Chapter XV

Designing e-Business and e-Commerce Courses to Meet Industry Needs

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is designed to assist undergraduate program developers in designing and developing courses that will better prepare graduates to have a balanced mix of e-business, e-commerce, communication, and leadership skills that will equip them for roles as consultants for small-to-medium enterprises. Because small-to-medium enterprises do not have a vast budget or knowledge of e-commerce development, they are more likely to contract a consultant within their local community rather than contract a larger consulting firm that is more likely to have a number of staff members with a variety of specialist skills. This being the case, undergraduate courses must equip our professionals with skills sets that focus on e-business strategic planning as well as the e-commerce technology skills that will enable them to design, develop, and implement e-business strategies that meet the needs of small-to-medium enterprises by understanding the environments in which they operate.

INTRODUCTION

Accountability of universities to deliver courses and programs that are relevant for today's society is placing pressure upon educators to find a balance between the philosophical argument for the benefits of a university education and the fiscal constraints for funding a public higher education sector. While government agencies remain the major funding source for universities, course and program content will continue to be subjected to calls by legislative bodies and industry groups to be relevant and have outcomes that enable the graduate to "hit the ground running" with employability skills that match the position description. With employers selecting graduates on their employability qualities, attributes, capabilities, and employability skills, a major concern for course developers must be on what makes this university's course or program immediately recognized and accepted by industry, because there are a large number of universities that offer programs with the same or a similar name.

Three reports by the Australian government — "Backing Australia's Ability" (2001), "Knowledge and Innovation" (1999), and "Investing for Growth" (1997) —have set the framework for a set of desirable skills a knowledge worker in the information age will require to effectively compete within the knowledge economy.

In a project commissioned by the Australian Department of Education, Science, and Training (the major funding source for Australian universities), titled "Employability Skills for the Future" (DEST, 2002), the focus was placed on developing "clear definitions of what Australian industry and leading business enterprises mean by 'employability' skills and the consistency or otherwise between the various terms similarly used" (p. 2). The Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee (AVCC), together with other public-funded training agencies, are required to respond to the outcomes of this report by identifying "implications for policy development and programs…(and) strategies and timelines for implementation of the framework" (p. 58) for "preparing graduates with appropriate skills and attributes" (p. 25).

Future courses and programs developed in Australian universities will have to be developed to enable the graduate to operate "effectively with and upon a body of knowledge of sufficient depth to begin professional practice," (p. 25) so that the transition from university to workplace will not be difficult and so that graduates' expectations will not be unrealistic.

Within the context of the information age, a method for integrating employability skills into courses and programs in electronic commerce and electronic business has been set out in this chapter as a way of assisting course and program developers to better prepare graduates to "hit the road running" with the level of confidence that will enhance their prospects of a successful career.

BACKGROUND

Although there are many and varied definitions for electronic commerce, Lawrence and Lawrence (2000) use the definition "buying and selling of information, products and services via computer networks today and in the future, using any one of the myriad of networks that make up the Internet." Katakota and Whinston (1996) define e-commerce as "a modern business methodology that addresses the needs of organizations, merchants, and consumers to cut costs while improving the quality of goods and services and increasing the speed

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