

# Book Review

*Accounting Information Systems*, 7th Ed. by Romney, Steinbart, and Cushing. Reviewed by Professor Gary Adna Ames, (gaames@ilstu.edu), Illinois State University.

Not infrequently accounting students entering the Accounting Information Systems course feel as if they are not in a real accounting course. In the AIS course students do not typically calculate depreciation to the penny nor do they go through torturous mental gymnastics associated with leases or any of a host of other *typical* accounting exercises. As a result, AIS professors may well feel as if they spend much of the term justifying the course's existence.

Gratefully, the Romney, Steinbart, and Cushing book does much of that justification for the professor. This text begins by pointing out to students the following two important facts: 1) "more accounting students take jobs as management accountants ... *than any other career choice*," (Italics added for emphasis) and 2) "Big 6 CPA firms pass on \$50 million consulting jobs because they do not have enough people with the necessary AIS skills" while at the same time "they compete fiercely for \$50,000 audit jobs." After thus establishing the importance of the AIS course the text continues on by doing an admirable job of teaching the subject.

The book is divided into five main sections and further subdivided into twenty-one chapters. The first section establishes the foundation for the remainder of the text by introducing such topics as the elements of the AIS, tools, the data processing cycle and data modeling.

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The various accounting cycles are explored in greater detail in the final section which is comprised of the final five chapters. In between are well-written and very interesting chapters dealing with fairly typical topics such as technology, systems analysis and design, controls, fraud and auditing.

One of the great strengths of this text is that it is heavily laden with examples that are concrete and easily understood. This is crucial to students who may not have much background to help them understand some AIS concepts. Throughout the text the authors are careful to remind the reader that the purpose of the AIS is to provide information that is useful. This seems obvious on the surface but it is really driven home by the following example. Ameritech historically prepared a 25-page report that required five days to prepare and then was not even used. By reviewing its information system Ameritech eliminated six million pages of just such reports. That may be impressive but the authors make it even more understandable by explaining that six million pages is four times higher than Ameritech's 41-story Chicago headquarters.

The second great strength of this text is its emphasis on relational databases and data modeling. In fact, the text may shock many accounting majors by forcing them to realize that the traditional methods of capturing and presenting data by using journals and ledgers could very conceivably be a thing of the past. The suggestion is even put forth that double entry bookkeeping may not be necessary. Such decla-

rations will be stunning to any who tend to think of such traditions as being almost sacred in nature. (As the Grinch might say in his gravelly unbelieving voice, "How could it be so?")

The first chapter on data base systems begins the groundwork for such *radical* thinking with very specific and easy-to-follow imaginary examples. Accompanying the fictitious examples the authors employ some very interesting instances from the business world as well. For instance, the authors point out how Coca-Cola implemented a relational database and watched the time needed to retrieve details relative to an individual transaction drop from 30 minutes to about ten seconds. That is clearly an example that a student can readily understand and appreciate.

This book excels at helping students understand why the AIS course really is a vital course for accounting majors. When students read about companies with which they are famil-

iar such as Wal-Mart, Sports Illustrated, Chevron, and many others it is easier to make the connection from vague theoretical concepts to actual practices.

As with all books of course, this one has its drawbacks. For instance, the chapters frequently illustrate Data Flow Diagrams that have data flows that are not always labeled. Although it is easy to guess at what the unlabeled flows should be, the lack of labeling is a frequent and unnecessary annoyance. Perhaps a greater concern from the teacher's perspective is that the test bank is somewhat weak. For example, I found myself going back to the test bank from the sixth edition to make my first exam.

Overall, this AIS text is one that will enhance the teaching of the AIS topic and assist students to gain a clearer understanding of the importance of the information systems field. 