

Choosing Between a Business Degree and a Computing Degree

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Abstract

At UNITEC and many other tertiary institutions, students interested in the information systems and computing area have a choice between a business degree with an information systems major and a technical computing degree. Differences between the two degrees at UNITEC include the entry criteria, the compulsory courses, the number of options available and the likely career opportunities. Over the four years that such a choice has been available at UNITEC, more than 60 students have tried both degrees. This poster examines the differences between the degrees and the considerations that influence the students in choosing which degree to complete.

Similarities and Differences

The business degree at UNITEC is called Bachelor of Business Studies (BBS). BBS students have to major in one or two of Accountancy, Finance, Information Systems, Management, and Marketing. There is a common core of eight compulsory courses: Accountancy, Business Law, Economics, Information Systems, Management, Marketing, Organisational Communication, and Quantitative Analysis.

The computing degree at UNITEC is called Bachelor of Computing Systems (BCS) and has eleven compulsory courses worth 168 credits. Seven of these are in common with the BBS Information Systems (IS) major: Business Information Systems, Data, Hardware Basics, Operating Systems, Organisational Communication, Programming 1, Systems Analysis and Design 1. The other four are Business Context, Packages, Project Planning and Control, and Project. BCS students make up the remaining 192 credits by choosing between 11 and 14 courses from 40 optional computing courses (at

least 5 required) plus numerous courses from other degrees (although few take non-computing options). There are no defined majors.

BBS IS majors have another six compulsory courses. Five of these are options for BCS students: Data Communications and Networks 1, Database Design, Management Information Systems, (Applied) Information Technology, Systems Analysis and Design 2. The sixth is Industry Based Learning. There is only room in the BBS for four optional courses, and IS majors often choose courses from the BCS. Thus they have much less room for options than the BCS students, and prerequisites may limit their choice even further.

Reasons for Student Choice of Degree

Most of the 60 students started on BBS and switched to BCS after one year, citing "BCS suits me better", "change in interest", "IS major not as marketable", "enjoyed computing papers in BBS and wished to specialise in it". Reasons for starting with BBS include lower entry criteria, mild technophobia, and having studied business subjects before (but not computing). Having transferred to BCS, some hankered after the "more formal BBS courses" or the system of majors that are a feature of the BBS, but others appreciated the greater freedom of choice, the wider range of options and "the practical aspect of the courses" in the BCS. The few students who transferred from BCS to BBS talked of wanting to know more about business.