

## Business Partnering for IT Education: a Panel Discussion

**Ravi Nath**  
*Creighton University,  
Omaha, NE, USA*

**James Schmidt**  
*First National Bank of  
Omaha, Omaha, NE, USA*

**Robert Sweeney**  
*AIM Institute,  
Omaha, NE, USA*

[rnath@creighton.edu](mailto:rnath@creighton.edu)

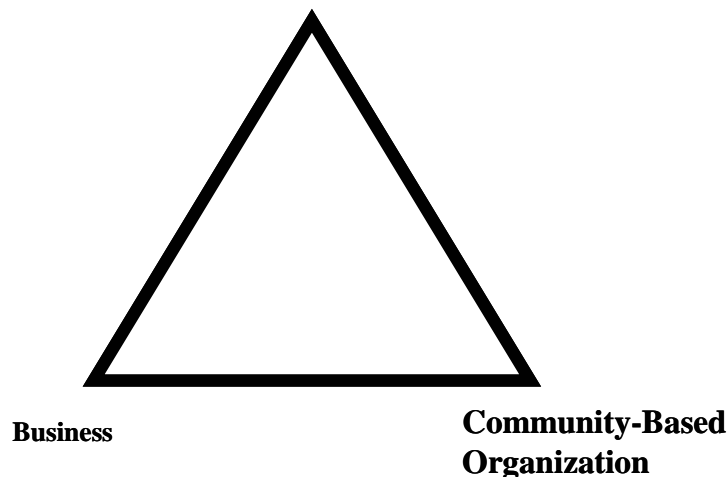
[jschmidt@fnni.com](mailto:jschmidt@fnni.com)

[rsweeney@omaha.org](mailto:rsweeney@omaha.org)

### Introduction

Developing and providing information technology (IT) education that is current and strikes a balance between theory and practice is challenging. Incessant changes and innovations in computer hardware, software, and communication technologies coupled with ever-evolving business practices, make the task of teaching IT courses daunting. One approach to addressing this problem is the formation of academic-industry strategic partnerships. This panel discussion addresses issues surrounding the formation and cultivation of win-win partnerships between academic institutions and business firms.

### Academic Institution



The panel members will address the following issues:

1. What is the value of academic-business partnerships to the parties involved?
2. How to develop such partnerships?
3. What form and shape can these partnerships take?
4. What must be done right to cultivate and sustain these partnerships?

The panel consists of individuals who represent three different key constituents in the partnership value-chain.

One panelist is in charge of undergraduate and graduate IT degree programs at an educational institution; the second panelist is the President and Chief Executive Office of a nationally-renowned community-based non-profit organization with the mission to bring educational institutions and industry together in

promoting IT education; and the third panelist is a senior Vice-President of a business that is involved in several such university-industry partnerships.

This session will be useful to both academic institutions and business firms who wish to develop such partnerships in order to enhance the quality of information technology educational programs and thus, help develop the technology workforce of tomorrow.

## Biographies

**Ravi Nath** is the Jack and Joan Endowed Professor of Information Technology Management, the founding Director of the Joe Ricketts Center in Electronic Commerce and Database Marketing, and Chairman of the Department of Information Systems and Technology in the College of Business Administration at Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. Recently, Dr. Nath was named the “Technology Professor of the Year” in the state of Nebraska by the Applied Information Management (AIM) Institute.

Before joining Creighton University, he served in the capacity of the Associate Dean for Academic Programs and Director of the Ph.D. program in Management Information Systems in the Business School at the University of Memphis. During the 1991-1992 academic year, Dr. Nath lectured and conducted research in Africa as a Fulbright Scholar. He has published over 80 research papers in the area of Electronic Commerce and Information Systems in various national and international publications. Dr. Nath teaches and conducts research in Information Systems, Electronic Commerce, and Data Mining. He is a frequent speaker at local and national business events. Dr. Nath has a Masters degree from Wichita State University and a Ph.D. degree from Texas Tech University.

**James Schmidt** is a Senior Vice President at First National Bank of Omaha and heads the Technology Services Division. He is also chairman of First Technology Solutions, a wholly-owned subsidiary of First National of Nebraska. He received his B.S. degree in mathematics in 1967 from the University of Iowa, and his M.A. in Business Administration in 1976 from the University of Nebraska.

Jim is the current chairman of Applied Information Management (AIM) Institute, an organization designed to focus, coordinate and synergize the resources of the region’s educational, governmental, and private partners toward economic development around information technologies. He is also a member of the Curriculum Advisory Committees at the University of Nebraska Information Science & Technology College and Bellevue University.

**Robert E. Sweeney** is the President & CEO of the Applied Information Management Institute (AIM). AIM is a non-profit partnership between business, academic and government to support Omaha/Nebraska economic development, as related to IT.

Bob Sweeney spent 20 years as Vice President & CIO for three different Farm Credit Banks. He has also served as a faculty member and Chair of the Department of Economics at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, Economist for the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta and operated a 600-acre Iowa grain & livestock farm.

Bob holds a Bachelors of Science Degree from Iowa State University, a Masters of Science from Louisiana State University and a Ph.D. from Georgia State University.

Dr. Sweeney is also actively involved in our community in various leadership capacities. He currently is Chairman of the Board of the Open Door Mission, serves on the Boards at SCOLA and the Greater Omaha Chamber of Commerce, serves on the Board of Trustees at Grace University, and is actively involved in other Christian Ministries. Bob was a 2000 recipient of the Ike Friedman award for community service. He also enjoys collecting and restoring antique farm equipment and tools.