

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mike Mahon
President and Vice Chancellor

DATE: May 16, 2013

FROM: Bob Boudreau
Chair, University Review Committee

RE: Faculty of Management – Information Systems Area, Academic Quality Assurance Review

In accordance with the U of L *Academic Quality Assurance Policy and Process*, the University Review Committee approved the review of the Faculty of Management – Information Systems Area at its December 18, 2012 meeting.

The Program Review Committee for this review was comprised of Brian Dobing (Coordinator), Gordon Hunter, Helen Kelley, and James Graham. The review produced four documents:¹

1. *Quality Assurance Review Self-Study Report for Information Systems (IS) Programs* (May 13, 2012) – Self Study Report developed by the Information Systems Program Review Committee.
2. *External Review Report for Information Systems (IS) Programs* (July 14, 2012) – External Review Report prepared by external reviewers Blaize Horner Reich and Barbara L. Marcolin.
3. *Response to Information Systems External Review Report* (October 12, 2012) – Program Response developed by the Information Systems Program Review Committee.
4. *Quality Assurance, Faculty of Management, Information Systems: Response of the Dean* (December 12, 2012) – response to the review, written by Robert Ellis, Dean of Management.

Self Study

Overall, the Self Study found that Information Systems (IS) programs are of a good quality that produce graduates with knowledge and skills that are valued by employers seeking employees in the information systems field.

There are four major issues that Information Systems needs to address:

- What changes should be made to the IS Major to increase enrollment and maintain or enhance quality?
- What is the appropriate balance for the curriculum between technical (primarily programming), business analysis, and communication/interpersonal skills?
- Should the program be based on a specific platform or approach?
- Should the program join the CCICT Business Technology Management program?²

¹ All documents are available upon request.

² This is “a new undergraduate university program that Canadian Coalition for Tomorrow’s ICT Skills (CCICT) corporate and academic members have designed to improve the quality and quantity of business professionals capable of implementing information and communications technologies (ICTs) to achieve productivity, innovation, entrepreneurship, and competitive advantage” (Business Technology Management brochure, CCICT, 2012.) See <http://ccict.ca/ccict-strategy/btm>

Some of the recommendations for improving Information Systems programs are:

- Change the curriculum to align with the Canadian Coalition for Tomorrow's ICT Skills Business Technology Management program and increase the appeal to potential students. Curriculum changes include: adding a greater focus in management, web and media design, and interactive interface design; increase program flexibility; add more discipline-specific knowledge and skills; and make it easier to schedule IS minor and major courses.
- Raise students' interest in Information Systems by aggressively promoting opportunities in IS occupations.
- Through continuous improvement, respond to changes in the external environment and industries to prepare IS students for successful careers.

External Review

The External Review Report noted strengths, challenges, opportunities, and recommendations:

Strengths:

- Strong job opportunities.
- Supportive faculty.
- Solid curriculum.
- Good quality faculty.
- High levels of student satisfaction.
- Program resources are excellent.
- Strong support from University leadership.

Challenges:

- Enrolment has fallen since 2000 and has not recovered.
- Weak connections with IS alumni or employers.
- Only 2.5 FTE are available to teach in the major.
- Students lack awareness of careers for IS graduates.
- Budget pressures exist because Management faculty generally command higher salaries.
- Too many U of L IS options.

Opportunities:

- Create an IS Advisory Board.
- Bring alumni and employers into the classroom.
- Communicate the wide range of IS co-op jobs available.
- Boost the engagement of IS students through, for example, clubs, competitions, and service learning.

Recommendations:

- Consider various program alternatives, including an enhanced major or targeted minors (New Media, Entrepreneurship, Business Technology Management).
 - Boost promotions. Emphasize co-op jobs and employability of graduates.
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Program Response

In its response to the External Review Report, the Self Study Committee provided commentary on the observations and recommendations of the External Reviewers.

- Offering an enhanced IS major and aligning with the Business Technology Management program would enhance the quality of the IS program.
- An IS minor could add value to the existing Management majors.
- An IS Advisory Council, which advises on IS program design and alignment with the Business Technology Program, should be formed.
- The IS area should work to increase student engagement opportunities, including use of working professionals in courses, case competitions, and enhancing the co-op program.
- The lack of faculty resources in the IS area is a concern. This problem will increase as, beginning in 2013, IS faculty will have to cover two additional sections of MGT 2070 - Operations and Quantitative Management, which is a core requirement in the Faculty.
- Low enrolments in the IS major are a concern. The proposed solution from the external review – better partnerships with industry – is difficult in practice due to a small IT workforce in Lethbridge. However, IS has identified some managers who can support the program. The students need clear messages from industry about IT career opportunities for IS graduates.
- The recommendation to switch from Windows programming to Web programming is consistent with IS thinking, but there is no guarantee that a New Media programming course will be developed to support this.
- The Computer Science 1620 course requirement for the IS major is a key reason for the enrolment problems, as many students find the course uninteresting, irrelevant, or difficult. IS agrees that its programs should keep the programming requirement, but how this is taught needs to be reexamined.
- For the post-diploma students, the best option is to reduce GLER requirements, which would allow them to take more courses in their major.
- The idea of a “New Media Entrepreneurship” major is interesting, and could attract more students. This could be developed relatively easily, by combining the IS and New Media minors with a Small Business course as an elective.

Dean's Response

In his response to the results of the review, Dean of Management Robert Ellis compiled six main recommendations to take action on:

1. Create an Information Systems Advisory Board, comprised of representatives from industry and alumni. This Board will: provide advice on curriculum; create student co-op placements; help promote career opportunities to students; and raise the profile of the IS program.
2. Consider joining the Canadian Coalition for Tomorrow's Information and Communications Technology Skills (CCICT), an industry group whose goal "is to help increase ICT-related post-secondary enrolments" (<http://ccict.ca/>).
3. Implement an enhanced IS Major in 2013.
4. Create a Marketing Manager position, who will be responsible for the marketing, communications, and public relations activities of the Faculty of Management.
5. Recruit a tenure-track faculty member in IS for 2014.
6. Expand leadership and experiential learning opportunities for IS students.

The Student Professional Development Program launched in Fall 2012, and a Co-op Field Advisor was hired in 2011. Beginning in 2013, co-op education will be offered to second year IS students.

The University Review Committee is satisfied that the Faculty of Management – Information Systems Area academic quality assurance review has followed the U of L's academic quality assurance process appropriately, and acknowledges the successful completion of the review.

Update

Due to several considerations, since the program review was closed in December 2012 the internal process for academic program suspension has been initiated for the B.Mgt., Major in Information Systems and affected programs. As a consequence, each of the six action steps from the Dean's Response and the Provost's Implementation Expectations Memo will be reviewed.

Sincerely,



Robert A. Boudreau

Chair, University Review Committee

Cc: Andrew Hakin, Provost and Vice President (Academic)