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Chapter XX
Teaching Information Systems to International Students in Australia: A Global Information Technology Perspective

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ABSTRACT

GIT and GIS have a significant impact on the undergraduate and postgraduate programs offered in universities in Australia. Further, how to teach IT and IS to international students has been becoming a significant issue for IT and IS programs offered in Australia, in particular in the context of a fiercely competitive market of international students and in the context of GIT and GIS. However, these topics have not drawn the attention of academic researchers so far. This chapter will fill this gap by examining the impact of global information technology on universities in Australia in such areas as curriculum development, textbooks and teaching, and looking at some issues in teaching information technology and information systems to international students from different countries with different IT and IS backgrounds based on the author's working and teaching experience in three different universities in Australia. This chapter also makes a daring prediction for the impact of GIT on international education in Australia and proposes a few viable strategies for resolving some issues facing international education for IT and IS in Australia. The proposed approach is very useful for research and development of GIT and GIS as well as for IT/IS programs in Australian universities.

INTRODUCTION

Global information technology (GIT) and global information systems (GIS) are not a new concept, because Manheim (1992) discusses the critical issues and strategic opportunities for globally competing firms using GIT and GIS. Palvia (1997) proposes a model of the global and strategic impact of information technology (IT). Palvia, Jain Palvia, and Whitworth (2002) also address

some key issues of GIT and provide a model for analyzing global IT issues. Akmanligil and Palvia (2004) discuss strategies for GIS development, in which they consider GIS as it is used across one or more national borders. However, like global economy, GIT and GIS have a significant impact on the undergraduate and postgraduate programs offered in universities in Australia. In particular, the international students have dominated the student numbers that enrolled in IT and information systems (IS) in Australian universities. The majority of students enrolled in IT/IS postgraduate programs (by course work) are from Asia, mainly from China and India. For example, there were 16 students in a subject entitled Decision Support Systems taught by this author in Autumn 2006, and only one of these was Australian. The rest were from Asian countries. However, "global information technology in Australia" cannot be Googled in its "scholar" world, which implies that this topic has not drawn the attention of academic researchers so far. This chapter will fill the gap by examining GIT and its impacts on IT and IS education in Australian universities.

Further, how to teach IT and IS to international students has been becoming a significant issue for IT and IS programs offered in Australia, in particular in the context of a fiercely competitive market of international students and in the context of GIT and GIS. However, this issue has been technically ignored to some extent in universities in Australia. The administrators might believe that the key to teaching IT and IS in the international student-filled environment is to use flexible teaching methods in an online teaching and learning environment. This chapter will analyze some issues of teaching IT and IS international students based on my working and teaching experience in three different universities in Australia. My working and studying experience in China and Germany will certainly affect the discussion in the chapter.

The term IT is frequently used today not only within universities and colleges but also by individuals and governments. Strictly speaking, IT in Australia covers all disciplines of computing, at least from a viewpoint of immigration policies. Because there are some differences between IT and IS within universities, I have used IT and IS or both in some contexts.

The rest of the chapter is organized as follows. The next section examines international education in Australia, followed by a look at IT and IS in Australian universities from a global viewpoint. I then discuss the impacts of GIT on IT and IS in Australia, as well as my experience teaching IT and IS in Australia as an example of GIT. The next section discusses the future trend for IT and IS in Australia. I end the chapter with some concluding remarks and by proposing future research directions.

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

This section will examine international education in Australia within a context of globalization. Therefore, GIT can be considered as a part of international education.

Harman (2002) considers Australia as a major higher education exporter. He also discusses internationalization of higher education within a context of globalization.

The higher education sector in Australia comprises 37 public and three private autonomous and self-accrediting universities, and four other autonomous and self-accrediting institutions. Internationalization of higher education in Australia has made significant progress since the 1980s. In 2004, 362,092 students commenced higher education in Australia, 107,142 of them being international students from overseas (DEST, 2005). This means that international students accounted for about 30% of the total new enrolled students in Australian universities in 2004.

Marginson (2004) points out that "between 1990 and 2002 the number of international students enrolled in Australian universities increased from 24,998 to 185,058." Lukic, Broadbent, and Maclachlan (2004) also noted that the enrollments of international students in Australian universities increased 123% from 1997 to 2002. Therefore, "international students are making up a substantial and growing proportion of Australian higher