as the way each university counts those courses.

### AACSB and ABET Accreditation

AACSB was found in 1916 and applied its first accreditation standards in 1919. AACSB (2008d) accredits all business programs but it has a separate accreditation for accounting AACSB (2008c). Many IS faculty expected that AACSB would eventually accredit IS as a separate program like the accounting accreditation. However, this AACSB accreditation of IS never occurred and in 2001 ABET (2008) announced standards for IS accreditation. In examining the difference between AACSB and ABET accreditation, AACSB has more of a prescription of management process and ABET has more of a prescription of course content (Hilton & Lo, 2007). The summary of comparison of AACSB and ABET accreditation methods is shown in Table 1 from Hilton and Lo's study (Hilton & Lo, 2007).

**Table 1: Hilton (2007) Comparison of AACSB and ABET Accreditation Methods.**

AACSB	ABET
Membership	N/A
Application	Application
Pay ~ \$20,000 plus \$3,500. per year	Pay ~ \$7,500 then \$230 per year
Preparation: Pre-candidacy, Candidacy	Preparation
Self Evaluation	Self-Study
On-Site Peer Review	On-Site Visit (can include objective observers)
Notification Report	Notification Report
Annual Reporting	Interim reviews if prescribed in Report
Five-Year Reaffirmation	Six-year Renewal (two year if prescribed)

Hilton summarizes that there are differences between two but no conflict in either point of divergence. His study includes a helpful summary of the ABET (2008) accreditation guidelines:

1. *Objectives & Assessments: documents, appropriate educational objectives, mechanisms in place to measure achievement of objectives*
2. *Students: have timely access to courses and faculty, meet program requirements at graduation*
3. *Faculty: current, active, qualified majority with terminal degrees, some with an IS doctorate*
4. *Curriculum:*
  - a. *At least 30 semester-hours of information systems topics*
  - b. *At least 15 semester-hours of business topics*
  - c. *At least 9 semester-hours of quantitative analysis (reduced to 6 in 2008)*
  - d. *At least 30 semester-hours of general education*
5. *Technology Infrastructure: adequate student and faculty computing resources*

6. *Institutional Support and Financial Resources: sufficient to continue the program through the six-year accreditation period*
7. *Program Delivery: enough faculty to teach curriculum*
8. *Institutional Facilities: adequate libraries, classrooms, faculty offices.*

In light of the above accreditation guidelines, the researchers have examined the characteristics of the IS programs that have been accredited by ABET.

### Department, Title, and College

Table 2 lists the departments, titles of the IS courses, and the college where the ABET accredited IS programs belong to in MacKinnon and Butler's study (2005).

**Table 2: ABET Accredited IS Programs in 2005.**

University	Department	IS Course Title	College
Drexel U	None	IS	IS & Technology
Illinois State U	School of IT	MIS	School of IT
Kennesaw State U	CS & IS	IS	College of Science & Math
U of Nebraska, Omaha	IS & Quant	MIS	College of IS & Technology
NJ Institute of Tech	IS	IS	College of Computing Sciences
U of North Florida	C & IS Sciences	IS	School of Computing
Pace U	None	IS	School of CS & IS
Robert Morris U	CIS	ISM	School of Comm & IS
U of South Alabama	C & IS	IS	School of Computer & IS
Virginia Commonwealth U	IS	IS	School of Business

Two of the ABET accredited IS and IS related programs in 2005 do not belong to any department while the rest of ABET accredited programs belong to typical IS departments. The titles of the IS courses are conventional but the college where the IS programs belong are unanticipated. It should be noted that at nine of ten universities, the ABET accredited IS program is not housed in a College of Business except Virginia Commonwealth University. By 2008 there had been thirteen additional universities with ABET accredited IS programs as shown in Table 3. There was a major change by 2008 with ten out of twenty-three ABET accredited IS programs were housed in the college of business or school of business. In 2008, nearly 40 percent of ABET IS accredited programs have IS as their department name, and some of them have MIS (30.4 %), CIS (13.0%), and ISM (8.7%) and the rest of them have different names for their IS department.

**Table 3: ABET Accredited IS Programs in 2008.**

University	Department	IS Title	College
Drexel U	None	IS	IS & Technology
Gannon	Computer & Info Sciences	MIS	College of Hum, Bus & Educ
Houston-Clear Lake	Comp & Math Division	CIS	School of Sci & Engineering
Illinois State U	School of IT	MIS	School of IT
Jacksonville SU	Math, Computing & IS	CIS	College of Arts & Science
James Madison	CIS & Mgmt Sci	CIS	<i>College of Business</i>
Kennesaw State U	CS & IS	IS	Science & Math
Lock Haven	Bus, CS & IT	CIS	College of Arts & Science
Maine	SIS & Engineering	ISE	Engineering
Metropolitan S College	CIS	MIS	<i>School of Business</i>
U of Nebraska, Omaha	IS & Quant	MIS	IS & Technology
NJ Institute of Tech	IS	IS	Computing Sciences

U of North Florida	C & IS Sciences	IS	Engin & Construction
Pace U	None	IS	School of CS & IS
Quinnipiac U	Info Sys Mgmt	ISM	<i>School of Business</i>
Robert Morris U	CIS	ISM	School of Comm & IS
U Scranton	Comp Sciences	CIS	School of Management
Slippery Rock	Computer Science	IS	Bus, Info & Social Sci
U of South Alabama	C & IS	IS	School of Computer & IS
U South Carolina	Computer Sci & Engineering	BIS	College of Engin & Computing
Utah S U	Computer Science	CS	College of Science
Virginia Commonwealth U	IS	IS	<i>School of Business</i>
Wright SU	IS & Oper Mgmt	MIS	<i>College of Business</i>

Table 4 lists a random sample of twenty IS programs listed on the ISWorld site (MacKinnon & Butler, 2005) and the equivalent information included in Table 2 and 3 for the sample programs in 2005. It is observed that the departments where the IS programs are located are typical and the title of the IS courses are also typical. However, it should be noted that almost all the IS programs from the sample are located in colleges or schools of business. These results are consistent with Hilton and Lo's (2007) findings. This is a major difference between the ABET accredited IS programs and the random sample IS programs.

**Table 4: Random Sample of IS Departments in 2005.**

University	Department	IS Title	College
Baylor U	IS	ISY	COB
Bowling Green SU	A & MIS	MIS	CBA
Central Connecticut SU	MIS	MIS	SOB
Colorado State U	CIS	BD	COB
Eastern Michigan U	CIS	ISM	COB
Florida Gulf Coast U	CIS	ISM	COB
Georgia College & SU	IS,C & M	CBIS	COB
James Madison	IT & MS	CIS	COB
Louisiana State U	IS & DS	ISDS	COB
Middle Tennessee SU	CIS	CIS	COB
Northwest Missouri SU	CS/IS	MIS	COB
Oklahoma State U	MS & IS	MIS	COB
San Diego State U	IDS	IDS	COB
Temple U	MIS	MIS	SOB
U of Alabama, Huntsville	None	MIS	CAS
U of Central Florida	MIS	MIS	COB
U of Maryland, BC	IS	IS	None
U New Mexico	M,IS & DS	MGT	SOM
U of South Florida	IS DS	MIS	COB
Western Carolina U	BCIS & Econ	CIS	COB

### IS Degree Name and Business Credits Required

Table 5 displays whether the university with ABET accredited IS programs for 2005 had a Computer Science (CS) degree, how many number of business credits were required, and whether the university also offered a Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) in Information Systems (IS) degree for 2005. It is notable that none of the universities with ABET accredited IS programs in 2005 had an accredited BBA in IS degree. Nine of the degrees were Bachelor of Science (BS) degrees and one is a Bachelor of Information Systems (BIS) degree. The business credits average from 20.7 to 21.8 which is a relatively low number of business credits for an IS degree. It is also

interesting to note that two of the universities also offer a BBA in IS degree but this program is not accredited by ABET

By 2008 there was an increase of 13 additional universities with accredited IS programs but still only 2 of these programs were BBA degrees. So out of 23 total universities with accredited IS programs in 2008 twenty one have non BBA degrees.

**Table 5: ABET IS Accredited Characteristics in 2005.**

University Names	ABET IS Accredited Year	ABET IS Degree Name	Business Credits Required	Existence of BBA IS	Existence of CS Degree
Drexel U	2003	BS	27	Y	Y
Illinois State U	2003	BIS	22	BIS	Y
Kennesaw State U	2004	BS	27	N	Y
U of Nebraska, Omaha	2004	BS	20	N	Y
NJ Institute of Tech	2004	BS	15	N	Y
U of North Florida	2003	BS	12	N	Y
Pace U	2002	BS	6 + 17 opt	Y	Y
Robert Morris U	2003	BS	15	N	SE
U of South Alabama	2003	BS	24	N	Y
Virginia Commonwealth U	2003	BS	39	N	Y
Average			20.7-21.8		

The twenty-three universities with ABET accredited IS programs in 2008 including thirteen additional universities with ABET accredited IS programs since 2005 are shown in Table 6. It is remarkable to observe that eighteen of these twenty-three universities also have AACSB accredited business schools or college.

Table 7 presents the comparable data for the random twenty sample universities. It is obvious that most of the IS degrees are BBA degrees and only three of the sample universities offer a BS in IS degree. All the sample universities with an IS program also offer a CS degree. It is notable that the number of business credits required is higher than the ABET accredited universities. The average number of business credits for the random sample universities is 38.3, which is much higher than the ABET accredited universities, 26.7-27.4

**Table 6: ABET IS Accredited Characteristics in 2008.**

University	Year ABET Accred	ABET IS Name	Business Credits Required	Existence of CS	Existence of IT	Existence of BBA IS	Bus AACSB Accred
Drexel U	2003	BS	27	Y	Y	Y	Y
Gannon	2006	BS	33	Y	N	N	N
Houston-Clear Lake	2006	BS	12	Y	N	BS CIS	Y
Illinois State	2003	BIS	22	Y	N	BIS	Y
Jacksonville S	2005	BS	21	Y	N	Mgmt/IM	Y
James Madison	2005	BBA	40-45	Y	N	Y	Y
Kennesaw SU	2004	BS	27	Y	Y	N	Y
Lock Haven	2005	BS	21	Y	N	N	N
Maine	2007	BS	15	Y	N	N	Y
Metropolitan SC	2007	BS	30	Y	N	N	N
Nebraska, Omaha	2004	BS	20	Y	PhD	N	Y
NJ Inst of Tech	2003	BS	15	Y	Y	N	Y
North Florida	2002	BS	12	Y	N	N	Y
Pace U	2002	BS	6+17 opt	Y	Y	Y	Y

Quinnipiac U	2007	BS	40	Y	N	N	Y
Robert Morris U	2003	BS	15	SE	N	N	N
U Scranton	2005	BS	18	Y	N	N	Y
Slippery Rock	2005	BS	18	Y	Y	N	N
South Alabama	2006	BS	24	Y	Y	N	Y
South Carolina	2006	BS	60	Y	N	N	Y
Utah SU	2007	BS	12	Y	N	BA	Y
Virginia Commonwealth	2003	BS	39	Y	Y	N	Y
Wright SU	2006	BSB	39	Y	N	N	Y
Average			24.6-25.3				

Table 7: Sample Universities Degrees &amp; Business Credits Required.

University Names	ABET IS Name	Business Credits Required	Existence of CS	AACSB IS Accredited
Baylor U	BBA	54	Y	Y
Bowling Green SU	BS	57	Y	Y
Central Connecticut SU	BBA	27	Y	N
Colorado State U	BBA	33	Y	Y
Eastern Michigan U	BBA	36	Y	Y
Florida Gulf Coast U	BBA	30	Y	Y
Georgia College & SU	BBA	18	Y	Y
James Madison	BBA	39	Y	Y
Louisiana State U	BBA	36	Y	Y
Middle Tennessee SU	BBA	45	Y	Y
Northwest Missouri SU	BBA	33	Y	N
Oklahoma State U	BBA	36	Y	Y
San Diego State U	BBA	33	Y	Y
Temple U	BBA	58	Y	Y
U of Alabama, Huntsville	BBA	48	Y	Y
U of Central Florida	BBA	45	Y	Y
U of Maryland, BC	BS	18	Y	Y
U of New Mexico	BBA	36	Y	Y
U of South Florida	BA/BS	39	Y	Y
Western Carolina U	BSBA	45	Y	Y
Average		38.3		

### REQUIRED IS AND PROGRAMMING CREDITS

Tables 8 and 9 list the required IS credits, the IS elective credits, the total IS credits and the number of programming credits required. Table 8 lists the equivalent credits for the sample universities' IS programs. It is very clear that the ABET accredited universities have a much higher requirement of IS courses for their degrees, in some cases they require twice as many IS credits as some of the IS programs at the sample universities do. The programming requirements are similar but are often higher at the ABET accredited programs.

**Table 8: ABET IS Requirements 2005.**

	<b>IS Credits</b>	<b>IS Credits</b>	<b>IS Credits</b>	<b>Programming</b>
<b>University</b>	<b>Required</b>	<b>Electives</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Credits Required</b>
Drexel	41	16	56	9
Illinois State	22	20-23	42-45	9
Kennesaw State	34	9-15	43-49	9
Nebraska, Omaha	33	12	45	4
NJ Institute of Tech	42	15	57	6
North Florida	27	12	39	11
Pace	39	6	45	12
Robert Morris	27	12	39	3
South Alabama	50	9	59	6
Virginia Commonwealth	30	9	39	6
Average	34.5	12-12.9	46.4-47.3	7.5

Table 9 for 2008 has the same information including additional universities with ABET accredited IS programs since 2005 and Table 10 displays the same information for the random sample IS programs.

**Table 9: ABET IS Programs' Requirements 2008.**

	<b>IS Credits</b>	<b>IS Credits</b>	<b>IS Credits</b>	<b>Programming</b>
<b>University</b>	<b>Required</b>	<b>Electives</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Credits Required</b>
Drexel	41	16	56	9
Gannon	45	6	51	18
Houston-Clear Lake	18	0	18	6
Illinois State	22	20-23	42-45	9
Jacksonville SU	42	12	54	9 incl COBOL
James Madison	22	6	28	Offered as elective
Kennesaw State	34	9-15	43-49	9
Lock Haven	27	15	42	18
Maine	54	15	69	9
Metropolitan S College	21	6	27	3
Nebraska, Omaha	33	12	45	4
NJ Institute of Tech	42	15	57	6
North Florida	27	12	39	11
Pace	39	6	45	12
Quinnipiac	29	6	35	6
Robert Morris	27	12	39	3
U Scranton	40	18	58	7
Slippery Rock	31	3	34	9
South Alabama	50	9	59	6
South Carolina	40	3	43	12
Utah SU (CS not IS)	21	6	27	10
Virginia Commonwealth	30	9	39	6
Wright SU	30	4	34	6
Average	33.3	9.6-10.0	42.8-43.2	8.1



Table 10: Sample IS Programs' Requirements in 2008.

University	IS Credits Required	IS Credits Electives	IS Credits Total	Programming Credits Required
Baylor U	12-24	6	18-30	3
Bowling Green SU	24	6	30	6
Central Connecticut SU	27	6	33	3
Colorado State U	24	3	27	6
Eastern Michigan U	27	3	30	6
Florida Gulf Coast U	27	6	33	9
Georgia College & SU	21	3	24	3
James Madison	25	12-15	37-40	9
Louisiana State U	30	9	39	3
Middle Tennessee SU	21	9	30	6
Northwest Missouri SU	27	0	27	9
Oklahoma State U	18	3-12	21-30	6
San Diego State U	24	6	30	6
Temple U	30-31	3	33-34	6
U of Alabama, Huntsville	21	6	27	6
U of Central Florida	21	6	27	3
U of Maryland, BC	24	3	27	9
U New Mexico	21	9	30	9
U of South Florida	18	6	24	9
Western Carolina U	21	3	24	6
Average	23.2-24.9	5.4-6.0	27.3-29.8	6.2

## CONCLUSIONS

In the comparison of the ABET accredited IS programs to the random IS sample programs several items stand out. Most of the ABET accredited IS programs are BS degrees and are not bound by the AACSB regulations. The ABET accredited IS programs are not usually located in a Colleges or Schools of Business. By contrast, all sample IS programs are located in Colleges or Schools of Business and are required to have a certain number of business credits. In the past, the "50% rule" of AACSB restricted the number of credits that were available in a major field. This rule is emphasized in lower number of business credits in ABET accredited programs and a higher number of IS credits in accredited programs. From Tables 5, 6, 8 and 9 it appears that ABET accredited IS programs have replaced some typical business credits in IS programs by additional IS credits, thus producing a stronger technically oriented IS program. It appears that the first IS programs that were evaluated by ABET were likely evaluated by computer science professors accustomed to evaluating technically strong computer science programs. Perhaps this had an influence on which IS programs were first accredited by ABET.

From the above tables, it would appear that a technically strong (more IS or CS courses) IS program would have a better chance of being accredited by ABET. James Madison University was the first BBA IS program to be accredited by ABET in 2005 but it had a typical IS program, not like the other BS in IS programs that were previously accredited by ABET. Lock Haven University is the other BBA IS program to be accredited. It also had a typical BBA IS program but it had a very strong programming requirement. It should also be noted that although the Utah State IS program was accredited under IS, the degree is actually a computer science major with an IS emphasis.

If a university with an IS program is considering ABET accreditation they should read the Kohun and Wood's (2003) article carefully to learn from the experiences with ABET accreditation at Robert Morris University. The Hilton and Lo's 2007 article in the JAIS is the major ABET IS accreditation article that should be read by faculty at any university considering ABET accreditation (Hilton & Lo, 2007). For additional information on the ABET accredited IS programs, see Appendix A, for ABET Accredited IS Programs' URLs.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**ABET Accredited University URLs 2008**

University	Department	Title	URL
Drexel U	None	IS	<a href="http://www.ischool.drexel.edu/Home">www.ischool.drexel.edu/Home</a>
Gannon	C & IS	MIS	<a href="http://www.gannon.edu/PROGRAMS/UNDER/mis.asp">www.gannon.edu/PROGRAMS/UNDER/mis.asp</a>
Houston-Clear Lake	Comp & Math	CIS	<a href="http://www.uhcl.edu/portal/page/portal/SCE/">www.uhcl.edu/portal/page/portal/SCE/</a>
Illinois State U	School of IT	MIS	<a href="http://www.ilstu.edu/home/academics/">www.ilstu.edu/home/academics/</a>
Jacksonville SU	Math, C & IS	CIS	<a href="http://mcis.jsu.edu/">mcis.jsu.edu/</a>
James Madison	CIS Mgmt Sci	CIS	<a href="http://www.jmu.edu/cis/">www.jmu.edu/cis/</a>
Kennesaw State U	CS & IS	IS	<a href="http://science.kennesaw.edu/csis/">science.kennesaw.edu/csis/</a>
Lock Haven	Bus, CS & IT	CIS	<a href="http://www.lhup.edu/comp_sci/index.html">www.lhup.edu/comp_sci/index.html</a>
Maine	SIS & Engin	ISE	<a href="http://www.umaine.edu/about/academicprograms/">www.umaine.edu/about/academicprograms/</a>
Metropolitan S C.	CIS	MIS	<a href="http://www.msced.edu/%7Ecmsdept/">www.msced.edu/%7Ecmsdept/</a>
Nebraska, Omaha	IS & Quant	MIS	<a href="http://www.isqa.unomaha.edu/">www.isqa.unomaha.edu/</a>
NJ Institute of Tech	IS	IS	<a href="http://som.njit.edu/academics/index.php">som.njit.edu/academics/index.php</a>
U of North Florida	C IS Sciences	IS	<a href="http://www.unf.edu/ccec/cis/SoChtml/SoCInfoSys.07.html">www.unf.edu/ccec/cis/SoChtml/SoCInfoSys.07.html</a>
Pace U	None	IS	<a href="http://www.pace.edu/page.cfm?doc_id=161">www.pace.edu/page.cfm?doc_id=161</a>
Quinnipiac U	Info Sys Mgmt	ISM	<a href="http://www.quinnipiac.edu/x496.xml">www.quinnipiac.edu/x496.xml</a>
Robert Morris U	CIS	ISM	<a href="http://sentry.rmu.edu/default.aspx">sentry.rmu.edu/default.aspx</a>
U Scranton	Comp Sciences	CIS	<a href="http://matrix.scranton.edu/academics/">matrix.scranton.edu/academics/</a>
Slippery Rock	Computer Sci	IS	<a href="http://cs.sru.edu/index.php/dept/is">cs.sru.edu/index.php/dept/is</a>
U of South Alabama	C & Info Sci	IS	<a href="http://www.cis.usouthal.edu/">www.cis.usouthal.edu/</a>
U South Carolina	Comp Sci & Eng	CIS	<a href="http://www.cse.sc.edu/">www.cse.sc.edu/</a>
Utah S U	Computer Sci	CS	<a href="http://www.huntsman.usu.edu/mis/">www.huntsman.usu.edu/mis/</a>
Virginia Commonwealth	IS	IS	<a href="http://www.isy.vcu.edu/isy/index.jsp">www.isy.vcu.edu/isy/index.jsp</a>
Wright SU	IS Oper Mgmt	IS	<a href="http://www.wright.edu/business/acad/isom/">www.wright.edu/business/acad/isom/</a>