

2013 BOV Report – Undergraduate Program

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The key focus is on growth for the undergraduate program. Growth is primarily influenced by the curriculum, faculty and student satisfaction. All three of these topics have many sub-topics and details that need to be examined.

The curriculum has shown to be in demand by employers. The most recent Placement report from the University states that our students have a 94% placement rate with employers and graduate school. Although this shows the competitive nature of our program, the IT field constantly changes, forcing us to assess our curriculum for strengths and weaknesses. In this last year, the BSIS program has been actively engaged with the Telecommunications program faculty in enhancing the curriculum. Specifically, the computer networking lab course has been re-written to better meet the needs of the undergraduate population, the mobile application course is being offered, a data analytics course is being tested to determine student interest levels, and the wireless course will be available in a dual enrollment setting with undergraduate and graduate students.

Regarding the concentrations available to undergraduates, there is active discussion about expanding the range of opportunities. In particular, a concentration in data analytics is being explored with a focus on analytics, data mining and visualization. The corporate marketplace has already demonstrated an interest in candidates that possess skills in this area, so it makes sense to fully explore it. During the Spring 2013 term, a course in data analytics was offered that will allow for a determination of the level of interest undergraduates have in such a specialization. If there proves to be a significant demand, then the other courses will be developed and implemented. In addition, if there is an increase in faculty resources, a separate concentration in security will be considered. Currently, security is a joint concentration with networking.

A new course was introduced in Fall 2012 titled “Special Topics: IT Management,” in which students used a case study approach to analyze situations that IT professionals encounter in their careers. This high level approach expands students’ problem solving ability and makes them more mature regarding the issues of the professional workplace. The case study approach is a rich technique promoting collaborative team work, analytical thinking and the relationship between technology and human resources.

As mentioned, continued growth in the undergraduate program will require more dedicated faculty resources. In particular, a Professor of Practice is currently being recruited, with an expected start before the beginning of the Fall 2013 term. This type of position is currently in place at Penn State, Syracuse, University of Maryland and Drexel. The position focuses on teaching and applied research. This would allow the BSIS program to make advances in its systems analysis and design classes, applied research projects, internship/corporate relations and consistent course scheduling.

Courses at the undergraduate level are taught by full-time faculty members, adjuncts and teaching fellows. Fifteen out of twenty of the regular full-time faculty members in IS and Tele have

taught in the undergraduate program. As enrollment continues to increase in the MSIS and MST programs, there will be a need to involve more faculty members in teaching undergraduate classes. Also, we have successfully experimented with dual enrollment courses and limited online classes. The use of online classes may be a valuable asset in reaching post baccalaureate students who want to become more competitive in the workplace. Currently, the university wants to keep the first undergraduate degree an in-class residential type of experience. However, a post baccalaureate certificate of five IT online classes could be a very attractive option. Of course, this would involve a significant investment of faculty time and effort in learning to teach in this modality at the undergraduate level.

The third, and maybe the most important, component of continued growth is the satisfaction of our students. It seems that some initial (SERU) reports suggest that our students are not as satisfied as some of their counterparts at the university. This is a key reflection on our commitment to the undergraduate program and to the quality of our students. The construction of a collaborative space on the 3rd floor will be a great opportunity to promote a positive atmosphere to undergraduate students and a place for them to build a sense of community. Hopefully, it will be used for group projects, student organization meetings, company presentations and individual study. Hopefully, we will see a more positive review of their academic experience.

In order to address this area, there are a number of steps being taken. A survey of student attitudes is being conducted within undergraduate classes to obtain feedback from students on what they would like to see in the Information Science program. Preliminary results indicate that students would like to be more involved in the school. The area mentioned most frequently revolves around professional development. Some of the student suggestions include visiting IT companies, inviting professional speakers to campus, résumé and interviewing workshops, and anything focused on jobs.

In addition, students have placed a high value on having collaborative work spaces for their group projects in the building. As we have previously discussed, this building is quite a challenge due to its construction. However, we have a great opportunity in the repurposing of the third floor to provide not only collaborative work areas but also a signature space for the Information Science program. This may be the most significant opportunity for the school in the last decade to increase student satisfaction, to brand an identity, and to help with marketing and recruiting.

Students have also mentioned wanting to engage in social activities with their peers. Because this is a two year program, students spend a short amount of time together and are looking for opportunities to increase their interaction both through physical interactions and through social media opportunities.

The BSIS program is positioned to address these three areas this year. There are positive steps in increasing faculty allotment to the undergraduate program, dedicating a budget, increased involvement of Student Services personnel, developing on-line courses, and continued involvement in curricular expansion. The expansion of the program is dependent upon both financial (enrollment) concerns and the branding, identity, satisfaction, and ultimate success of its students.