

Exploring the Social Studies of Information

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Abstract

This full day workshop builds a new community of scholars interested in exploring the potential of the “Social Studies of Information” (SSI) as a meta-identity for information research informed by the humanities and social sciences. We are inspired by the broad field of STS (for either “Science and Technology Studies” or “Science, Technology, and Society”). STS-influenced work within iSchools has been balkanized across a range of functional classifications and disciplinary identities. These differ from school to school, and are often seen as marginal or esoteric within the strongly technical focus of many iSchools. Calling this the “Social Studies of Information” acknowledges the shared object of study around which iSchools are built. Full program at www.socialstudiesof.info/workshop14.

Keywords: socio-technical, social studies of information, STS, SSI, policy, information history, philosophy of information, values, internet research, social informatics

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1 Defining the Social Studies of Information

The workshop aims to bring together a diverse range of scholars interested in exploring the potential of the “Social Studies of Information” (SSI) as a meta-identity for information research informed by the humanities and social sciences.

This is inspired by the broad field of STS (for either “Science and Technology Studies” or “Science, Technology, and Society”), which exerts an ever deeper influence on a variety of research traditions within iSchools. Many faculty are hired with degrees in STS, while others receive a grounding in its concepts and perspectives during their education in schools of information or communication. iSchool scholars are well represented at meetings of the Society for Social Studies of Science (4S).

STS-influenced work within iSchools has been balkanized across a range of functional classifications and disciplinary identities, sometimes seen as marginal or esoteric. These identities differ from school to school, and are often seen as marginal or esoteric within the strongly technical focus of many iSchools. This includes much work in areas such as information policy, information ethics or philosophy of information, values in design, software studies, socio-technical systems, information systems, Kittlerian media studies, information history, community informatics, internet studies, and social informatics. STS perspectives are increasingly prominent within established Library and Information Science areas such as archival studies and information organization. We are not seeking to replace the range of existing identities held by these scholars, but rather to create opportunities for them to discover common ground.

The workshop is an important step towards the growth of a new, broadly based, community of iSchool scholars that cuts across these specific identities, mirroring the success of the STS movement in providing a space in which specialists of different kinds can productively interact. SSI scholars share a commitment to using the methods of the humanities and social sciences to probe what are often thought of as exclusively technical domains. Calling this the “Social Studies of Information” acknowledges both the connection to STS and the shared object of study around which iSchools are built. SSI is indigenous to the iSchool world and covers the full range of information-related work, cultures, practices, and institutions rather than being focused exclusively on the use of information technology.

2 Workshop Format

The workshop program is continuing to evolve as of December 2013, the deadline for this repository, and so details on the exact sequence and format of activities will be left for our online program at www.socialstudiesof.info/workshop14.

We are structuring the workshop to maximize interactivity and involve as many people as possible. Most of the time will be spent either on roundtable discussions, interactive sessions allowing participants to introduce their own ideas and research to the community, or breakout groups gathered round tables to discuss particular topics of interest and report them back to the larger group. We will also be using social media and old fashioned email to keep the community together before, during, and after the workshop.

3 Program Participants

The following have confirmed their participation in the workshop program as speakers, breakout group moderators, or panelists.

- Kimberly Anderson, University of Wisconsin--Milwaukee
- Alistair Black, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
- Pnina Fichman, Indiana University, Bloomington
- Anne Gilliland, UCLA
- Thomas Haigh, University of Wisconsin--Milwaukee
- Maria Haigh, University of Wisconsin--Milwaukee
- Jenna Hartel, University of Toronto
- Caroline Haythornthwaite, University of British Columbia
- Lai Mai, University College, Dublin
- Annette Markham, Aarhus University
- Lilly Nguyen, University of California, Irvine
- Nadine Kozak, , University of Wisconsin--Milwaukee
- Anabel Quan-Haase, University of Western Ontario
- David Ribes, Georgetown University
- Howard Rosenbaum, Indiana University, Bloomington
- Kalpana Shankar, University College, Dublin
- Kristene Unsworth, Drexel University
- Howard White, Drexel University
- Kelvin White, University of Oklahoma