Trends

Using Actual Software in Your Accounting Courses
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If actual accounting software is used early in the accounting curriculum then it will become easier to integrate its power as an analysis tool in subsequent accounting courses. Actual software applications will provide the relevant business process framework necessary to build business literacy and accounting fluency in students. This article will give brief overviews of the most widely used accounting software programs and share my strategies for adding actual accounting software into undergraduate accounting courses without losing any precious class time.

QuickBooks Online Plus by Intuit:

Software: Great for a small service business because it has no inventory capabilities. Software includes service business sample data or students can build a variety of service businesses from scratch. No software is required since this QuickBooks program resides on Intuit's web server. Only an Internet connection is necessary to use this program 24/7 for 30 days FREE! Students only need an e-mail address to use it. After 30 days, students continue to have viewing rights of their data for an additional month. If you want to use QB Online Plus for more than 30 days in your classes, schools can contact Mack Pennington (Mack_Pennington@Intuit.com) at Intuit for specific educational pricing information. At the time this article was written, the classroom price was $15-$25 per student for 180 days depending on the number of students. Normal pricing for QuickBooks Online Plus is around $35 per month (includes tech support). QuickBooks Online Plus includes features like one touch exporting of reports to Excel, budgeting, and online banking. It allows the external accountant to use it in addition to the company user. Payroll and credit card processing can be done for an additional fee. There is another version of the Online program known as Basic. Basic is a very simple program that lacks much of what is done in a beginning accounting course. For more information about QuickBooks Online Plus Edition (for Windows) go to http://oe.quickbooks.com.
Best integrated into these beginning accounting courses: Financial, Principles, or College Accounting can this software to either demonstrate or use the basic business processes involving customers, vendors, or banking with minimal problems for the first-time user. Lots of preformatted reports, including all the financials, can easily be exported to Excel to view or make graphs. From a teaching standpoint, the best feature of QuickBooks Online Plus is the Activity Log which time and date stamps all keystrokes made by the student so student mistakes

are easy to find and correct. Also the Activity Log provides the audit trail needed to validate student effort which makes any assignment easy to grade. Consider assigning QuickBooks Online Plus to complete a comprehensive problem from the textbook or an outside of class practice set.

QuickBooks Pro by Intuit

Software: Great for a small retail business with some inventory (Average Costing). Software includes sample company data or students can build a variety of businesses from scratch on their personal computers. The 140 day student educational version of QuickBooks Pro is selectively packaged with some textbooks. Both the QuickBooks Pro software and an Internet connection are necessary to use this program. Over the Internet Intuit provides 30 days of free online tech support to educational users. Schools must buy educational site licenses to use the QuickBooks Pro software in their computer labs. Schools can contact Trae Harris (Trae_Harris@Intuit.com) at Intuit for specific educational pricing information. At the time this article was written, a 10 user educational site license was $259.95, a 25 user license was $399.95, and a 50 user license was $599.95. Normal pricing for QuickBooks Pro software is around $200 for one user. Not only does QuickBooks Pro has comparable features to the Online Plus Edition but it also handles inventory tracking, the importing of data from certain programs, multiple currencies, and has many more preformatted reports. Payroll and credit card processing can be done for an additional fee. For more information about QuickBooks Pro (for Windows) go to
http://quickbooks.intuit.com/product/training/students_educators.jsp
Best integrated into these beginning accounting courses: Financial or Principles classes can this software's well documented work flow paths to either demonstrate or use basic business processes involving customers, vendors, employees, or banking with few problems for the first-time user. The numerous preformatted reports can be exported to Excel to view or make graphs. From a teaching standpoint, the best feature of QuickBooks Pro is the Audit Trail which tracks a student's keystrokes so student mistakes are easy to find and correct. Also the Audit Trail makes any assignment easy to grade. Consider assigning QuickBooks Pro to complete end of chapter problems or as an outside of class practice set.

Peachtree Complete Accounting by Sage

Software: Great for any type of small businesses with inventory (FIFO, LIFO, or Average Costing) including not-for-profits and manufacturing concerns. Software includes sample company data or students can build a variety of businesses from scratch. The educational version of Peachtree is FREE to students and schools and the software can be packaged with textbooks. Normal pricing for Peachtree Complete software is around $270. Peachtree Complete has comparable features to QuickBooks Pro and is the most accounting-like of the small business software options. Add-ons like payroll, fixed assets, and credit card processing can be done for an additional fee. For more information about Peachtree Complete (for Windows) go to http://peachtree.com/PeachtreeAccountingLine/Complete/

Best integrated into these beginning accounting courses: College Accounting, Financial, Principles, or Managerial Accounting classes can use this software to compare the traditional accounting system of journals and ledgers to the forms-based entry processes involving customers, vendors & inventory, employees, or banking. Like QuickBooks, the numerous preformatted reports can be exported to Excel to view or make graphs. From a teaching standpoint, the best feature of Peachtree Complete is the Audit Trail Report which displays the time, date, and amount of every action done by the student so student mistakes are easy to find and correct. Also this report provides the audit trail needed to validate student efforts for grading purposes. Consider assigning a Peachtree project to review the accounting cycle, to examine common internal controls, or to complete end of chapter problems.

Microsoft Office Accounting Professional

Software: Great for small businesses with inventory (FIFO, LIFO, or Average Costing) and fixed assets. Software includes sample company data or students can build a variety of businesses from scratch. The 120 day student educational version of Office Accounting Professional is selectively packaged with some textbooks. Schools can request the MSDN version of the software for their computer labs from their textbook publisher at no cost. Normal pricing for Office Accounting Professional software is around $200. Office Accounting Professional compares favorably to QuickBooks Pro and Peachtree features. In addition, it offers fixed asset accounting, the customization of user roles and permissions, and some XBRL tagging. Office Accounting Professional works seamlessly with the other components to the Office Suite to introduce the power of Excel pivot tables and Access databases. Add-ons for payroll, credit card processing, Equifax credit profiling, PayPal invoicing, and selling on eBay can be purchased for an additional fee. For more information about Microsoft Office Accounting Professional (for Windows) go to: http://office.microsoft.com/en-us/accounting/FX100518171033.aspx
Best integrated into these undergraduate accounting courses: Accounting classes can use this software as a second accounting software application to experience a more robust accounting solution. Previous accounting software experience with either QuickBooks or Peachtree is helpful. Office Accounting Professional is fully integrated into the Office Suite and provides coverage of financial and tax depreciation methods. It can be used to introduce user interface permissions, Excel pivot tables, Access, and XBRL.   From a teaching standpoint, the best feature of Microsoft Office Accounting Professional is the Change Log which tracks the changes a student makes. Consider assigning the following Office Accounting Professional projects in these undergraduate courses:

- Use the sample company data to apply managerial accounting concepts like budgeting, pricing, and short and long-term decision making in the Managerial Accounting or Principles 2 course,
- Set up and operate a start-up retail corporation with fixed assets transactions to review the accounting cycle in Intermediate Accounting,

- Examine common internal controls and set up the necessary user interfaces and permissions for a business in an Accounting Information Systems course,
- Prepare tax returns and do some basic tax planning for the sample company in a Corporate Tax course,
- Conduct basic audit procedures and testing on the sample company data in the first Auditing course.

Conclusion

The brief overviews of the most widely used accounting software programs and the suggested strategies for adding them into undergraduate accounting courses presented in this article, hopefully has given you some ideas for integrating software into your courses. One learning outcome that will result if you do add software experiences is the building of business literacy and accounting fluency in your students. Another outcome is better preparation of students for how accounting is actually done in the workplace. What wonderful results for our profession, our students, and our school's curricula.