Review of the
Department of Information Technology and Administrative Management
College of Education and Professional studies
Central Washington University

John D. Chenoweth, Ed.D.
Associate Professor of Information Technology and Business Education
University of Wisconsin - Whitewater
Whitewater, WI

(262) 472-1592
chenowej@uww.edu

On March 1, 2 and 3, 2011, I was able to visit with faculty, students, staff, and administrators at Central Washington University as part of the program review process for the Information Technology and Administrative Management program in the College of Education and Professional Studies. Through the various interviews and reading of the self-study, I came away with a good understanding of the program, its history, future plans, strengths and weaknesses.

I would generally characterize the program as one that is aware of the needs of its students and other constituents, is actively engaged in program assessment and curriculum development and prepared to continue strengthening of the program.

In this report you will find a continuation of the conversations I had with the department and administrators. Included are recommendations, mixed with feedback, mixed with questions you might continue asking yourselves. Program improvement is not an endpoint, but a process. The following pages are a continuation of that process. I am happy to continue to be engaged in conversations beyond the scope of this document if you think those would help you on your journey.

There are two issues that strike me as needing immediate attention:
1) A decision is needed on the availability of Online General Education courses. ITAM claims to be an online degree completion program, but it appears that that isn't necessarily true unless the general education courses are made available with enough frequency to meet the need of this program. Program and university leadership appear to be prepared to deal with this issue, but these decisions must be made quickly or there will be significant negative impact to the program.
2) A decision is needed on staffing plans. The ITAM program has submitted a request that includes multiple tenure track positions. This is a high demand program, the BAS in particular, experiencing double-digit growth rates. That growth is not sustainable without additional staffing. More importantly, the program cannot plan appropriately without some sense of a long range staffing plan that recognizes that the staff to student ratio should remain fairly consistent. Due to the length of time it takes to recruit, place and mentor new staff, those decisions should be made as soon as possible.

Before going into detail about various components of the program, I raise a few questions that I think the program, college and university should spend some time considering over the next few months and years. For some of these questions, I will provide some additional feedback in the following paragraphs.

1) How does the "brand" of the online BAS ITAM enhance/conflict with the BS ITAM?
2) How does the "brand" of the online BAS ITAM enhance/conflict with the brand of CWU?
3) How will growth be managed?

4) Can the BAS be leveraged to grow enrollments in other programs?
5) How and who is going to manage growth?
6) Can a different "tuition model" be used to support the courses high demand programs? Does the current summer revenue model support the needs of faculty, departments, colleges and the university?
7) Curriculum
    a. Is there too much overlap in some courses? Can you articulate to students why some overlap will exist in courses?
    b. Is the "value add" of each specialization the same? For instance is the curriculum of the web and database specialization meeting a similar type of need as the "networking" specialization? Said differently, what is the purpose of a specialization? Is the purpose the same or different across specializations?
8) Can you clearly articulate to students and other constituents how, in reality, this program meets a different need and perhaps different audience than other "IT" programs (CS / IS) on campus and offered elsewhere?
9) How can you capitalize on current department conditions?

Mission

While the self study attempts to articulate the mission of the program. It isn't clear that there is an "approved" mission statement. The value of having a defined mission statement is not so much the statement itself, but the dialog that can take place between the program constituents in shaping the mission statement. Much can be learned and a shared sense of purpose can be attained through those dialogs. Due to the distinct nature of the specializations, I would also encourage the unique constituents of each of these specializations to also engage in conversations about the mission of each of these. Further, while establishing a shared mission that captures the essence of the entire "program" is useful, some time should also be spent considering the unique mission of the BS program versus the BAS program.

Curriculum

The curriculum appears purposeful. There is some sense that perhaps there is unnecessary overlap in several courses. Students pointed to this overlap in the Customer Relationship Management course with other Retail Management courses and also between the Projects in Database course and the Systems Analysis course. Some overlap is probably healthy and useful to students. However, I get the sense that perhaps some of the overlap is not purposeful, but rather should be "cleaned up" by engaging in a detailed curriculum review. I'd suggest starting with these identified classes, but then identifying one or two "sequences" a year to investigate further.

The IT students in particular seem to feel that they need more "IT" and less "AM". My sense is that this comes from two perspectives. One perspective is that they are not getting enough IT or at least not specific enough IT. The other perspective is that they are getting too much or not the right mix of administrative

management content. My recommendation would be to first look to see if the IT they are getting is really what they need. The students indicate that they the content they are getting is good, they just want more of it.

The student feedback seems to point to the need to look more closely at the two IT related specializations. It appears that in the Web and Database specialization that students are receiving some strong highly technical web development skills. The feedback suggests that some students would prefer even more technical web development skills including additional programming classes. Some decision needs to be made as to whether that is the direction the program wants to be headed.   Based on my understanding of the industry and various degree programs, my sense is that the students are best served with something near the existing mix of business knowledge and skills and IT knowledge and skills. I would caution against the temptation to add too much technical depth, as I believe that you would need to add a significant number of classes in order to have these students compete against computer science or graphic design programs. Your students are better served by giving them a solid foundation of IT, but primarily focusing on their business savvy and analysis skills. Another approach would be to retarget the "web" portion to supporting "web" at a higher level including topics like search engine optimization, internet marketing, content management, web analytics, etc..

In the networking specialization, again it appears the current courses are good, students just want more. Students could benefit from content that focuses more on administering networking hardware (switches / routers / wireless). It would appear that the technical depth that students get in the web specialization is stronger than that in the networking specialization. I recommend that you decide what type of approach works best for your IT offerings but then provide the same level of depth in both.

One final recommendation on the curriculum would be to look to see if there are ways you can incorporate real-world projects into the curriculum as opposed to just using cases. Particularly students may benefit for incorporating these in to the Systems Analysis and Design sequence. Look to see if there are campus projects or projects from alumni that could be used here.

Assessment
The overall assessment plan look good. The department should ask itself if the output of the assessment process is detailed enough to be used for improving teaching and learning. Do they believe the assessment results are reflective of what goes on in the classroom? The primary question always is whether this assessment is helping them move the program forward.

Personally, I think that the assessment process could be improved by using more specific measurements. I'm not sure how helpful it is to look at overall grades for a class or even an exam as an indicator of whether a specific objective is met. Generally courses and exams cover so much material that results are not very

indicative of success or failure on a specific objective. But again, before making a change in this direction I would just ask yourselves whether the current method is informing your program. If not, this may be an approach you might consider.

Facilities and Resources
There appear to be ongoing issues with getting the lab support needed to keep the on-campus program thriving. Work on building strong relations with IT support on campus. A series of questions you might ask to help you develop a plan for improving this relationship include asking:
1) How can IT support benefit from the growth of your program?
2) How can your program benefit from supporting the IT support department?

A potential solution would be to look at shared staffing. If you can find a set of overlapping skills that you both need, perhaps you can hire new personnel or shift personnel so that they are shared between the ITAM department and the IT support function.   As an example, if you were looking to hire someone to teach in your network administration classes, you might benefit the program, the IT support area, and even the person you are hiring (from a professional development standpoint) to have them teach part-time in your area and work in the IT support area the other portion of their load.

Staffing
 The needs in this area seem to be clearly articulated. As I indicated at the exit interview. This is an opportunity to "sieze the moment". Decisions made now will likely impact the long-term growth potential. It would appear that this program has an opportunity to grab the market. Does the university want to do that? If so, does it make sense to develop a 2-3 year plan for bringing new faculty and staff on board to stay ahead of the growth curve.

        The growth of the BAS program impacts the need to adequately staff other areas on campus. The obvious area of need is in general education. But perhaps there are other courses that would benefit BAS students if they were made available online. Is staffing available in those areas to support the program?

Other Issues
BRAND
        There is the potential and risk that the "brand" of the online BAS impacts the brand of the BS (and vice versa), other BAS programs that CWU may want to offer, and CWU as a whole. This needs to be managed effectively. In what ways do you want to communicate that this program is "different" than the typical offering of ITAM/ COEPS / CWU? In what ways do you want to communicate that this program is a strong example of what ITAM / COEPS / CWU is all about?

Leveraging
        How can you leverage the growth of this program to meet your other strategic goals? Are there other BAS programs that can/should be rolled out? Do

you have graduate or non-credit programming that students in the BAS program would be interested in taking after graduation?

Financing

The current model of revenue generation available to departments may need adjustment. My sense is that the principal method to generate revenue is to enroll as many students as possible in summer classes. While it is generous to "award" this summer money to departments, it has the potential to adjust course offering behavior in a way that does not serve students or the institutions in the best way. Perhaps the institution should investigate ways to align revenue generation with the activities they truly want or need to provide appropriate incentives. The ITAM program would clearly benefit from having revenue generation aligned with online programming. This could create incentives for additional online general education courses or additional online programs. My guess is that these decisions are not just local decisions so movement in a different direction might be hard.

The ITAM program itself may look to find additional ways to generate revenue. With expertise in areas related to IT services, they could look to using the concept of a business outreach center providing fee-based IT services. This could also provide students with real world experiences and build critical client-relationship skills.