

## EDITOR'S COMMENTS

### What Are the Best MIS Programs in U.S. Business Schools?

Every year, two popular magazines, *Business Week* and *U.S. News & World Report*, publish their respective lists of the best MIS/technology programs. Interestingly, these lists include business schools without MIS faculty and exclude other business schools with exemplary MIS programs. There are many possible explanations for this. One is that the perceptions of respondents to the two magazines' surveys—respondents who are from outside academia—might make no distinction between a university's business school and its computer science or engineering program, or between a business school's information systems program and its decision science or management science program. Even today, "information systems" remains synonymous with "computers," "statistics," and "models" in the minds of many otherwise well informed people. Another possible explanation is that the reputation of a business school or its university might be overwhelming the objective measures in a magazine's overall assessment of the program. Another argument is that some respondents (employers) might be evaluating the best students, not the best programs.

As a first step in looking into this situation, I wanted to know if any of my academic colleagues shared reactions similar to mine. I approached three, each one of whom is an accomplished university educator and researcher in MIS, who is active in academic service organizations (such as the Association for Information Systems and the Academy of Management), and who has experience with industry. I asked them to provide input to my September editorial statement, which I said was tentatively titled, "The Best MIS Programs in U.S. Business Schools," by answering the following two questions: "Which 10 business schools have the best information systems/MIS faculties?" and "Which 10 business schools are doing the most innovative master's level education (e.g., MBA or MS) regarding information technology?" I specified that there was no need to rank the schools within each list. The results appear in the table at the end of this editorial, including the schools in the top 10 of *U.S. News's* "Business Specialities: Management Information Systems (Ranked in 2001)" (see [www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/beyond/gradrank/gmbasp4.htm](http://www.usnews.com/usnews/edu/beyond/gradrank/gmbasp4.htm)) and *Business Week's* "TECHNOLOGY" list under the heading, "Finding the Cream of the MBA Crop" (see [www.businessweek.com/2000/00\\_40/b3701002.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/2000/00_40/b3701002.htm)).

There are some surprises. The University of Texas at Austin and the University of Maryland at College Park appear on the lists of all three academic experts, but are absent from the *Business Week* list. The three experts also all mention Georgia State University, but neither *Business Week* nor *U.S. News* includes Georgia State University in their top 10 lists (although, for *U.S. News*, Georgia State University is ranked just below its top 10). Altogether, there are eight schools that either *Business Week* or *U.S. News* identifies, but that the three experts do not, and there are 15 schools that one or more of the experts identify but that the magazines do not.

One can argue that academic experts would have as much to learn from popular opinion as *vice versa*. Still, when I visited the web sites of all 30 (not just the top 10) programs on the *U.S. News* list, "Business Specialities: Management Information Systems (Ranked in 2001)," and all 10 schools in *Business Week's* "TECHNOLOGY" list under the heading, "Finding the Cream of The MBA Crop," I was surprised at the thinness of the MIS offerings at some of the schools. Some of these "top" programs have no or only one MIS faculty member whom I could find listed in the ISWorld Net Faculty Directory. Based on my reading of the web pages of these schools, I noted that some have no required course in MIS in their MBA

program. (Yes, there is a shortage of MIS faculty, but the shortage is no justification.) Given the increasing need for literacy in information systems, one can question the extent to which these schools are succeeding in doing an ethical and effective job of preparing future managers, executives, and consultants whose decisions regarding information technology will make or waste millions of dollars and will enrich or deskill the jobs of thousands of workers.

MIS researchers have a responsibility beyond our immediate research activities; we must also act to disseminate our research. And our research innovations experience diffusion not only in the publication process, but also in the classroom, where we convey our ideas in a language that carries immediate relevance to future managers, executives, and consultants in case discussions, debates, and realizations about how to do things differently (i.e., "learning"). One possible means of living up to this responsibility would be for MIS scholars to publish our own rankings of the top MIS programs and the MBA programs with the best MIS curricula and teachers.

Another possible means would be to set up an accreditation program (perhaps in association with an organization such as the Association for Information Systems) that would give its stamp of approval to those MBA programs that do an adequate and ethical job of imparting literacy in information systems. Indeed, the very need to point out these suggestions only dramatizes the current lack of educational standards. The accreditation requirements need not be anything complicated; simply requiring an MIS course in the MBA curriculum and requiring the employment of at least one true, full time MIS faculty member (i.e., not a mathematical modeler or a professor from another area who teaches an MIS course on the side) would be a significant step forward. The result would be a better supply of future managers, executives, and consultants who are more likely to be literate in information systems and therefore less likely to do the following: to confuse technology-enabled business process reengineering with downsizing, to sign off on a sizeable investment in information technology without an information technology strategy's first being formulated and aligned with the organization's business strategy, and to make the very basic but still common mistake of assuming that database design has nothing whatsoever to do with business policy.

An appropriate methodology for determining the best MIS programs in U.S. business schools remains a matter to be determined. One of the three experts whom I consulted offered the following suggestions:

As academics, we should be concerned [about any possibly] fallacious methodology that does many good MIS units and scholars a major disservice. There must be a better way, and here are some ideas.

1. All MIS units are identified [and are] requested to provide two pieces of information...
  - a. One page listing its [MIS] faculty and [their] significant achievements.
  - b. One page describing what is innovative about its [master's level education (e.g., MBA or MS) regarding information technology].
2. A panel of judges reads all of this material and selects the 10 "top" schools for each question.
3. Judges at the extremes have their scores thrown out as in Olympic diving.
4. If the panel of judges were sufficiently large (i.e., > 10), the top 10 for each question [could be] q-sorted by the judges and factor analyzed to determine whether the judges have the same criteria. Of course, another approach is to get the judges

to agree on the criteria in advance, but this does not mean they will be [able to] apply them faithfully and with the appropriate weights.

5. No person is allowed to rank his/her MIS unit.

A further refinement would be to remove all identifying information from that supplied by MIS units (e.g., faculty names, university name, etc.) to focus attention on the information and away from personalities.

On the other hand, perhaps it is less important for the good of corporations, governments, workers, and societies overall to come up with yet another top 10 list in this or that category than simply to promulgate a common core of knowledge and educational standards that would help to guarantee information systems literacy. In fact, many MIS scholars are already doing just that when we produce textbooks for this topic.

So far, I have discussed the situation only in the United States, but I am sure that the corresponding issues facing MIS scholars in Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and the rest of the Americas are no less complicated. Around the world, it is our responsibility as MIS scholars to promote information systems literacy through our research and teaching, and it remains no less our responsibility to critique and supplement popular conceptions about what constitutes the "best" MIS educational programs.

**Allen S. Lee**  
**Editor-in-Chief**

*Lee/Editor's Comments*





New York University (Stern)	x			x		x	x	
Northwestern University (Kellogg)		x						
Stanford University	x	x					x	
University of California, Berkeley (Haas)					x			x
University of Arizona (Eller)	x							
University of Chicago		x						
University of Georgia (Terry)			x		x			x
University of Houston			x		x			
University of Maryland, College Park	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor	x							
University of Minnesota, Twin Cities (Carlson)	x			x			x	
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill						x		
University of Oklahoma			x			x		
University of Pennsylvania (Wharton)	x	x		x			x	
University of Pittsburgh (Katz)				x	x			x
University of Southern California (Marshall)			x			x		
University of Texas, Austin (McCombs)	x		x	x	x	x	x	x
University of Virginia		x						