



Chapter XI

Solving Common Business Problems with Microsoft Office®

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ABSTRACT

The authors traced the process of revising and updating a long-existing Micro-Based Software class at the undergraduate level at Metropolitan State College of Denver. The course was designed to allow students to become proficient in end user computing at the operational business level. The revisions were prompted by the increasing sophistication of horizontal microcomputer application programs, the increase in the level of computer literacy among undergraduate School of Business students, and the students' need for experience in problem solving and applying the theory they learned using the Microsoft Office software suite. A pilot class was taught utilizing the revised curriculum in the Fall of 2001. The revised curriculum involved using Web-based material and regular presentation sessions for solutions to assigned problems. An efficacy survey was administered at the end of the class, to determine student satisfaction with the revised curriculum. The success of the pilot class resulted in implementing the revised content in all sections of the Micro-Based Software class as of Spring semester, 2002.

BACKGROUND

In today's business environment, most of the commonly occurring daily business problems are solved at the desktop computer, using existing horizontal software applications. Many of the operational level problems are solved using the most popular horizontal application suite, *Microsoft Office*. Some version of *Office* is installed on almost all business computers and is used almost universally throughout the organizational environment. Hence, end user computing proficiency is more important than ever. The central typing pool and the electronic data processing (EDP), or end user support services for problems requiring a short turnaround time, are almost nonexistent anymore. Office staff and lower level managers are responsible for solving daily problems on their own, using the horizontal microcomputer application program with which they are familiar. With current GUI software programs and enhanced Help facilities, including well-designed Search facilities, cascading Windows where Help steps remain on the screen, and social interfaces like the *Microsoft Office Assistant*, the software skills to perform a task is no longer the hurdle. It is actually the problem-solving process that is the challenge. This is an account of how an existing Micro-Based Software course was revamped to include problem-solving elements, so that business school graduates would be better prepared to tackle the daily problems in the office.

Much has been written on end user computing since microcomputers became the *modus operandi* of the business world. More than one journal is devoted entirely to end-user computing, such as *The Journal of End User Computing* sponsored by IRMA and published by Idea Group Publishing. The microcomputer has added a new dimension to end user support by increasing the range of computer information systems and increasing the computer literacy of the end user (Lundgren, 1998).

When hands-on laboratory sessions were introduced into end user computing courses in the 1990s, students were given the opportunity to "learn by doing." The computer provided the vehicle for the learning, where students actually learned concepts while working with the software program. It had become obvious that learning programs should be designed to allow the flexibility that resource-based, self-paced learning could provide (Stoney, 1999). When the hardware could support it, self-paced, resource-based instruction, such as multimedia, provided the links between conceptual and experiential learning (Stoney, 1999). Increasingly, as the program interfaces became totally graphical, many concepts and ideas could not be taught without the aid of technology to represent and manipulate them. Molnar (1997) noted that computers have revolutionized the representation and manipulation of information.

Web delivered courses spawned a new surge in research on micro-based courses. A study was done recently, comparing 94 students in a traditional classroom, with 37 students taking the same course online. It was found the perception of the online students was that they learned as much and had the same quality of instruction as the students in the classroom (Cooper, 2000). This

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