

The i-School Movement

Sponsored by SIG ED

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Description

In its academic plan, a school of information studies recently described itself as broadening its mandate, and thereby joining “an elite group of North American faculties collectively known as the ‘Information Schools’ or i-schools.” At the first formal Conference of the i-School Community, in September 2005, 19 institutions from the US and Canada were identified as i-conference schools. 15 of these are schools which include American Library Association-accredited master’s degree programs. Some who were not present would argue (and have done so) that they were “i-schools” long before the “i-” existed. The academic community in library and information science (LIS) has begun to wonder what the i-schools movement is all about, and how it evolved from a small occasional meeting of deans to an annual conference, and perhaps more. This panel will attempt to demystify the i-school concept. The next i-school conference will be held in October 2006, immediately prior to the ASIST annual meeting, and should inform the conversation. The panel is deliberately quite large - this is meant to be a discussion, not a set of presentations. Each of the panelists (including the moderator) will make a brief presentation, and the moderator will lead the conversation, addressing the questions listed above, adding any insights gained from the October 2006 conference, and soliciting input from the audience.

♀Some of the questions put to panelists to stimulate that conversation include:

- How did the i-school movement come about, and what is its purpose?
- Is this an association in the making, or just an annual gathering of like-minded people? Is there an infrastructure that involves governance, committees, and so on?
- How did/might your school become part of it, and what has that meant for your program?
- How does “membership” work-what qualifies a school to be i-, and how does a program join the i-school community? What are the advantages?
- Has the i-school group talked about accreditation or similar kinds of activities?
- Do you expect the roster of i-schools to grow, and if so, with what kinds of programs?
- What are your take-aways from the 2006 conference?
- Do you see a role for ASIST or ACM or any other professional organization in relation to the i-schools?

The panelists are all deans, associate deans, or former deans of a variety of program types

Andy Dillon

The program at the University of Texas at Austin was founded in 1948, renamed itself as a school of LIS in 1980 (as did many others) and became a School of Information in 2002, which was when Andy joined (he had been with Indiana University). He represents someone coming from outside to lead an existing program into a new era, and is also very active in ASIST.

Harry Bruce

The program at the University of Washington was founded in 1911 (making it the oldest west of the Mississippi), changed to LIS in 1983, and became the iSchool in 2001 under the direction of Mike Eisenberg. Harry became Dean in 2006 (having been Associate Dean), and so represents someone who had been part of the evolution taking over a program which is already well-established as an i-school.

Michèle Cloonan

The Simmons program was founded with its institution, in 1899, changed its name to library and information science in the late 70s, has a significant grant-getting record, and is well-ranked nationally despite not having a PhD program until this year. Michèle, who joined Simmons in 2002, represents leadership of a successful example of contrast.

John King

The University of Michigan program was the first to call itself just School of Information, which it did in 1996. John joined Michigan in 2000, coming from the University of California at Irvine. He represents a program which was at the beginning of the “i-” wave, and he came from the outside to an already well-established i-school.

Debra J. Richardson

Under Debra’s leadership at UC Irvine, the former ICS department was promoted in December 2002 to The Donald Bren School of Information and Computer Sciences, the first computing-focused school in University of California history. Debra represents an i-school which comes from the computing science tradition.

Linda Smith

In 1893, Katharine L. Sharp founded a department of library science at the Armour Institute in Chicago, and four years later she moved her school to Urbana to become part of the University of Illinois, the longest continuous university affiliation of any library school in the United States. In 1981, the school changed its name to the Graduate School of Library and Information Science. Linda represents an i-school which has made a deliberate decision to keep its identity as an “and” school.

Jim Thomas

Penn State’s program was a response to a planned initiative at the university level, and was led by Jim from the beginning (1997) until he stepped down in July 2006. Penn State hosted the first i-school conference. Jim represents a "greenfield" program that did not evolve from a pre-existing form.

Ray von Dran

The program at Syracuse has been around for more than a hundred years, and has been a School of Information Studies since 1974 (hence it calls itself “The Original Information School”). This was one of the first information science programs. Ray joined Syracuse in 1995, and represents what could almost be called the old guard in this relatively new movement.