

Presentation

OSRA 21st Annual Conference

St. Louis, Missouri

February 21-23, 2002

Portfolio Development for the IST Professional

Presenter: Deborah Frey
Information Management Systems
College of Applied Sciences and Arts
Southern Illinois University
Carbondale, IL 62901-6614
Phone: (618) 453-7225
E-mail: debfrey@siu.edu

Portfolio Development for the IST Professional

Employing the IT Professional: Selection and Retention Processes are Changing

In an era of challenging economic conditions, companies are prudent as they scrutinize application packets. November 2001, the Information Technology Association of America announced that there were “more than 400,000 unfilled IT jobs in the United States.” (Khirallah, 2001, p.1) Trends indicate that hiring officials are scrutinizing the IST employment candidates for an array of abilities that compliment the technical skills and the business operations. It is no longer enough to be able to master the hardware and software elements from the cubicle. IST professionals support end-users. Candidates that have the technical and communication skills combined with a working understanding of the challenges of doing business have the employment advantage. This hiring climate reinforces the need for IST professionals to be able to demonstrate their abilities for organizations.

To accentuate the usefulness of the portfolio project, consider the possibility of being able to optimize a match of skills to the needed project using a scannable portfolio product. A human resource management concept developed by Andrew Templer and Tupper Cawsey, supports the model of “portfolio careers”. This management technique uses “portfolio-centered career development” that makes it possible for top level management to match what the organization needs using the skills portfolios. “As the pace of change accelerates, the resulting flexibility becomes an overriding competitive advantage.” (1999, p.7) The career portfolio provides a portable delivery system to display those skills.

A Nontraditional Audience for the IST Professional Career Development Course

The Information Systems Technologies (IST) Profession course has been developed for delivery at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale's off-campus locations. The nontraditional student enrolled in the program is typically employed full-time accomplishing coursework via the weekend classroom delivery system. These scheduling constraints render an internship experience impractical and essentially unachievable. This course affords the student generous research opportunities to investigate the IST career field. Elements of the course are devoted to researching IST positions including job descriptions, likely responsibilities, and the general nature of the work. A self-evaluation component provides tools for the student to reflect on personal values and career desires to clarify and target a position in the field.

Equipping Students for Career Conditions That Lie Ahead

Projections recently published by the U.S. Department of Labor for computer related areas describe the computer technology career field "... to be the fastest growing industry in the economy, with employment expected to increase 86 percent between 2000 and 2010". (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Occupational Outlook Online) Despite this prediction of expansion and increase in the field, there is evidence by the numbers in mass layoffs that many employees are "disposable and subject to every cost-cutting whim". (Templer and Cawsey, 1999, p.70) Having better control of one's own destiny, while walking the discovery path for a satisfying career, is a possibility with maintenance of the career portfolio. In an era when organizations are seeking those with diverse skills sets, breadth of experience, personality and character qualities that compliment the workforce, the career portfolio provides a venue to showcase the individual and optimize a placement advantage beyond the résumé. The foundation for the extensive portfolio project for the Information Systems Technologies Profession course is to equip the

student with the most effective tools possible to have a dynamic impact in the interview situation. If there is no attempt to impress the employer, those who hire will remain unimpressed. The portfolio, when effectively developed, packaged and presented, in an impressive product.

The Information Systems Technologies Profession course deliverable is a comprehensive career portfolio that is appropriate for use as the student pursues employment and to expand as a living journal of career expertise. As the final step in the project, students present the completed portfolio project to a panel of their classroom peers in a mock interview scenario.

What Does This Student Audience Need?

Effective design of this project began with a realistic evaluation of how it would most benefit the nontraditional students enrolled in the pilot program at Goodfellow Air Force Base in San Angelo, Texas. How would this course and the portfolio project best serve these people? The group consisted of fourteen individuals that have been employed in the United States Air Force, ranging from two to twenty years. All were enrolled in the IST program to make a career change after leaving the military or to improve their career potential during the remainder of their enlistment. All expressed strong interest in developing skills to secure employment in the civilian sector as a second career after they had completed their enlistment. (Personal correspondence and interviews, IST program students, June, 2001) The focus for this coursework is to prepare these students for the career transition. As experienced employees that enjoy the benefits of effective military training, were they not adequately prepared to enter the civilian workforce without this course? Progression through the coursework resulted in a discovery process that produced some unexpected results. There were gaps in their preparation that left them unprepared for the career change.

Self-evaluation.

Consideration of the military environment for this clientele reveals nuances of life and work styles that require consideration to smoothly accomplish a transition into a civilian career. As students completed exercises designed to evaluate what was valuable to them personally in terms of future employment, questions were fielded regarding the specific work environment an information technologist might encounter. Some interesting moments provided the group pause when consideration was given to apparel expectations, not only for an interview, but day-to-day activities. Many had not been afforded the flexibility to choose what to wear to work each day. Military uniforms require maintenance, but no choices.

In their analysis of influence of individual differences on skill in end-user computing, Harrison and Rainer observe: “End-user computing has emerged as a vital component of the overall information resource of the organization...the research suggests that EUC management should consist of two, complementary processes: a macro (global or organization wide) process and a micro (individual) process.” (1992) The ability to work in a continuum of training to ensure that end-users are supported requires effective interpersonal skills at all organizational levels. Research continues to support the need for effective communication skills and behavioral characteristics that nurture cooperation when accomplishing technical tasks. The student groups participating in this course had achieved extraordinary team and communication skills in their previous career training and are able to respond to the needs of the IST field sufficiently equipped with the interpersonal skills set necessary to succeed.

Students used the evaluation exercises to align personal career goals with their lives. By identifying and candidly discussing course assignments that produced descriptions of personality traits, work pattern characteristics, personal responsibilities, skills and competencies, individuals

were enjoying revelations about their career directions. Discussion included comparisons between working for a small organization, a large company, self-employment, home-based businesses, and public versus private organizations. All exercises and discussions resulted in the common conclusion that employment in the information systems technology career field requires a lifelong commitment to learning and training. The self-evaluation process identified goals for the nontraditional students that were the preliminary preparation to develop a marketing strategy for their next job.

The career field research assignments.

Although this student group had impressive accomplishments as they completed the IST coursework, the group expressed concern and doubts about pursuit of employment in the IST field during this period of uncertainty in the economic environment. Students discussed concerns about their future in the wake of announcements of widespread layoffs, which have included many in the information technology field. It was apparent that considerable research of the career field and the trends that affect employment was necessary to begin the course. The research projects were designed to provide exposure to the following topics:

1. trends in the workplace
2. workplace challenges
3. skill-based planning and/or SCANS applications
4. Global considerations for the IT professional
5. Self-assessment
6. employee and employer expectations
7. Communication skills
8. Phases and trends in the IST job market

9. job prospects, sources of job information and assistance
10. packaging for the job search
 - a) resume preparation
 - b) Job application processes
 - c) Cover letters
 - d) Portfolio development
11. Interviewing
12. Evaluation, accepting and rejecting job offers
13. Transitioning
14. Professional development
15. Promotions, career enrichment versus enlargement
16. Professional equity, how to protect the job and the career track

To supplement the library services available to all students, a comprehensive research resource module is published to the Internet to support this course. This web page includes hyperlinks to websites for journal articles, professional associations, career services and writing skills resources.

Marketing to the Workforce-Development of the Career Portfolio.

To appreciate the development process for successful job search campaign, students learn the purposes and advantages of including the career portfolio in the job application and interview process. They prepare the portfolio as the final report, which includes:

1. Professional profile including a career summary and personal point of view in areas such as work ethic, organizational interests, management/team philosophy, personal and professional short term and long term goals

2. Résumé including education, skills and abilities, achievements and work experience (Students also prepare a scannable text-only version.)
3. Detailed description of abilities and marketable qualities such as; skill or experience area, performance or behavior, necessary or gained knowledge, personal traits that contribute to achievement in the area, background, and specific areas that exhibit use of the skill(s)
4. Work samples including reports, papers, studies, brochures, projects, presentations, CD-ROMs, videos, and other multimedia formats, anything that contributes to professional presence
5. Testimonials, letters of recommendation, recognitions from customer feedback, clients, colleagues, former employers, professors and performance evaluations and reviews
6. Awards, honors, scholarships
7. Conferences and workshops
8. Transcripts, degrees, licenses and certifications
9. Military records, awards and badges
10. References

The portfolio is packaged with all materials for submission to a potential employer with the assumption that the hiring official will either preview or review the materials before the final hiring decision is made. The assembly process involves group discussion of assembly methods, permanent and disposable media, and organization for most advantageous use.

Packaging for the job search

After completing exercises to self-evaluate and peruse the IST career field, students assemble a one page professional profile. The design of the page should be easily adapted to a web page as an introduction to the electronic portfolio. The profile describes the IST professional using a writing style that compares to the “Intro to Author” back cover of a book or an introduction that could be published in a company newsletter. This document is prepared as an introduction that shares qualities about the person in a narrative style description. Information offered may include a general overview of biographical information, a description of personal beliefs, expectations, perspectives, personal philosophies, what contributions the person believes they will make to the organization, personal and professional interests, and personal perspective on organizational objectives.

Résumé preparation and cover letters

Students have researched several organizations during the course to identify a particular position for which they could apply upon graduation. Guidance for these projects is structured to accommodate the nontraditional student pursuing a position in the private sector for that job. If students have strengths in diversified information technology applications and work experiences, consideration is given to the functional résumé design. Preparation of these documents is assigned with a specific employer as the target audience.

The IST professional should demonstrate progressive technical and detail skills in the production of the résumé. The “Cyberspace Résumé” guidelines require attention to detail and awareness of the technology that will be used to initially peruse the information. “Think of formatting your résumé as though you were creating a movie trailer about your readiness for the industries of your choice.” (Breidenbach, 2001, p.26) Students learn the advantages of

preparing a résumé to be viewed on the web including page flexibility, design advantages and use of hyperlinks to more information about the applicant.

Portfolio development

The portfolio project is the showcase for the applicants career biography. Designed to provide samples of exemplary performance, products, character and promotion abilities, the portfolio collection in process is analogous to a scrapbook. Because the assembly of a comprehensive portfolio requires extensive collection of materials, students are encouraged to use working three-ring binder with pockets to pull the product together. The portfolio should be continually updated with documentation with career, community and personal accomplishments and recognitions acknowledged and evidenced in the materials. The final project should be professionally assembled including a table of contents. Sections should be organized and prioritized to appeal to the specific audience.

Because a portfolio design is customized to the individual, the employer has a sense of the qualities that can ensure a “fit” in the organization. As IST professionals, students are strongly encouraged to produce an electronic profile for submission at the point of interview. With the ability to scan hard copy documents to create electronic files that can be saved to disk, the customization of the IST career portfolio should not be offered without an enclosed CD-rom or zip disk that can be viewed electronically. New product developments make it possible to store the contents of the portfolio on a business card CD-rom that has labeling products to replicate the business card contact information. This small card size portfolio indicates to the employer that this IST professional is abreast of new product lines and is progressive enough to use the applications.

Interviewing

Students are required to professionally present the portfolio in a panel interview scenario. The instructor role-plays as the hiring official that has conducted the initial private interview and has had an opportunity to review the portfolio. The instructor (hiring official) introduces the applicant to the classmates (role-played as a panel of potential co-workers, peers, supervisors, and department heads) for an abbreviated presentation and question and answer session. Students are encouraged to prepare a PowerPoint presentation for this exercise and develop a congenial environment for discussion to conclude the exercise.

Feedback

Feedback from the Information Systems Technologies Profession course and the portfolio project was very positive. Student responses to casual follow-up e-mail surveys indicate enthusiasm for the project and were gratified to have the experience to prepare to post-military career planning. Students were pleased and often surprised to find they had significant data, documentation and examples of demonstrated skills to use for the project. All students provided electronic files to support the hard copy submitted for the final interview exercise and were looking forward to assembly of the working project to begin their job search.

The portfolio project development for the Information Systems Technologies Profession was impetus for implementation of the profile module for group projects in other IST courses. Since the initial project, two profile projects have been used in other IST courses on campus to familiarize students with the process of self-evaluation and to develop an interactive environment in online and offline courses. The response has been encouraging and entertaining. The involuntary result is a prompt for communication in the classroom and a reinforcement of the soft skills development that is necessary for effective group dynamics.

RESOURCES:

Barker, J., and Kellen, J., (1998) *Career planning: A developmental approach*. Prentice Hall, Inc. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.

Beatty, R. H. (1986). *The five minute interview: A new and powerful approach to interviewing*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Beatty, R. H. (1989). *The perfect cover letter*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Borchard, D., Kelly, J.J., Weaver, N.P. (1999) *Your career: Choices and changes*. (7th ed.) Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, Dubuque, Iowa

Breidenbach, M.E. (2001) *Career development: Strategies and technologies for career and life balance*. (4th ed.) Prentice Hall, Inc. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.

Foxman, L. D. (1989). *The executive résumé book*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Harris, C, Henle, M., Stebelton, M. (2001) *Hired! The job hunting/career planning guide*. (2nd ed.) Prentice Hall, Inc. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.

Harrison, A. W. and Rainer, R. K. (1992) The influence of individual differences on skill in end-user computing. *Journal of Management Information Systems*. 9 (1) 93.

Kennedy, J. L., & Morrow, T. J. (1994). *Electronic job search revolution: Win with the new technology that's reshaping today's job market*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Khirallah, D.R. (2001). Where are the jobs? *Information Week.com*. Retrieved from the Internet, November 15, 2001, from <http://www.informationweek.com/story/TWK20011109S0006>

Kushner, J. A. (1996). *How to find and apply for a job*. (6th ed.). Cincinnati, OH: South-Western Educational Publishing.

Molloy, J. T. (1988). *John T. Molloy's new dress for success*. New York, NY: Warner Books.

Moss, A. L., Yale, D.G. (2000). *Employment opportunity: Outlook, reason, and reality*. Prentice Hall, Inc. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.

Powell, C.R. (1999). *Career planning today: Hire me!* (4th ed.) Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, Dubuque, Iowa

Sherfield, R.M, Montgomery, R.J., Moody, P.G. (2001). *Capstone: Succeeding beyond college*. Prentice Hall, Inc. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.

Smith, M.H. (1993). *The résumé writer's handbook*. (2nd ed.). New York. NY: Harper Collins Publishers (Harper Paperbacks).

U.S. Department of Labor; The Bureau of Labor Statistics. (Winter 2001-02) How Industries Differ. *Occupational Outlook Handbook* [OOQ Online] 45 (4) Retrieved from the Internet, January 24, 2002, from <http://stats.bls.gov/pub/ooq/ooqhome.htm>

Williams, A.G., Hall, K.J. (2001) *Creating your career portfolio: At a glance guide for students*. (2nd ed.) Prentice Hall, Inc. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.