

Identifying tertiary educators' preferred attributes to facilitate technical writing

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Summary

All IS study programmes strive to keep up with technology advances and social changes; in addition to meeting industry needs by preparing students for the real job market. More newspapers and recruitment

sites are seeking technical writing professionals. To confirm this, there was a need to update curriculum within the Bachelor of Applied Information Systems degree at the Universal College of Learning.

The research described in this paper has been inspired by these demands to update the content and delivery methods of the Technical Writing unit (paper). The verification of this updating activity would result from investigating the treatment of this subject in other NZ tertiary institutions.

A survey to all of the New Zealand tertiary institutions with undergraduate courses in Information Systems received a response rate from nine institutions. Of this, eight institutions provided valid data.

The survey asked questions on teaching technical writing to undergraduate IS programme, topics and assessments used, teaching resources used and the lecturers' preferred student knowledge and skill sets.

Four institutions had dedicated technical writing papers at the 100 and 200 levels in the following topics. Five institutions incorporated technical writing into existing curriculum; mainly in the areas of systems documentation. The main areas of expected student knowledge and skill set were development and maintenance of computer and paper-based documentation. The most common assessment method was by assignment. Tutors' responses indicated a preference for delivering technical writing using a customised workbook and web-based resources.

This research confirmed that technical writing

- ◆ Has a de facto definition understood as developing/maintaining technical documentation of information systems;

- ◆ Is incorporated in many subjects across IS degree programmes, even when an independent paper is offered;

- ◆ Is present in all levels of papers, but more importance is usually placed at 100 level;

- ◆ Skills are an essential part of the basic skill set expected from students.

Based on these findings, the authors are able to verify the updates made to the BAppIS curriculum in 2001 as:

- ◆ Industry projects with substantial technical writing content are being accepted as valid final projects;

- ◆ Technical writing skills are getting more attention in systems analysis and business analysis units in a way of lifting standards when accepting assessments across the degree programme;

- ◆ Merging the existing technical writing unit into a new 300-level unit under the name of "User Support Management"; 30% of the unit is spent on preparing user documentation.

Keywords: IS education, IS curriculum, IS research agenda, Future Information Professional.

Note: This poster was presented in 2002 at the Hamilton Conference but was missed from the proceedings. The editors apologise for this omission.