Using Indices of Student Satisfaction to Assess an MIS Program

Earl Chrysler, Black Hills State University, USA
Stuart Van Auken, Florida Gulf Coast University, USA

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate a methodology by which management information systems (MIS) alumni evaluations of the content of courses and their satisfaction with an entire MIS program can be used to assess the relevancy of an MIS curriculum. By way of clarification, an MIS program prepares its graduates to be effective in the tasks necessary to design, program, and implement systems that will provide management with timely, accurate, and useful information for decision making. This is in contrast to computer science (CS) programs that prepare their graduates to be knowledgeable in the technical aspects of computer hardware and operating systems software. This study first determines if there were any differences in the evaluations of the content of required MIS courses by alumni based on whether the graduate was using the first year on the job or in one’s current position as a frame of reference. Then a factor analysis is performed, using the scores earned by specific courses, to reduce the content value of specific courses into specific factors, thus simplifying understanding of the type of learning that is taking place. A factor analysis is performed both for course content scores during one’s first year on the job and again in one’s current position. Using a global measure of satisfaction with the entire MIS program, the course content factor scores then are correlated to a student’s satisfaction with the entire MIS program. This regression analysis is performed once again for both one’s first year on the job and in one’s current position. The implications for evaluating the effectiveness of an MIS curriculum are presented and discussed.

Keywords: alumni program evaluation; factor analysis; index of program satisfaction; multiple regression; program assessment

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few years, there has been increasing pressure for higher education to demonstrate that it is effective in delivering persons who have the required skills and knowledge. The American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business also has incorporated this philosophy into its accreditation procedures. Instead of measuring inputs in terms of the qualifications and scholarly performance of faculty, it is requiring schools of business to pro-
vide evidence that graduates are being provided with the experiences necessary to develop the skills and knowledge promised in the educational objectives that flowed from the school of business conceptual objective or mission statement.

There are several methods of obtaining opinions regarding what an MIS curriculum should contain. Cougar et al. (1995) offered a set of guidelines for an undergraduate curriculum. Lee, Trauth, and Farwell (1995) published their findings of an investigation that involved both academicians and industry representatives. Nelson (1991) published the perceptions of Information Systems (IS) and end-user personnel. Another method of determining whether students have been given the knowledge, skills, and experiences that firms value would be to survey firms recruiting graduates of an Information Systems program. This is one approach suggested by Van Auken (1991). The survey form could inquire about how well graduates are meeting the expectations and/or needs of the employer. This approach also has shortcomings. An employer may not wish to alienate an Information Systems area by being critical of its graduates. Also, the authors have observed that, on some occasions, employers are concerned with relatively short-term goals. They wish to hire graduates who are productive from the first day on the job (i.e., they were trained rather than educated) and are less concerned with the contributions that may be made later in the employee’s tenure. If the person is evaluated some time after joining the organization, the assessment may be based upon factors other than job skills. Those factors may be loyalty, interpersonal skills, political astuteness, and being a team player rather than the ability to focus their Information Systems education on specific organizational problems.

Still another method of assessing the effectiveness of an educational program is to have the program evaluated by the graduate, another approach mentioned by Van Auken (1991). The graduate is the primary consumer of the educational experience, having invested the equivalent of four years of his or her life and a considerable sum of money in the program of choice. It is the graduate, it seems, that knows best if he or she was appropriately prepared for the functional area chosen as a career field. Also, if asked the correct questions, the graduate most likely would respond objectively. One approach used by Gasen et al. (1991-1992) asked students to evaluate various aspects of the IS program. Gasen’s study, however, was focused primarily on the satisfaction that students perceived with the entire IS program and did not address the content value of individual courses. As a consequence, the results of administering this survey form to graduates would not be very useful in determining whether specific courses should be continued.

A questionnaire proposed by Hanchey (1995-1996) provided data on several demographic variables but required a great deal of time by a respondent and, therefore, the return rate most likely would not be very high. In addition, the graduate is asked to indicate the value of specific IS topics in addition to the quality of preparation in several areas such as analytical skills, values, ethics, and so forth. Once again, the graduate is not able to evaluate specific course content as to applicability.

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this article is to present and discuss the findings of a survey of
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