I'M A DIGITAL NATIVE – OF COURSE I'M COMPUTER LITERATE!

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ABSTRACT

Digital natives are not inherently computer literate. Business faculty and the business community have come to expect business students to be able to know how to use common business applications to solve problems and create workplace efficiencies, yet many of our students do not have such skills. This research reports on the results of a study designed to assess the computer literacy skills of our current business students and discusses how these results can influence the design of our curriculum.

INTRODUCTION

As information and computer technology becomes more ubiquitous in society, it is important to ensure that students graduating from business schools have the requisite technology skills to use, and leverage, this technology. This is one reason many business schools still require an introductory information systems course of their students. This course is created to ensure "computer competency," "technological literacy" or whatever term is currently used to measure one's aptitude and proficiency with computer and information technology. Further, this course usually goes beyond basic computer literacy concepts and covers principles of how businesses develop and use information technology.

Business faculty have wrestled with the issue of student computer literacy for years [2]. The issue seems to have grown as most "digital natives" now come to college convinced of their superior technology skills. While anecdotal evidence from faculty suggests that the skills of our students have not significantly changed, it is important to periodically re-assess these skills. This research reports on a study designed to assess the entry-level computer literacy skills of our current business students.

BACKGROUND

In the last decade, it has been hard to avoid the changes in our society due to the pervasiveness of information and computer technology. During this time we have also seen analogous changes in our student population. Today the vast majority of our students are what Prensky [5] classified as "digital natives" – people born since 1980 that have been constantly surround and immersed by new technologies. Tapscott [7] called them the "Net Generation" and in his recent book Grown Up Digital writes about this group of 11 to 31 year-olds coming of age.

It is easy to understand why so many students entering college today consider themselves computer literate. After all, these digital natives grew up with computers in their homes, and most of their computers had Internet connections. Not surprisingly, many of these students have had some experience with computer applications such as word processors, spreadsheets and presentation software since grade school. Further, many states have now adopted state curriculum standards to address the need to develop technologically literate students.

Given the arrival of the digital natives to the college classroom, it seems logical to assume that their information technology skills have increased. Unfortunately, for many educators the reality is that the digital skills of these natives are not equal and in some cases too much technology is having a negative impact on critical thinking skills. Brabazon [1, p. 16] describes a situation where "clicking replaces thinking" for undergraduate students and scholarship is little more than "Googling their way through degree courses." Selwyen [6] argues that we should reconsider "the status of the 'digital native' description as a *prima facie* account of young people's lives." His findings are that for many young people, their technology usage is less expansive and empowering than the rhetoric would have us believe. Further, some researchers have suggested the need to look beyond a simple binary classification of digital skills [3] [8] and instead realize that there are many degrees or levels of skill.

Prior research has shown that the assortment of computer-related skills acquired by many students is often incongruous with the computer skill sets expected in their college study programs, and in the business world [2] [4]. However, it is important to have accurate assessments of the entry level skills of our students to ensure that our curriculum meets the needs of our students.

The conference presentation will report on the results of an assessment of the self-efficacy of computer skills in an introductory information systems course required of all business majors. Demographic data, as well a detailed assessment of their computer proficiency, collected from over 300 students at the beginning of the Spring 2011 semester will be reported. Additionally, these results will be compared to previous studies to enable us to report on any longitudinal changes that may be observed. The results will help faculty in Colleges of Business determine the skill areas where students lack proficiency. Ultimately this will help in revising curriculum to best meet the needs of our students.

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