Teach, Learn, Engage: Reflections on Community Informatics Curriculum Development

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ABSTRACT
This paper describes the 2010 iConference wildcard that aims to discuss the expectations, development, and demands of Community Informatics curriculum in light of its status as an emerging area of study.

Categories and Subject Descriptors
H.1.2 [**Information Systems**]: User/Machine Systems – *human factors, human information processing.*

General Terms
Performance, Design, Experimentation, Human Factors, Standardization, Theory.

Keywords
Community Informatics, curriculum, pedagogy, community, students, engagement.

1.INTRODUCTION
Although there is no single Community Informatics (CI) theory, at its foundation Community Informatics originated in response to the advent phenomenon of information and communication technologies and their effects on diverse communities. Michael Gurstein, the Editor in Chief of the *Journal of Community Informatics* and the first to coin the term, describes CI as "the application of ICT to enable and empower community processes."[1] Brian Loader, another early CI scholar who teaches at the University of York, says it is "navigating the interaction between *transformation* as expressed in information technology or IT, and *continuity* as expressed in a local, historical community."[2] Due to the central role of community in the study of CI, curriculum is predicated on the interplay of teaching, learning and engagement. CI encourages engagement to be a circular process, rather than a one-way relationship; thus, both students and communities should gain direct benefits.

As an emerging field of study, it is important to understand how CI is being taught in higher education. Students of CI will be entering the field in in the near future, so hearing about their experiences while they are in school will provide insight about what types of programs and initiatives they will be implementing in their future careers. A few universities have established CI as a formal specialization, while other schools have classes or projects that often have the same goals, but operate under different names. As a result, there is some variation in what students in CI learn at each institution. This raises the question of whether core consistencies should be implemented across institutions with CI curriculum or whether it should be combined with community-specific studies to be a more effective pedagogical approach.

It is important for Community Informatics programs to be in communication with each other so that as pioneers they can spur developments in the field. Furthermore, by exchanging ideas, concerns, and issues that each program is facing in their respective communities and even within their universities, involved institutions can establish a higher level of proficiency in CI education design and practice. Through collaboration, mutual support, and creating networks, the current focus on case studies or different projects can coalesce into a more comprehensive and informative or action-oriented understanding of the body of CI programs.

2.PURPOSE
The panel has three goals: 1) to examine how Community Informatics curriculum is developing in different universities, 2) to examine if the expectations of students and community partners are being met, and 3) to explore possible needs to be addressed within these programs. To obtain first-hand experience on this subject, the panel will feature students participating in CI practice and projects, community partners, and faculty members who teach CI courses.

The organizers, who are students concerned about how the inchoate Community Informatics paradigm fits into future careers that revolve around community engagement and development, such as librarianship and scholarship, created the panel in order to encourage understanding and awareness across CI programs. In addition, this panel will promote pedagogical discourse by sharing the faculties? thought process and challenges as they design degree programs and course syllabi. Furthermore, the exposure to the individual experiences of the community partners will help

[1] In What is community informatics (and why does it matter)? By M. Gurstein, 2007, p. 11.

[2] As quoted in Social networks and social capital: rethinking theory in community informatics by Williams & Durrance, 2008.

paint a picture of potential technology-related needs of a particular community and best practices based on their and the students' perspectives.

3.FORMAT

The panel will begin with moderators presenting a brief history of CI within education, the purpose and format of the panel. The panelists will then briefly introduce themselves (name, institution, position).

A succession of faculty, students and community partners will present on assigned topics and questions, accompanied by PowerPoint slides. Following the presentation, panelists will field questions from the audience regarding the material discussed during the panel or issues that were missed. We are requesting an additional 30 minutes to allow in-depth discussion of this complicated topic. Panelists can raise further questions and dialogue amongst each other and the audience can engage with panelists on the issues. This will facilitate the outcomes we outline at the end of the proposal.

Proposed Schedule	*Alternate Schedule*
Introduction 5 min	Introduction 5 min
Faculty 1 10 min	Faculty 1 10 min
Faculty 2 10 min	Faculty 2 10 min
Student 1 10 min	Student 1 10 min
Student 2 10 min	Student 2 10 min
Community 1 10 min	Community 1 10 min
Community 2 10 min	Community 2 10 min
Discussion 55 min	Discussion 25 min
Total Time: 120 min	Total Time: 90 min

4.QUESTIONS

4.1Faculty

1.How did you develop the curriculum for your courses? What input/theories/models informed your decisions to assign readings, projects, and papers? What theoretical framework and practical skills do you aim to impart to students by the end of each course?

4.2.Students

1.What expectations did you have in regard to coursework, extracurricular activities, research, and professional development that you would be involved with when you started the program? What methods have worked in your experience, and what can be improved upon?

2.What methods did you learn from your coursework that helped to guide you in assessing the needs of the community for the UFL Technology Assistance project, and shape the way it is run?

3.Do you feel the coursework and activities in CI have helped you to learn about the particular needs of diverse communities and how to address them? How are you approaching this matter in the Community Informatics Corps Seminar?

4.3Community Partners

1.How well are the needs of the community being addressed by the respective projects you have partnered with? What can students and faculty do to better serve the community?

2.Do you see the UFL Technology Volunteer Project as being sustainable if the University were to leave the picture? Why or why not?

3.Did you feel you have a voice in the process of developing SisterNet? How do you feel about scholars/students bringing their ideas to the field as opposed to people in the field approaching the university to address specific community needs?

5.PANELISTS

A complete biography of the panelists will be available at the discussion.

5.1Faculty

Kate Williams (Ph.D., University of Michigan School of Information) has been an assistant professor in Community Informatics at GSLIS at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign for two years.

Steven Jackson (Ph.D., Communication and Science Studies, University of California-San Diego) is an Assistant Professor in the School of Information at the University of Michigan and has been involved in assessing the CI program there.

5.2Students

Susan Rodgers is a second-year graduate student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and works in the Community Informatics Initiative as a Research Assistant. She is the manager of the approximately 30 Tech Volunteers at the Urbana Free Library (UFL).

Emily Petty Puckett is a second-year master?s student in the School of Information at the University of Michigan, specializing in CI and Library and Information Services. She is the Community Information Corps (CIC) program coordinator.

5.3Community Partners

Debra Lissak is in her third year as Executive Director of the UFL where she has been employed for nearly 30 years. She received her MLIS Science from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

Imani Bazzell has worked as a community educator and organizer for over 30 years. She is the founder and director of SisterNet, a local network of African American women committed to the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual health of Black women.

5.4Organizers

Aaisha Haykal, Suzanne Im, and Aiko Takazawa will serve as moderator, timekeeper and provide technical/logistical support during the panel.

6.OUTCOMES

Before the conference, panelists will answer a question that will be posted on the Community Informatics Initiative (CII) web space. The conversation that begins there can continue after the panel discussion and provide a means for networking amongst faculty and students. Issues that come up through this forum can be further explored through the establishment of an annual conference where students and faculty of CI and related studies present and share their research and community projects. Additionally, the panel may spur ideas about new courses or assignments. In addition, the research done by Kate Williams and Aiko Takazawa on CI syllabi in various universities can be analyzed and provide another discussion thread. The panel can also be video-recorded and then posted on the GSLIS and/or CII web space. An analytical paper based on the findings in the panel can be written and then submitted to a peer-reviewed journal.

7.ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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8.REFERENCES

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[2] Williams, K., & Durrance, J. 2008. Social networks and social capital: rethinking theory in community informatics. The Journal of Community Informatics [Online] 4, 3 (Aug 2008). Available: http://ci-journal.net/index.php/ciej/article/view/465/430