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Chapter III

Integrating SAP Across the Business Curriculum

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Abstract

This chapter describes the integration of the SAP R/3 system into courses across the undergraduate and graduate business curriculum at Bentley College. It argues that the integration of the SAP R/3 system into existing business courses, rather than creating standalone courses covering enterprise systems concepts, is a preferable way to immerse students in

information technology issues and help them understand how enterprise systems have significantly transformed the workplace. The authors describe the processes used to train faculty, develop and test curriculum materials, and coordinate the integration effort. Learning objectives and SAP R/3 curricular content are described for MBA, accounting, and finance courses.

Introduction

Business school faculty have always struggled with the sometimes antithetical demands of providing students with lifetime career knowledge while giving them enough practical skills to obtain a good entry level position upon graduation. A prime example of this dilemma relates to “hands-on” computer skills. Outside of the domain of information systems where learning programming languages and database management skills are key to the curriculum, business faculty face valid criticism when their hands-on exercises are nothing more than computerized versions of textbook problem solving. It is not adequate to acquaint students with simulated and simplified versions of real business computer system issues. To be truly useful, classroom computer applications must both reflect the theory of a subject area and expose the student to real, and therefore complex, software and data. Such exposure gives the students an increased appreciation of technology’s role in their intended career paths while demonstrating the changes technology brings about in the business processes and workflow of the area under study. This, then, is the powerful lesson resulting from intensive immersion into the real world of information technology.

A primary mechanism for exposing students to the synergy of information technology and business theory is enterprise systems. Enterprise systems are used by companies and governmental organizations of all sizes to support and integrate internal business processes, and increasingly, to interact with their business partners. The results are simplified and automated data entry, more sophisticated analysis for decision-making, and coordination among previously isolated business functions. Thus, exposure to enterprise systems gives students a more accurate and sophisticated picture of the way business works today and will continue to evolve in the future.

Many colleges and universities have joined SAP’s Educational Alliance (EA) program in the past few years and have used SAP’s R/3 enterprise system in

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