



MARKETING THE INFORMATION SYSTEMS PROFESSION:

A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE BOSTON-SIM CAREERS VIDEOTAPE

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ABSTRACT

Student interest in computer-related careers has fluctuated greatly in the last decade. In the annual survey of college freshmen conducted by UCLA (Astin, et. al., 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989), interest in programmer/analyst occupations surged from 2.8% in 1977 to a high of 8.8% in 1982, followed by an equally dramatic decline to a low of 1.9% in 1989. This fluctuation has not gone unnoticed and has been the basis for articles in the Wall St. Journal (Duke, 1987) and Computerworld (Withington, 1988). While these articles and others (Rochester, 1988) espouse a number of hypotheses, little organized research has addressed the cause of this decline. The research that has been done suggests that some of this decline is attributable to perceptions of computer-related careers (Cale, et. al., 199y).

Recent studies indicate there will be a major shortage of properly trained information professionals. Although projections of future demand for such people indicate an increasing number of jobs for properly trained college graduates (Silvestri & Lukasiewicz, 1985, 1987), projections of future supply are pessimistic that such demand can be met, given the current enrollment trends (Callaghan, et. al. 1990).

Colleges and universities, many of which struggled to add computer-related curriculum capacity during the early and mid-1980s, have already felt the sting from declining enrollments, and are now trying to maintain the viability of their programs. Industry, on the other hand, is just beginning to feel the effects of the reduced

number of graduates. The anticipated effects of these declining enrollments have been described by Cale, et. al. (1990, 199x).

Action programs have been proposed at both the high school and college levels to attract students to the information profession (Cale, et. al., 1990, 199x). One such program to convert freshmen business majors has met with some success (Mawhinney, et. al., 1990).

This paper reports on a project undertaken by the Boston Chapter of the Society for Information Management (Boston-SIM). Boston-SIM became aware of the declining enrollment problem at an early stage and made a commitment to play a role in trying to reverse that trend. This project focuses on an outreach program at the high school level to raise the visibility of the information management profession. During the Summer and Fall of 1990, a subcommittee of Boston-SIM produced a prototype videotape to promote the profession. It features the chief information officers (CIOs) and various other information professionals from three major corporations (Bose Corporation, Bank of Boston, and Wang Laboratories). The theme is built around a "SMART formula" developed by one of the authors. The SMART formula states that an information professional requires a diversity of skills and knowledge:

- Systems concepts
- Management practices
- Applications in business problems
- Relational skills
- Technology (current and future)

The effectiveness of the videotape was tested at fourteen high schools in the greater Boston area. In this pilot test, questionnaires were administered before and after the videotape was shown in order to assess perceptual changes. Approximately 1,000 students participated.

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The data collection took place in January 1991. This paper is a preliminary report on the results of this pilot test.

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