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# Huntsman Business Intelligence Group Gains Valuable Experience Mining Big Data

## Huntsman Post

### Huntsman Business Intelligence Group Gains Valuable Experience Mining Big Data

By Steve Eaton



Huntsman students learn to mine "big data."

With the news that the National Security Agency has been sifting through massive amounts of phone data to try to thwart potential terrorist plots, more people are becoming aware of a term frequently being used in the IT industry – "big data."

The idea of mining massive amounts of data to unearth new insights for businesses and organizations is nothing new to the Business Intelligence Group at the Huntsman School. For months the student-led group has been helping professors and businesses tap into the secrets to be found analyzing big data.

While the group is not paid for its work and no course credit is offered, the students gain a competitive edge when they go into the workforce, according to the group's student leader Mike Tolman, who is earning his master's degree in management information systems and business administration.

Graduates who have been a part of the Business Intelligence Group are now averaging starting salaries of \$10,000 more than the average MIS graduate from the Huntsman School, according to David Olsen, head of the Management Information Systems Department, who is also the faculty advisor to the group.

In addition to the chance to be a part of the Business Intelligence Group, MIS students are offered some opportunities at the Huntsman School of Business not available at other business schools, Dr. Olsen said. For example, they often work with professors to submit research papers, a practice that is extremely rare in business schools across the country. Professors have sought out the expertise of the Business Intelligence Group, and the diverse experience students are gaining is paying off for them. Tolman said his work with the Business Intelligence Group has led to an internship with Oracle and has earned him two scholarships.

Dr. Olsen says those who know how to tap big data can often offer up insight that might never have been gleaned when people relied on traditional ways of analyzing information and instinctive assumptions about how things interrelate. While many leaders with an accounting background end up becoming CEOs, several students in the Huntsman Business Intelligence Group believe that tomorrow's business leaders will have a deep understanding of how to tap the benefits of big data.

Chad Williams, a senior majoring in accounting, said he became involved in big data analytics, in part, because he thinks it will help him qualify for upper management positions.

"Accountants are exposed to a lot of information," he said. "My experience in the Business Intelligence Group has taught me how to analyze large amounts of this data. With the expanded role of technology in business, there is a need for people with these skills like never before, especially in upper-management."

Dr. Olsen said that those who know how to analyze big data often discover "non-obvious" correlations in the information they analyze. Harrah's Casino, for example, introduced loyalty cards and discovered it wasn't the high-roller millionaires, often called "whales" in the gambling world, who were contributing most to the casino's bottom line but it was the "average Joes" who came in on a regular basis hoping to turn a couple hundred dollars into a big pay day.

"Business intelligence isn't just being able to run analytics on a massive data set," Tolman said. "It's about being able to take those numbers and find how they impact a business. I would say, business intelligence is getting the right information to the right people at the right time. This is what makes what we do valuable because it helps a business become more profitable."

Paul Fowler, who is working on his master's degree in MIS, said that anyone who can offer this kind of expertise to a company is likely to be valued.

"A popular misconception of information technology professionals is that they stay in dark rooms coding and reconfiguring servers," he said. "There is some of that, but with business intelligence, you don't stay in the background very long. Analyzing an organization's data gives you the ability to see the business from a lot of different perspectives, and that is very valuable to any organization."