OBSTACLES TO THE INTEGRATION OF SAP TRAINING IN ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

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Extended Abstract
In order to prepare students for challenging careers where they are expected to produce results with little initial training and to compete against others for the best jobs, they need to be exposed to the latest technologies used within industry. One of these technologies is Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software. Implementing ERP software in academic programs of study provides many benefits to academic institutions, students, and employers. Academic institutions benefit by demonstrating they are providing cutting edge technology training to their students and are preparing them for challenging careers that employ this latest technology that has become a necessity in many sectors of industry.

Furthermore, students benefit from ERP software integration in academic programs by being exposed to this software. This exposure enables them to be much more prepared to work with software they are likely to use in their upcoming careers. If academic programs are able to successfully integrate ERP software throughout their curriculum, where students are engaged in the processing of actual transactions involving live ERP software that enable the implementation of business decisions, then students are more likely to benefit than those that are not exposed to such environments.

Employers also benefit by the implementation of ERP in academic programs for various reasons. First of all, employees that have already been exposed to current software require less initial training. Furthermore, they are more likely to become acclimated to their new environment much quicker than those that were not exposed to this software. Most of all, new employees that are already trained are more productive from the start and less expensive since they don't need a substantial amount of initial training to produce results for the company. Therefore companies, as well as students, benefit from the implementation of SAP within academic programs of study.

Although there are limited choices of ERP software packages that are widespread in industry, their implementation and understanding is complex and requires extensive training and exposure in order to establish a good knowledge base. Therefore, ERP exposure that begins early in an academic program of study and progresses throughout a degree program is more likely to provide the exposure and knowledge students need to be successful after graduation.

One of these leading ERP software packages used throughout industry is SAP ERP. It has been implemented in various sizes and sectors of industry. Its widespread use makes it an ideal software package to implement in degree programs of study. Many academic institutions have already implemented SAP within their degree programs through the SAP University Alliance (SAP UA) program. Some of these implementations have been very successful, while some have resulted in failed attempts. Research in this area is needed to gain a better understanding of the causes of these failures, if academic institutions are to be successful with their attempts to implement SAP within their programs.

To gain a better understanding of the implementation of SAP within academic programs through the SAP UA program, a study of SAP UA faculty was conducted. This study surveyed SAP UA faculty perceptions of their SAP ERP implementations utilizing an online survey instrument that consisted of demographic, open ended, and Likert-scale questions. Out of the 175 potential participants who were invited to participate in the study, 55 completed the survey, resulting in a 31% response rate. Email

addressed of potential survey respondents were located by searching web sites of academic institutions with SAP UAs and through a search of the SAP UA portal. The survey was developed and administered online using Qualtrics, a web-based survey development and management tool. The respondents with at least one year of experience within the SAP UA were asked to complete the survey.

One of the research questions for this study attempted to determine the areas that need the most attention within the SAP UA program. Respondents were give six options to choose from. They were allowed to choose one or more of these options. In addition, they were provided a method for entering text, if none of the options applied to them. Another research question attempted to determine the weaknesses of the SAP UA program. This was an open-ended question that was meant to capture all of the possible weaknesses of the respondent's SAP UA.

There are some limitations of this study that are worth noting. One of these limitations is the limited number of potential participants that were invited to participate in this study. After attempts to obtain faculty email addresses from regional SAP UA centers were not successful due to SAP's privacy concerns, email addresses for SAP UA faculty were obtained through web searches of SAP UA programs and through the SAP UA portal. This approach made locating SAP UA faculty emails difficult and likely resulted in a much smaller pool of potential participants than actually exist. Furthermore, since locating potential respondents was difficult, searches were limited to SAP UA within the United States. Therefore, the results of this study may not apply to the entire population of SAP UA faculty, since the study population was limited in scope.

Another limitation of this study is that it only uses the survey methodology to collect data from potential respondents. Other forms of data collection such as interviews of potential respondents would have produced more accurate results. Furthermore, only 31% of the potential respondents completed the survey. A higher response rate would have produced more accurate results. Also, no method was available to determine the level of experience among the respondents prior to invitations being distributed. In the invitation and in the opening screen to the online survey, respondents were asked to complete the survey if they met the one year of experience requirement.

Despite these limitations, an initial review of the data indicates that there are several obstacles to the implementation of SAP within academic programs that should be of concern for faculty and administrators that are contemplating the implementation of SAP within their programs of study. This paper will present the results of this study by categorizing and summarizing the responses obtained during this study. The authors believe this new knowledge will aid in decision making within academic programs, especially those in business schools, since the majority of responses were obtained from faculty within business schools located throughout the United States.

Keywords
SAP ERP, SAP University Alliance, Academic Programs

Abstract
In order to ensure academic programs of study prepare students for rewarding careers in industry, they need to expose students to the latest technologies they are likely to use. One of these software tools is Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP). A leading ERP solution used throughout industry is SAP ERP. SAP has partnered with universities through the SAP University Alliance (SAP UA) program by providing universities access to software free of charge. Implementing SAP ERP within these programs of study has been met with some obstacles for faculty and universities. A study of SAP UA faculty within the United States was conducted to identify these obstacles to SAP ERP integration within academic programs and to identify possible solutions to these obstacles. This paper will present the results of this study.