

MIS versus Computer Science: An Empirical Comparison of the Influences on the Students' Choice of Major

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ABSTRACT

A history of declining enrollments in university Management Information Systems (MIS) and computer science (CS) departments in the U.S. considerably impacts both college departments and business organizations that hire graduates. In order to reverse the enrollment trend, an understanding of the important similarities and differences that shape a student's decision to major in MIS or CS will allow departments to better promote their major, formulate more effective strategies for reaching interested and undecided students, and enhance the fit between student and career. This study directly compared important influences on choice of major for 205 MIS and CS majors at four US universities. Results indicate that the most important influences for both MIS and CS students are interest in technology and monetary compensation. MIS majors, however, are significantly more influenced by others, especially college instructors, parents, friends, and the desire to interact with others. They are also more interested in business and business organizations. CS majors, on the other hand, are more interested in the technology itself and tend to choose CS as a major either in high school or shortly thereafter. Based on these findings, recommendations are provided to aid college departments in attracting and retaining appropriate majors.

Keywords: Choice of major, Information technology, IT careers, Management Information Systems (MIS) departments, Computer Science departments, Careers.