

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE OSRA MODEL CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

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An organization is known by the projects it undertakes and the communications it sponsors. The charter members who founded OSRA in 1981 needed a forum for discussing the impact the personal computer would have on work, and by extension, how business educators could best prepare people for work. It is no surprise, then, that the projects undertaken were first, conferences where inquiry-minded scholars could work together to find new ways of understanding the impact of technology; second, the creation of a refereed journal dedicated to scholarship on technology and its impact on work and learning; and third, the development of a curriculum designed to update and expand existing curricula. The charter members had one other brainstorm that would become a signature feature of the group: OSRA would not be just academics talking with each other; the bylaws would suggest that at least half the members would be researcher-practitioners, individuals interested in sharing research, whose employers were organizations other than colleges or universities.

The purpose of this article is to describe the development of the first two model curriculum projects that were rolled out in 1986 and then in 1996, with a view to introducing the third generation model curriculum development process, which was led by Steve Hunt and is the focus of this special issue. This third edition of the curriculum builds on both the processes and the technological tools used in the previous projects.

AN ACTION RESEARCH MODEL FOR CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Action research is a problem-based model originating in the work of Kurt Lewin (cf., Lewin, 1948). Its key stages are assessment, design, implementation, and evaluation. It is cyclical in that one stage follows another, and the stages are continually evaluated with feedback from each

stage, with one cycle informing the next. Action research supports the notion that curriculum development involves both systematic inquiry and workplace demands; the curriculum developer is both a researcher and change agent, involved in advancing a field's knowledge base and organizing it to support knowledge dissemination. Additionally, it involves continuous learning, not one-shot program development.

A second tenet of action research is that problems are best solved by those who have a strong interest in their solution. By involving such stakeholders, the end result is not only a relevant curriculum, but participation and buy-in by those who are charged with implementing the curriculum. As a framework, action research views curriculum development as a problem solving/learning process that takes advantage of organizational learning. It is similar to traditional systems models, but it emphasizes the process itself and includes planned change as a key underlying component.

While the first model curriculum project began with assessment, subsequent models have had the opportunity to begin with evaluation data from the previous models. The first model was begun from scratch; subsequent models revised, built on, and updated the curriculum for new generations of learners. Moreover, the basic assumptions about what a model curriculum should look like and support have not changed. For example, the curriculum itself is composed of interchangeable modules, which, while offered within specific course groupings, can stand alone and be regrouped to allow particular colleges or universities to focus on their own strengths and directions. No two universities would have exactly the same coursework and learning experiences. A dynamic

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model curriculum allows specialization, is learner-centered, and yet includes the breadth of the field. Additionally, to make the curriculum user-friendly, we offered textbook recommendations as well as teaching strategies. Following is an overview of the first two curriculum development efforts with an emphasis on how action research framed the work.

OSRA MODEL CURRICULA DEVELOPMENT GROUP I

OSRA's entry into curriculum development began when Georgia Miller, a charter member of OSRA and an assistant dean at Indiana University, put together the first Curriculum Development Group (CDG-1); members are identified in Table 1.

Aware that other information systems-related practitioner-oriented organizations were in the curriculum development business, especially DPMA and ACM, she crafted a curriculum development strategy that has remained a framework for all three OSRA model curriculum efforts. Shortly after our initial CDG-1 meeting, Miller resigned as Chair, passing the responsibility to me; I had just accepted a faculty appointment at New York University, and was eager to lead the energetic group she had put together. The overall framework followed was that of action research: assessment, design, implementation, and evaluation.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment is the process of describing the current state of the problem. Translated into curriculum development terms, assessment means reviewing the literature and doing what we would today call an *environmental scan*. In 1983, OSRA member

Leonard Kruk ran 11 nationwide focus groups or roundtables that brought OSRA members and their colleagues together to discuss "Defining a Discipline: Administrative Information Systems." Results of these roundtables suggested that the field we were moving toward describing as office systems was, indeed, "a business function distinct from general management and computer science, and a need exist[ed] for standardization of the curriculum." (Penwell & O'Connor, 1986, p. 43).

A literature review identified major concepts and competencies needed by administrative managers and showed that researchers could agree neither on a definition for the field of study nor on what to call it. Moreover, most collegiate programs were applications-focused rather than managerially focused (O'Connor, 1983). The CDG-1 also had as a starting point other model curricula and actual curricula from Indiana University, Utah State University, and The University of Tennessee.

DESIGN

The CDG-1 met in person, usually in Louisville, Kentucky, which was considered to be a central location for the group. In initial meetings we brainstormed what the content of the curriculum or field would be. Once brainstorming sessions were concluded, we turned to putting concepts and

Table 1: Members of the 1984-1986 OSRA Model Curriculum Group

| | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Mary Ellen Adams | Professor | Indiana State University |
| Gerald L. Hershey | Professor | University of North Carolina, Greensboro |
| Cynthia Hillard | Manager, Office Systems | American Fletcher National Bank, Indianapolis |
| Rebecca Jones | Manager, Office Systems | Ball Corporation, Muncie |
| Ruth H. Lankford | Assistant Professor | Purdue University at Indianapolis |
| John P. McDaniel | Manager | Deloitte Haskins & Sells |
| Georgia B. Miller* | Assistant Dean | Indiana University |
| Bridget N. O'Connor** | Assistant Professor | New York University |
| Janet J. Palmer | Assistant Professor | Western Kentucky University |
| Larry W. Penwell | Systems Planning Specialist | General Electric Corporation |
| Charles M. Ray | Professor | Western Kentucky University |
| E. Ray Smith | Professor | The University of Tennessee |
| John J. Stallard | Associate Professor | University of Georgia |
| Edward G. Thomas | Associate Dean | Cleveland State University |
| Kathleen P. Wagoner | Professor | Ball State University |
| Margarie E. Wells-Davis | Senior Systems Analyst | Procter & Gamble, Cincinnati |

*Founding Member

**Chair

competencies into logical groupings. This could never have happened without the meeting facilitation skills of General Electric's Larry Penwell, who kept this diverse group on task. Once groupings were made, we teamed academics with practitioners, and the duos worked to draft course syllabi. These drafts were circulated by mail to every member, and each member provided feedback to everyone else. This resulted in ownership not only of the course assigned, but of the entire curriculum. At the subsequent meeting, we had revised drafts to share, and Penwell again facilitated discussions that resulted in outcomes that were, for the most part, in consensus. For final versions of courses, members sent me their drafts on paper along with a copy of their work in WordStar on 5¼-inch disks.

With an initial complete draft of the curriculum, one that assumed the curriculum would be offered in a four-year school of business, CDG-1 brought together local OSRA members in Atlanta, St. Louis, Indianapolis, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, and Toronto to provide feedback. Led by members of CDG-1, questions were posed to the groups to ensure the curriculum's validity, comprehensiveness, and usefulness. Additionally, we hired a marketing services organization to interview business professionals as to the likelihood of the organization having positions to which graduates of the program could aspire. We generated reports detailing reactions to the curriculum by both our members and hiring organizations, which later served as a starting point for the second draft of the curriculum released in 1986.

IMPLEMENTATION

Realizing that no curriculum would be successful without instructional materials, I found a publisher that was excited about the potential of the curriculum and asked for proposals for textbooks aligned to the curriculum. These textbooks would be reviewed and, if approved, endorsed by OSRA, thus ensuring content integrity. The publisher provided an advance of \$20,000 against a 2% royalty to OSRA. Thus, South-Western Publishing Company of Cincinnati, Ohio, offered the first funding we had received to date for the curriculum

project. The CDG-1 was clear that other publishers were encouraged to sponsor textbooks in support of the curriculum, but only the South-Western texts could be endorsed by OSRA. Because South-Western was considered a premier publisher in our field, and because they were willing to take the first risky steps in supporting the curriculum, we had no problem agreeing to that stipulation.

For the next couple of years, many of us on the CDG-1, usually in panel presentations, described and discussed the model at professional meetings. We published a special issue of the *Office Systems Research Journal*, developed promotional materials, and created a curriculum advisory council that included industry and academic representatives.

EVALUATION

Curricula are, by definition, dynamic. Professional school curricula, particularly, change as the knowledge base expands and economic and business trends become apparent. So much happened in the technology and business worlds between 1986 and 1994 when the second Curriculum Development Group began its work! Feedback from adopters of the curriculum indicated that the curriculum had become out of date, and that it was time for OSRA to begin a revision process. Figure 1, the OSRA Curriculum Development Cycle: An Action Research Approach, illustrates these steps.

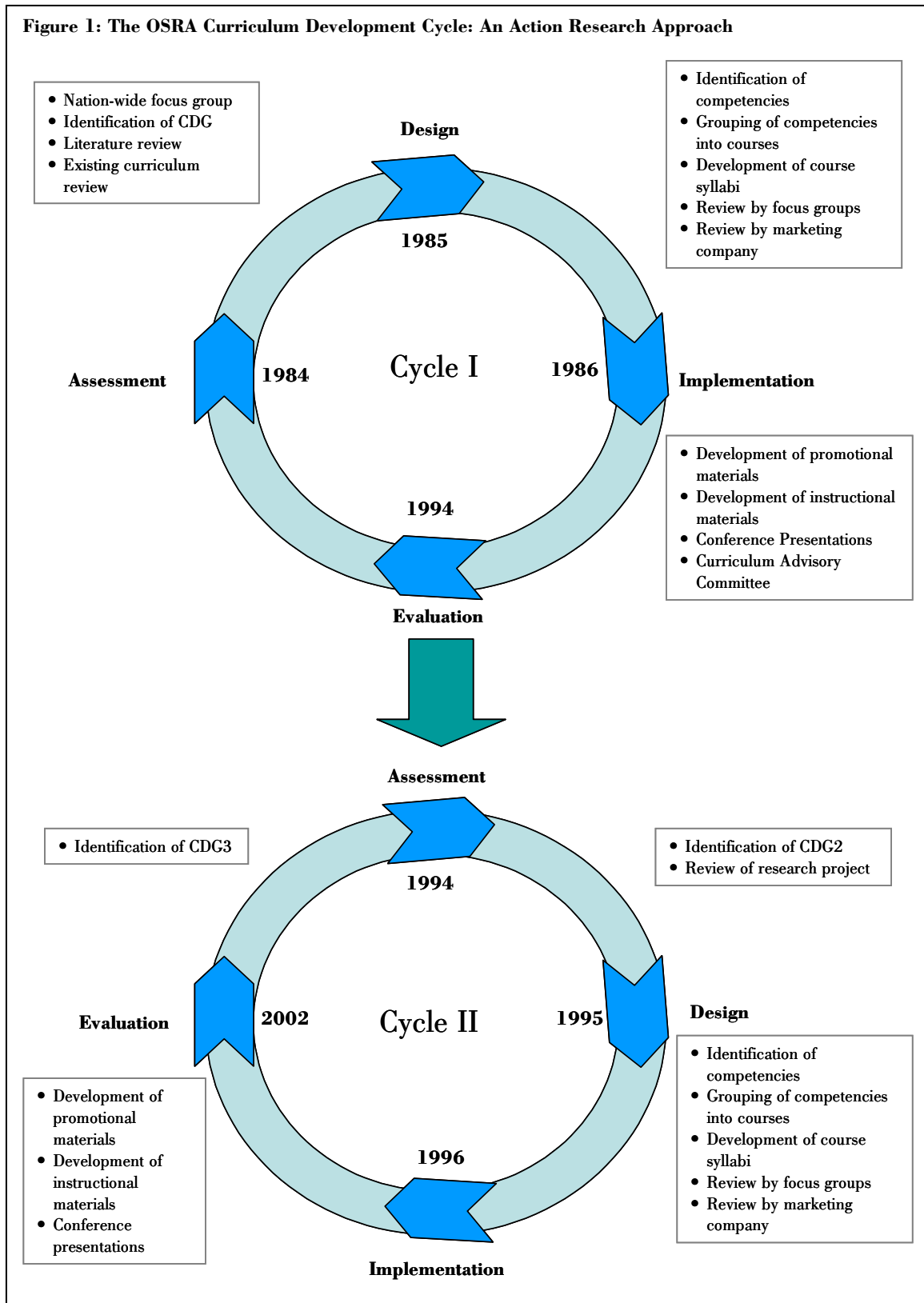
OSRA MODEL CURRICULA DEVELOPMENT GROUP 2

In early 1994, the OSRA Executive Board asked OSRA Vice President for Professional Studies Robert Fidoten and me to respond to concerns that the curriculum needed updating. We were asked to determine the technological advances that were changing the field as well as to identify specific pedagogical concerns (O'Connor, 1996).

ASSESSMENT

Our first task was to identify what we called a blue-ribbon panel of experts in the field, particularly

Figure 1: The OSRA Curriculum Development Cycle: An Action Research Approach



individuals who were teaching within the OSRA curriculum guidelines. Because the OSRA curriculum had garnered interest from ACM’s Special Interest Group/Office Information Systems and the National Association for Business Teacher Education, representatives from these groups were named to the CDG-2, and I was asked to chair the Group. Table 2 lists this membership.

In 1993 OSRA published a Special Issue of the *Office Systems Research Journal* that focused on Elizabeth Regan’s position paper entitled, “Bringing Office Systems Into Focus,” in which she reported on the direction of the field, identified experts in the field and, using the Delphi Technique, suggested a blueprint for a new direction for the curriculum (Regan, 1993). She further concluded that other existing model curricula, including those available from ACM and DPMA, differed markedly from OSRA’s goals, as they continued to emphasize the programming and technical side of information systems design (Regan, 1993).

DESIGN

During a face-to-face working session at the 1994 OSRA Conference in Kansas City, the CDG-2 first developed the competencies from Regan’s strategic direction report. Belcore’s Sarah O’Donnell facilitated this meeting. The CDG-2 examined the competencies identified, brainstormed missing elements, and then grouped them into modules and courses. Academic members left the initial meeting with rough outlines of the competencies for given courses and were asked to return to their communities where they would team up with practitioner-researchers to develop the full courses. It was now 1994, and we incorporated e-mail, facsimile, and video teleconferencing, and

relied less and less on the mail to share drafts with everyone in the group. We continued to meet face-to-face, at OSRA conferences and in New York City, with O’Donnell facilitating the meetings. At one weekend meeting at New York University, we used for the first time, very successfully, Ventana Corporation’s GroupSystems technology. Here’s how that weekend evolved:

While we all agreed that the working title of “office information systems” was not the best of descriptive titles, little agreement as to what the title should be surfaced the first day. However, early on the second day and using GroupSystems V in a Delphi-like process, we brainstormed options, rank ordered resultant titles, discussed differences of opinion, and in less than an hour agreed on “Organizational and End-user Information Systems” as a title that reflected the intent and goals of the curriculum. Throughout the two days, we worked as a group of the whole as well as in small groups. By the end, we had developed instructional modules, delineated courses, and checked the curriculum for articulation and overlap. Individual members left with revised courses to continue to refine (O’Connor, 1996, p. 20).

Table 2: Members of the 1994-1996 Model Curriculum Group

| | | |
|-------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Michael Bronner** | Professor | New York University |
| Donna J. Cochrane | Professor | Bloomsburg University |
| Margaretta J. Caouette | Assistant Professor | Pace University |
| Roger Deveau | Professor | University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth |
| Robert E. Fidoten | President | REF Associates |
| C. Steven Hunt | Associate Professor | Tennessee State University |
| Marcia James | Professor | University of Wisconsin-Whitewater |
| Dirk Mahling*** | Professor | University of Pittsburgh |
| Duane Moses | Assistant Professor | Southwest Missouri State University |
| Bridget N. O’Connor* | Associate Professor | New York University |
| Sarah Dorando O’Donnell | Quality Facilitator | Belcore |
| Charles M. Ray | Professor | Ball State University |
| Elizabeth A. Regan | Senior Systems Analyst | MassMutual Life Insurance Company |
| Susan R. Rehwaldt | Professor | Southern Illinois University |

*Chair
 **NABTE Representative
 ***ACM SIG/OIS Representative

Consistent with the strategy used in the development of the first model curriculum, we again sponsored a series of focus groups to review the completed first draft. OSRA members in Indiana, New York, Massachusetts, Tennessee, Georgia, Texas, Utah, Missouri, Connecticut, and Hong Kong provided feedback to CDG-2 that was carefully reviewed by the group as a whole. With agreed-upon revisions, members again took individual courses, this time different from the ones they were initially responsible for, and made appropriate revisions. These revised courses were again circulated among group members and approved. Members sent final syllabi to me; I edited and put together the final curriculum document, which was released in 1996.

IMPLEMENTATION

OSRA continued to work with South-Western Publishing Company, as they remained committed to producing high quality textbooks and other learning materials directly related to the curriculum. OSRA nominated textbook reviewers and when evaluation criteria were met, the book received the OSRA endorsement. By that time, however, other publishers had made competing textbooks available, and the recommended textbook and teaching resources list had expanded.

Members of CDG-2, individually and in panels, made presentations at conferences nation-wide. Additionally, a half-day was devoted to presenting and discussing the curriculum at the OSRA Conference in Orlando in February, 1996. Such forums were invaluable publicity media. Additionally, the curriculum was released as a standalone document, and a special issue of the *Office Systems Research Journal*, published in 1996, was again devoted to the topic, featuring articles written by CDG-2 members.

EVALUATION

Perhaps the best evaluation data are the numbers of colleges and universities that have adopted all or parts of the OSRA curriculum. South-Western

Publishing Company estimated that number to be at least 64. But much has happened in the business and technology world since 1996. The Executive Board again felt it was time to revisit the curriculum, and they tapped Vice President for Professional Studies Steve Hunt to take the curriculum to its third edition.

Steve Hunt, whose article appears later in this special issue, made the evaluation phase into the needs assessment phase of the current model. Hunt has kept the curriculum revision cycle in motion. CDG-3 practiced what it preached: the integration of technology into its work as meetings moved from being in person to being supported by an Internet-based group facilitation tool. The 2004 OSRA Model Curriculum for Undergraduate Education and its 1986 and 1996 predecessors are all illustrative of individual dedication, collaborative efforts, and a shared vision of professional goals. OSRA's title, its journal's title, and its curriculum's title have evolved over the years, but OSRA's commitment to serving its membership has remained strong. We have seen our field change and have seen OSRA continue to be on the forefront of educational and technical innovation. Just think of what this curriculum will look like in 2014!

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