

## Chapter XII

# Industry–Academic Partnerships in Information Systems Education

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### ABSTRACT

*Several thousand universities worldwide participate in industry-academic partnerships as a way to expose their students to “real-world” issues and technologies and to provide them skills that will facilitate their transition from the university to the workplace. This chapter highlights several of the leading IT-focused, industry-academic programs such as Hyperion’s Academic Alliance Program, the Teradata University Network, and SAP’s University Alliance Program; and references similar initiatives from Cisco, SUN, and IBM. The focus of the chapter is from an industry practitioner’s perspective; it covers what motivates companies to launch these types of programs, what the programs’ goals are, and what benefits accrue to the participating company and university. Information systems and technology (IS&T) are evolving so quickly that universities are continually challenged to keep abreast of the latest developments to ensure that their curricula and programs are current. On one hand, IT programs are pressured by various stakeholders—deans, incoming students, parents, businesses recruiting on campus, and so forth—to keep their programs current and relevant to these constituents’ needs. On the other hand, faculty and IT programs cannot chase the latest fads and each new innovation, if they are to offer a stable learning environment. The significant costs—in terms of time, training, technical support, curriculum revisions, and so forth—involved in deploying commercial software in an academic setting makes selecting which partnerships to pursue an important and far-reaching decision. The benefits can be significant, but the faculty need to understand up front, the expectations and level of commitment needed to make these kinds of collaborations successful. By gaining a better understanding of how industry views these programs, academics will be better able to assess these alliances and determine which best support and align with their programs’ goals and learning objectives. Developing students*

*who can join companies as new employees and IT leaders and quickly contribute to a firm's success is something that both universities and businesses strive for. But, it requires a mutual understanding of the skills that will be needed, vehicles for developing those skills within the students, and a buy-in from faculty to develop the necessary curriculum and teaching resources. This chapter contends that successfully managed industry-academic partnerships can be a vehicle for developing these capabilities, while enriching learning opportunities for students.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In a 2006 report based on a survey of 1,400 chief information officers (CIOs), Gartner (2006) reported that the business intelligence (BI) market had grown 6.2% over the previous year, would hit \$2.5 billion in 2006 and that “business intelligence has surpassed security as the top technology priority this year.” For companies selling into the BI space, these findings seem to be a clear affirmation of the business opportunity. But, what if, there are no employees at prospective client firms that understand the concepts around business intelligence or know how to use the tools available? At the 2005 Gartner Business Intelligence Summit, Gartner released findings that “Large businesses will need three times as many business intelligence personnel in 2008 as they did in 2004,” but that, ... “*A lack of user skills and knowledge of best practices form the most important barrier to business deployment*”(Gartner, 2005). How can a company grow its market and business if there are not users educated on the value of their solutions?

What if, you were Sun Microsystem's new chief executive officer (CEO), and you saw that almost every student in every IT program around the world was using Microsoft products day-in-and-day-out? Where would your customers find the Solaris and Java gurus that they will need to run a SUN environment? What if you were John Chambers, the CEO of Cisco, selling your networking equipment in over 150 countries around the world? What kinds of investments and collabo-

rations could you make with academia to develop a pipeline of Cisco-savvy network engineers and administrators to ensure that your customers worldwide had the technical talent available to deploy and manage Cisco products? In the sections that follow, this chapter will highlight some of the business drivers that motivate IT firms to develop collaborations with institutions of higher education. Further, it will provide examples of specific programs and their goals and offerings. Research findings on the impact of IT-focused collaborations will be reviewed along with suggestions—from an industry partner's perspective—on how faculty and universities can gain the best learning opportunities and benefits for their students.

## **INDUSTRY-ACADEMIC COLLABORATIONS AND ENLIGHTENED SELF-INTEREST**

In March 2006, the University of Nebraska—Lincoln announced that IBM, as part of its expanding IBM Academic Alliance, was providing approximately \$1 million worth of its iServer systems to outfit a new lab in the College of Business Administration. This is an important donation to the management information systems (MIS) program and a generous investment by IBM as indicated by Chancellor Harvey Perlman's comments: “*The University recognizes that to offer an innovative MIS program that continues to attract the best and brightest leadership and student talent, we*

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