

CHI, ICIS, SIGIR and Numerous Other Outlets That Won't Accept My Work: The Perils of Publishing Multidisciplinary Research?

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Abstract

The motivation for this session comes directly from two series of comments made at the 2007 *iConference*. The first was uttered at a pre-conference workshop. In a discussion on where to publish, the recommendation was made to aim for the outlet *First Monday*. Now *First Monday* is a fine online journal, but it is certainly not on any institution's A-list that I know of. If *First Monday* is your lead journal, what's your fall back?

The second comment was made at a session on digital library research, where the panelists were asked what they considered their major publication outlets. The overwhelming answer was the SIGIR Conference. Now SIGIR is fine conference, but when one thinks of openness to new ideas, SIGIR is not the first conference that jumps to mind.

These comments, and many others made in informal discussions, raise the concerns of disseminating multidisciplinary research results.

This interactive session will address the subject of publishing multidisciplinary research. By multidisciplinary, we also include interdisciplinary, transdisciplinarity, crossdisciplinary, cross cutting, multidisciplinarity and various other terms that academics and others use to describe:

“the act of drawing from and integrating two or more academic disciplines, professions, technologies, departments, their methods and insights, in the pursuit of a common goal. Interdisciplinary approaches typically focus on problems felt by the investigators to be too complex or wide-ranging to be dealt with using the knowledge and methodology of a single discipline” (Wikipedia, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Interdisciplinary>).

The question of the challenges of multi-disciplinary research is not new. There has been much written about multidisciplinary programs and education (see Chubin, 1976 or Newell, 2001 as examples). Most of this work has focused on designing of programs. There has been some articulation of the barriers to engaging in multidisciplinary

research, with the concern that multidisciplinary research can be seen as lacking in rigor (from the viewpoint of established disciplines). It has been noted that the tendency is for interdisciplinary research to become disciplines themselves. One could make the case that computer human interaction has followed such an approach. We see this now with the *iSchools*. The *iConference* series has moved from *iSchools the community* to defining *iResearch*, *iMethods*, and the *iSchool space*.

However, there has been much less formal discussion concerning the publication of multidisciplinary research. The subject is nuanced. For example, it is difficult to find a journal or conference that does not advertise itself as ‘seeking research from a broad range of perspectives on’ [insert domain here]. However, antidotal evidence suggests that many times there are severe qualifiers to these welcoming solicitation statements. The impression expressed by some multidisciplinary researchers is that journal and conferences are open to new perspectives ... as long as such research uses the field’s assumptions, methods, and literature.

As such, many academics claim that barriers do exist in publishing multidisciplinary research.

If this criticism is justified, what can be done about improving the publication opportunities for multidisciplinary researchers? It would seem that this is a critical issue for the *iSchools* for future recruitment and retainment.

However, is this criticism justified? Or, is it just sour grapes for research that is of little impact or low quality? Is the solution just to ‘published good research’? If this is the case, how do multidisciplinary institutions go about correctly a common misperception that multidisciplinary research is challenging?

These are the motivators for this session. We aim to examine this subject objectively, critiquing the major viewpoints, and producing some avenues for possible future courses of action. As such, we do not aim for this session to be a ‘whine-fest’. Rather, the session is structured to constructively engage and produce some directions to either deal with improving the publication process for the *iSchools* or putting the matter (i.e., misperception) to bed.

Issues

This interactive panel will address three issues in the 1 ½ hour session, which are:

1. Are there unique barriers to publishing multidisciplinary research?
 - a. If there are, what are they?
 - b. If there are not, why is there the misperception that it is so commonplace?
2. Depending on the answer to (1)
 - a. What can be done to over come the barriers of publishing multidisciplinary research? (and who needs to do it?)
 - b. What can be done to correct the misperception concerning barriers to publishing multidisciplinary research? (and who needs to do it?)
3. Is there a need for *iResearch*, *iMethods*, and an *iSchool space*?

Depending on the answer to (3)

- a. If there is a need, what are the *iResearch*, *iMethods*, and *iSchool space*?
- b. If there is not, what do the *iSchools* bring to the table in terms of multidisciplinary work that has not existed previously?

Contributors

- Facilitator: Dr. Jim Jansen (Penn State)
- Panelists: We have intentionally recruited panelists who hold diverse opinions concerning these issues, which should make for an informative session.
- Panelists and positions are:

Andrew Dillon (quite whining and just publish good research)
Dean, School of Information
Professor of Information, Psychology, and Information, Risk & Operations
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Howard Rosenbaum (publishing multidisciplinary research is really hard)
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Mark S. Ackerman (middle of the road)
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- Participants: The format of the session will be designed to actively engage the session attendees.

Format

1. Opening Remarks: The facilitator will present opening remarks (2 ½ minutes)
2. Session Survey: We will begin the session with a self-reflection on the three issues listed, with each participant and panelist individually addressing the three issues, writing down responses (10 minutes).

These written responses will be collected and quickly open coded while the panelists are giving short opening remarks.

3. Panelist Opening Remarks: Each panelist will give opening remarks concerning the three issues mentioned above (10 minutes each, 30 minutes).
4. Discussion: We will present the results from the participant and panelist surveys, and then use these results as a basis for a question and answer period among participants and panelists (30 minutes).
5. Outcomes and Final Statements: Based on various positions, discussions, and questions, each panelist will present their prescription on what a course of action should be for the *iSchools* (5 minutes each, 15 minutes).
6. Concluding Remarks: The facilitator will present concluding remarks (2 ½ minutes)

Outcomes

The session will have administrative support to accomplish three things:

1. Aggregate, analyze, and provide the responses to the self-reflection exercise from each session participant to the Dean of each of the *iSchools* and others as requested.
2. Summarize the discussion period comments with a focus on concerns, successes, and barriers.
3. Summarize the recommendations on courses of action and provide to the Dean of each of the *iSchools*.

Needed Support from the *iConference*

- Student volunteers to distribute, collect, and transcribe the surveys. Student support also needed for note taking during the session.
- A computer or two for the students to code the data.
- A bunch of pencils.

Review Criteria

The topic addressed in this proposal is a critical component of the conference theme of multi- (or inter- or cross-) disciplinarily in all areas, including participants, literatures used, and methods. The issue of whether or not the *iSchools* offer anything unique is something that must be addressed. Additionally, untenured faculty have to come to grips with the true nature of being in an *iSchool* – whether multidisciplinary research is a boon, a bust, or a non-issue for tenure.

This session will exclusively focus on publishing multidisciplinary research. Publications are in fact the tangible result of research, multidisciplinary or otherwise. In order for a multidisciplinary collection of faculty to be ultimately successful, they must understand the underlying process of publishing, be that in disciplinary outlets or in multidisciplinary venues. For tenure track faculty to be ultimately successful, they must find thriving processes for both publishing and for the related areas of grants.

This is an area of interest and concern for current faculty, Deans of the *iSchools*, for recruiting, and graduate students. As such, the session will be domain spanning.