



Institutional history: eleven years of a degree in a timeline

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Abstract

In this poster we describe the development of a timeline representing the eleven year history of a degree in information technology.

1 The degree

The Bachelor of Information Technology (B.Info.Tech.) at Otago Polytechnic was accredited in 1995 and first taught in 1996. Since that time it has undergone continuous change, with approximately a third of courses undergoing change each year. Some of these changes have been aimed at keeping the curriculum current; others have been more substantial structural change.

By plotting the process of changes of the degree we hope to capture the institutional history and record the effects of cumulative change. We hope to provide a means to examine the extent to which the current degree differs from the original. We also hope that this timeline will provide a model for future: a means to identify anomalies, areas that are due for updating and curriculum gaps.

The three authors are, or have been, programme managers of the degree for its lifespan. The poster was created by examining curriculum documents and academic process databases. One the structure was correct, other academics were asked to annotate the timeline with any significant changes that have been made within their courses and subject areas.

2 Major changes

The B.Info.Tech. degree was originally purchased from Waikato Polytechnic and eventually accredited in 1995. The roots of the degree in the NACCQ "blue book" can clearly be seen with both courses and nomenclature.

On accreditation the degree had 65 papers forming 28 modules. The assessment was mastery. Students gained 18 credits per year. In 1995 the degree was taught across all three years with students transferring from the National Diploma in Business Computing.

In the first three years of the degree the primary changes were in the selection of papers on offer. Several papers were never taught (eg the Formal Specification in Software Development, the 107 module of Social Sciences).

In 1995, several papers were described as "Advanced papers in development". These included "High reliability systems" and "Maintenance/Support services" both of which never saw the light of day. In 1997, however, IT210 Operating Systems and IT211 Hardware both emerged; Multimedia emerged in 2002 as IT212 Hypermedia Engineering. "Information Security", under development in 1995 gets discussed annually in programme review, but, as yet, has not surfaced.

By 1999 about half the papers were referred to only by their module title (rather than constituent courses), this was formalised as papers were updated, and completed in a rewrite in 2002. In this same rewrite, the degree changed to normative grading, to an annual 120 credit basis and removing all compulsory courses (the exception being the industry/capstone project). In the first year of the degree, logical groupings such as the programming sequence were not represented in actual paper structures until in 2003 when all first year papers were combined into "super papers". We had attempted to do this for several years but the groupings eluded us. In 2003 we realised that by unbundling maths into the papers it was supporting, coherency could be achieved.

Some subject areas have disappeared; others have been combined into other areas. Artificial intelligence, for example, originally taught in third year, disappeared for six years, only to reappear embedded in Games Development. Knowledge management similarly disappeared, only to reappear in eCommerce.

Graduate certificates and a diploma were added to the degree in 2004 (and again, following changed requirements, in 2005). In 2002, flexibility was added to the degree with Special Topics.

In 1999 we sought to build on the unique strength of the Otago degree, that of microprocessors, and so added Microware to the first year and Control Technology to the third. In 2003 we similarly worked to strengthen programming, so developed a clearly identifiable pathway of programming papers. This pathway, along with infrastructure (Networks and Operating Systems), Interactive media, Business, Databases, and Hardware were formalised in 2005 with addition of these areas as specific graduate profiles.

In 2006 we offer 48 courses (with no module structure except a holder for a 40 credit industry qualification), 25 of which are actively taught in 2006. Only 11 of these are on both the 1995 and 2006 programme schedules and most of those have had substantial internal change (the exception being the communication courses).

The poster is completed with staff appointments and departures, student numbers (282 graduates), institutional changes and projects of interest.

