AN EXPLORATORY COMPARISON OF MSIT, MSIM, AND MSIS PROGRAMS IN THE WESTERN UNITED STATES

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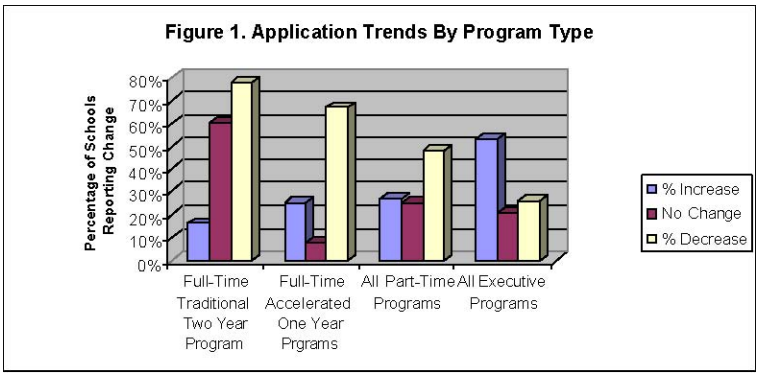
ABSTRACT

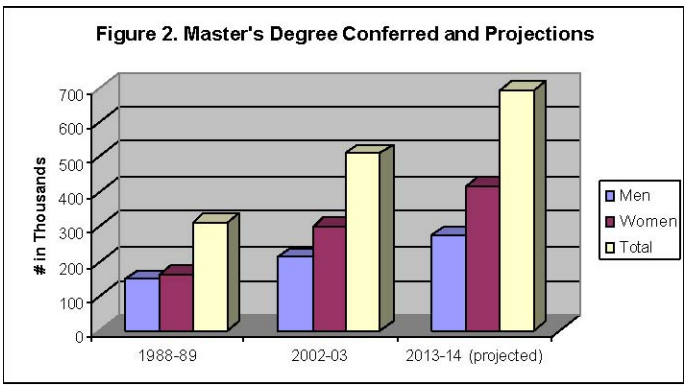
There has always been a strong concern that information systems/technology academic programs provide the appropriate skill sets for future IS Professionals. For example the most recent framework the IS2002 curriculum model is the result of over thirty years of analysis. Furthermore the MSIM2002 study investigated the relevance of graduate IS education. Over the last five years many universities have begun to offer graduate programs in information technology. The paper seeks to investigate current MSIT/MSIM/MSIS offerings to analyze their differences as well as similarities.

INTRODUCTION

All aspects of the computing field are facing rapid continuous change (Gorgone, et. al, 2002). Given this premise much attention has been given towards ensuring that university curriculum in Information Systems is updated to preparing its graduates for gainful employment. For example the most recent IS2002 framework is very comprehensive and the result of over 30 years of examination and the combination of many articles from multiple organizations (ACM 1968, ACM 1979, ACM 1983, BCS 1989, DPMA 1981, DPMA 1986, DPMA 1991, Nunamaker 1992, Couger, et. al, 1995, Gorgone, et. al, 2002). While, most of these analyses were focused on the undergraduate information systems curriculum, there has been recent attention towards the graduate IS education through the adoption of the MSIM 2002 (and soon to come MSIM 2006) model.

During the last few years we have experienced a change in graduate education. In August 2004, Forbes reported an overall 75% decline in MBA applications with 41% of programs reporting a decline of more than 20% (http://accepted.typepad.com/admissions_almanac/2004/08/2004_mba_applic.html).Also during this time we have seen an increase in specialized master and executive education programs. These changes have also been documented by the GMAC Application Trends Suvery 2004 Report (see Figure 1). Additionally in a report by the US Department of Education, NCES: Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), 'Completions Survey' found that the predicted number of master's degrees conferred will increase by 35% overall between the academic year 2002-03 and 2013-14 (see Figure 2).





CURRENT MSIT/MSIS/MSIM UNIVERSITY PROGRAMS

This study analyzed graduate program offerings in information systems, information technology, information management, and management information systems from eleven different universities located in the western part of the United States. The results of the analysis as depicted in Table 2 illustrate a large amount of variance in the amount of units required, the cost of the program, as well as the naming of the program.

Table 2 Comparison of MSIT/MSIS/MSIM Offerings

University	Degree Offered	Program Course Unit Required	Approximate Cost
Arizona State University	MSIM	34	$29,240
Claremont Graduate University	MSIS	40	$38,554
Coleman College	MSIT	60	$18,000
Colorado Technical University	MSITM	44	$24,925
Santa Clara University	MSIS	54	$37,800
University of Arizona	MIS	31	$11,160
University of Nevada Las Vegas	MIS	36	$5,580
University of San Diego	MSIT	30	$26,250
University of San Francisco	MSIS	36	$26,640
University of Washington	MS/MBA in IT	80	$50,000
Utah State University	MSBIS	36	$7,000

There were also differences between programs as some appeared to contain a schedule that consisted of almost all required classes (Coleman, Arizona State, University of San Francisco), while others (University of Washington, UNLV, Utah State, University of San Diego) allowed for greater flexibility and specialization.

While the programs varied on the prices, course unit required (note that some are on a quarter system), they all appeared to have several items in common. First, most programs appeared to be focused on providing the same type of training for master graduate professionals in information systems. For example, almost all programs contained required courses in information systems principles/foundations, data communications and networking, systems analysis and design, project management, database management, information security, and project management. Also, some of the electives that were more commonly offered among programs included decision support systems, management of high technology organizations, and web design/development and management. Interesting enough only a few of the programs (University of San Diego, University of San Francisco, Santa Clara) offered a course in IT ethics, and only a few programs (Santa Clara University, University of San Diego, Arizona State University) offered (or required) a capstone master course in information systems. Lastly, there were also similarities in the stated target market for the degrees. The following represents some of the statements listed by universities offering MS degrees in information systems and their intended audience:

1 Designed for working professionals in the IT field who recognize the importance of information technology in the competitive, global economy.
2 Graduates of the MSIS program will be prepared to provide leadership in the Information Systems field.
3 The Master of Science in Information Technology degree is designed for students who want careers managing information technology.
4 This degree program will prepare graduates with a broad-based knowledge of information systems design, development, implementation, evaluation, and maintenance.
5 The curriculum is designed to develop graduates who think strategically regarding the application of information systems to solve business problems.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study attempted to review the previous studies in undergraduate information systems curriculum review and to determine if a similar methodology could be applied towards master degree offerings in information systems. One limitation of this study is that is was limited towards only universities located in the western region of the United States.. Opportunities for future research not only include expansion towards other MSIT/MSIS/MSIM models throughout the United States but also the world.

CONCLUSION

There has been a large expansion in the number of graduate program offerings in information systems. However, unlike its undergraduate counterpart there has been little investigation towards the commonalities between university programs. More importantly there has been little examination towards what exactly are the right courses to be offered and what should the courses be teaching. This study sought to provoke the topic of which many universities either are incorporating or contemplating—graduate information systems education.

Full References available upon request.