The Globalization of the iSchools Movement

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Abstract

In 2005 a relatively small interdisciplinary group of LIS schools, all based in the U.S., announced its intention to form a new "iField." The explicitly stated goal behind the formation and formalization of this group was the coming to grips with the "elusive identity [that] poses a challenge for the I-School movement" (King, 2006). Today 40% of the iSchools Caucus is non-U.S. based. This research examines the impact of the international member schools on what was once an exclusively American group. The internationalization phenomenon is examined from the perspective of the Information Outcome Space (Gross & Latham, 2011). Content analysis of school websites addressing vision and mission statements, "about the school" statements, and messages from the Deans/Directors were conducted to discern the philosophical approaches of iSchool as they relate to the concept of information. This research addresses whether information conception is the uniting, identifying, and defining identity for the iCaucus.

Keywords: iSchools, Library and Information Science, Computer and Information Science, content analysis, international

Introduction

Over the past few decades, shifts in the professional marketplace, globalization, and a rapidly changing technological landscape have complicated the disciplinary identity formation process of technology-intensive disciplines. The disciplinary identity of LIS has been contested since its origins in 19th century librarianship training programs (Burnett & Bonnici, 2006). Inter-professional and interdepartmental competition, jurisdictional disputes—including LIS and computer science over the emergence of information technology as a discipline—have problematized the establishment of a lasting disciplinary identity (Bonnici, Subramaniam, & Burnett, 2009). Conversations among visionaries from both disciplines resulted in the formation of the iSchools Caucus in 2005. In an effort to determine whether this i-movement is a nascent discipline or repackaging of old ideas under a new guise, research has been carried out on three aspects of iSchools scholarship: integration (organizational culture and leadership), discovery (research and teaching), and application (professional associations and practice).

Integration

The term *information science* was coined in the early 1960s, and applied almost immediately to the description of two very different fields. The two disciplines in which Information Science most often resides, Library and Information Science (LIS) and Computer and Information Science (CIS), historically claimed distinctly separate domains. While the titles associated with the two disciplines have persisted, variations have been tested and discarded. Informatics, suggested by Gorn as an alternative to Computer and Information Science, had short-lived currency in each of the disciplines. This term survives, however it failed to rebrand the disciplines on a mass scale. Many of the academic units that house LIS programs removed "Library" from their names, but their programs continue to focus, albeit to varying degrees, on libraries as institutions and librarianship as practice.

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Discovery

The removal of "library" from the disciplinary identity of LIS schools is a result of the influence of information science, impacting the "and" in Library and Information Science. The impact of information systems on LIS as a discipline has notably been an influential factor in the iSchools movement, though not the main factor (Bonnici & Burnett, unpublished). The most notable distinction between the CIS and LIS disciplines is research domain. CIS research has its roots in information systems while LIS research has centered on the human element in information processes, widely known as information behavior research. Saracevic (1999) declared that information science falls short of being a full-fledged discipline due to the lack of cross-disciplinary connection between systems-centered and user-centered research engagement. Evidence indicates that communication between CIS and LIS researchers has begun to blur the lines of disciplinary boundary. Despite the disconnect, Saracevic noted progress indicating that information retrieval research has recognized motivational or affective relevance as elements in text retrieved by a system. Has the merging of the disciplines through the iSchools movement found common ground in the information sciences of LIS and CIS?

In 2005 a relatively small interdisciplinary group of LIS schools, all based in the U.S., announced its intention to form a new "iField." The explicitly stated goal behind the formation and formalization of this group was the coming to grips with the "elusive identity [that] poses a challenge for the I-School movement" (King, 2006). The iSchools Caucus created the term iField to capture this elusive identity, and defined it as:

> an academic field of study and a professional career field that deals with all the issues, opportunities, and challenges we face in our emerging Information Age.… The iField addresses this fundamental issue: how do we harness that incredible flow of information for the betterment of society, rather than get swamped by it? (iSchools Caucus, n.d.)

Today the iSchools Caucus is made up of thirty-eight member schools with nearly 40% of the membership being non-U.S. based.

As viewed through the theoretical lens of the *Chaos of Disciplines* (Abbott, 2001), as applied by Bonnici and Burnett, the culture of the iSchools Caucus has disciplinary breadth, is self-replicating in method, and has progressed through a method of rediscovery. The mechanism of progression from LIS to iField is an inverted fractal cycle, moving from specific disciplinary focus to broad focus over time. The inverted directional move is contrary to the theoretical view that disciplines move from broad concerns to more specific foci over time. Preliminary findings indicate that the move from the specific domain of libraries toward a more encompassing concern with information more generally may have fueled the inverted fractal cycle.

Bonnici and Burnett's research spanned 1965-2009. Since that time iCaucus membership has grown, with the most notable trend in membership being the addition of schools outside of the U.S. This research project examines the impact of these new schools on what was once an exclusively American group of schools.

Research Questions

RQ1: How has internationalization impacted the iSchools movement?

RQ2a: How do U.S. iSchools and International iSchools differ in their conceptualization of information?

RQ2b: How is information conceptualized by the iCaucus ?

RQ3: What possible effect might internationalization of the iSchool movement have on the future development of information science as a part of CIS, LIS, and/or a new iField?

Theoretical Framework

Interviews with the Deans and Directors of the six founding iSchools identified three unifying themes; people, information, and technology. In order to gain insight on the inverted fractal cycle, we will examine the internationalization phenomenon, from the perspective of the Information Outcome Space proposed by Gross & Latham (2011). The model consists of three tiers, with information conception

dominating the top tier. Information conception is defined by focus on information as product over process. More precisely stated, information conception is the outcome of the search for information rather than concern with approaches to finding information. However, information seeking is conceptualized at the mid-level tier. Theoretical concepts at the middle tier include information people, information technology, and information quality, key factors in the information seeking process. These three concepts were identified by the founding iSchool deans when asked to describe the factors uniting the iSchools' membership. The six administrative heads stated "people, information, and technology" as the key elements uniting the schools under the iCaucus label. Information technology conception is characterized as the use of technology as a primary way to disseminate and acquire information. Information people conveys the idea that people are considered valuable as information resources, whether they deliver information or facilitate the finding of information. The third concept at the middle tier of the model is information quality. Quality refers to information that is tangible and useful. These three elements alone do not equal information conception. Rather, they are key elements in the process of finding useful information. However, these three elements currently unite and thus define the iSchools movement. We have a notion that information conception (information as product) embodies additional unidentified factors. These factors may be found in the combination of LIS and CIS disciplines that constitute the iField, explaining why even the iSchools Caucus considers its identity "elusive."

Methods

Content analysis of school names and sections of school websites (accessed September - December, 2012) for the six founding iSchools and the international schools were examined. Aspects for analysis included vision and mission statements, "about the school" statements, and messages from the Deans/Directors were conducted to discern the philosophical approaches and attitudes of iSchool members as they relate to the concept of information. Content analyses are phase one of a two-phase project that will include interviews with iSchool Deans/Directors internationally, following the conference. Phase two analysis will also include an examination of faculty disciplinary contribution through a review of educational and career backgrounds.

Analysis and Conclusions

Data analysis was conducted in terms of the middle tier of the Information Outcome Space. In addition, analysis was informed by invisible substrates (Bates, 1999). Bates' "Three Big Questions;" physical, social, and design aspects of information were used to determine information conception. The researchers attempted to determine if the non-U.S. member schools contribute unique views to the iSchools group as it relates to information people, information technology, and information quality.

Data analysis addressed the logical, methodological, and pragmatic relations among and between the two disciplinary areas that populate iSchool membership: CIS and LIS. Our goal in this research is to facilitate understanding of the future trajectories of the discipline of Information Science, including the impacts of globalization of the information disciplines. Data analysis sought to determine if international CIS-based versus LIS-based member schools differ in their conception of information conception. The overarching purpose of this research is to determine whether information conception is the uniting, identifying, and defining identity for the iCaucus.

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