

Letter from the Editor Choosing a Major for Success

Robert G. Brookshire

At our university, admission to the College of Business is restricted. About a quarter of all students at James Madison University are business majors, but we insist on keeping class sizes low and on staffing our introductory courses with full-time, tenure-track faculty whenever possible. We must, therefore, limit the number of students who are able to concentrate in business disciplines.

There are many strategies that colleges, schools, or departments can use to cap enrollment. We have chosen to allow any student to take our first- and second-year core courses, but to limit the number of students who can enter our third-year courses. In order to be admitted to the third-year courses, our students must have completed all the lower-division core coursework, which includes two semesters of accounting, a statistics course, business calculus, business law, two semesters of economics, an interpersonal skills class, computer information systems, and management science. They must also have maintained a grade point average (GPA) of 2.5 or higher on a four-point scale.

A large majority of our students are able to meet these requirements, but there are a number who find that, at the end of the sophomore year, they are not eligible to continue business course work. For those students whose GPA is not too far below the minimum necessary for admission, we counsel an additional semester of liberal arts coursework calculated to raise the overall GPA. A few students, however, are unable to successfully complete our business core courses.

The management science and statistics courses are the ones that seem to present the biggest challenges to these students. We faculty members believe that the ability to reason numerically and the possession of a set of quantitative skills are critical to success in the modern business environment. Not all students are gifted in these areas, however.

Several times a year, therefore, I find myself meeting with a disappointed student, perhaps with parents in tow. The student has struggled mightily, perhaps even heroically, but has come up short. (One student, of blessed memory, took management science seven times, five times from the same instructor, before finally passing it.) I tell these students and parents that my goal is not to encourage students to major in business, but to choose a major in which they can excel. I believe that a sociology graduate with a B+ average is better equipped for success in life than a business major with a C-. Having a successful college experience is the most important thing, not the particular major that a student chooses. I visualize these students as repeatedly throwing themselves against a brick wall, trying to get through, but ignoring the open door just a few steps to their right.

Most often, it is not difficult to get these students to agree. They are frustrated and disappointed with their performance in their business classes and ready to look for something else. Art majors choose to study art because they love it; English majors pick their field because they love literature or writing; but most business majors do not love business. They choose their major because they believe it is a ticket to a successful career. All I have to do is to reassure these students that it is possible to have a good career without being a business major. As a political science major myself, I speak from the heart.

About This Issue

Sheila Smith's article in this issue deals with the factors that influence students' interest in

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information technology. She finds, among other things, that successful experiences with computers breeds more interest in information technology. If students can feel mastery over technology, this encourages them to seek more knowledge and experience with technology.

Catherine Chen's article is about the strategies that successful students use to become successful in their information systems course work. She compares students in both lecture and lab settings, and finds that good students in lecture courses are those who can regulate their own learning.

In the "Making a Difference" section this month, my colleagues Susan Palocsay and Ina Markham describe their innovative decision support systems course taught using spreadsheet technology, specifically Visual Basic for Applications. They provide a road map for others who might want to implement this training in their own courses.

Finally, our Assistant Editor, Lynn Bacon Keane, reviews *Communication Technologies* by Dennis Gehris and Linda Szul. She recommends this book as a text for several courses, based on its breadth of coverage of communication technology topics.

GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

The *Information Technology, Learning, and Performance Journal*, formerly known as the *Office System Research Journal*, publishes articles related to the field of organizational and end-user information systems (OEIS). Submissions may present the results of research in the discipline, deal with research methodologies and data treatment techniques, or describe research or experiences related to instruction in the discipline. For the "Making a Difference" section, manuscripts that discuss our theoretical bases or describe an innovative policy, procedure, method, technique, or practice that has potential benefit for systems professionals and/or educators and technology trainers are encouraged. We also accept reviews of current books—both academic and popular presses—related to OEIS. All submissions are submitted to a blind review process.

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