Prototyping a Cross-Planet iSchool Community

Ingrid Erickson[1] and Brian Beaton[2]

[1] Rutgers University

[2] University of Pittsburgh

Abstract

Over the past decade, the individuals and institutions that comprise the iSchool caucus have spent a fair amount of time attempting to understand their place within the larger academic landscape, which has often been plotted in disciplinary terms. We now stand at a different precipice in need of greater understanding and sensemaking: the globalization of the iSchool community. This interactive session is dedicated to probing, investigating and imagining our future as a global network of scholars. The spirit of the session will be playful and interactive, attempting to build on the existing diversity of the participants to question our assumptions, engage in dialogue about our commonalities and differences, and imagine new, cross-planet futures for the iSchool community.

Keywords: ischools, globalization, commonalities, differences, scale

Contact: ingrid.erickson@rutgers.edu, bbeaton@pitt.edu

1   Introduction

Over the past decade, the individuals and institutions that comprise the iSchool caucus have spent a fair amount of time attempting to understand their place within the larger academic landscape, which has often been plotted in disciplinary terms. Journal articles detail these acts of sensemaking, as do various workshop and conference sessions across the years (e.g., Cronin, 2005; King, 2006; Chen, 2008; Cox and Larsen, 2008; Saracevic, 2008; Marco and Javier, 2009; Cox, 2012; Lopatovska et al., 2012; Wiggins and Sawyer, 2012; Wu et al., 2012; Bidyarthi, 2013; Wedgeworth, 2013). These efforts have called into being an increasingly recognizable and coherent community that strives "to identify, clarify, and speak to the major issues, challenges, and driving questions at the nexus of information, technology, and society."[1]

We now stand at a different precipice in need of greater understanding and sensemaking: the globalization of the iSchool community. The current iSchool caucus, which continues to grow, spans places as far away from one another as Champaign-Urbana, Illinois in the United States; Adelaide, South Australia; and Kampala, Uganda. As noted at the most recent iConference (Bonnici et al. 2013), the globalization of the iSchool community is happening on top of older, unresolved debates about the very meaning of information and the role of information technologies in society. Our proposal takes as it starting point that the international expansion of iSchools represents a certain type of institutionalization, which presents a ready opportunity for critical reflection and inquiry. In addition, we see the introduction of new institutional partners and affiliated researchers as a fertile moment to explore new ways of researching, theorizing and understanding how people, information, and technology intermix -- an exploration that may also reveal lingering gaps and biases stemming from our community's primarily North American origins.

We propose an interactive session dedicated to probing, investigating and imagining our future as a global network of scholars. The spirit of the session will be playful and interactive, attempting to build on the existing diversity of the participants to question our assumptions, engage in dialogue about our commonalities and differences, and imagine new, cross-planet futures for the iSchool community.

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[1] http://ischools.org/about/history/organization/

2   Length

The session we envision will be 90 minutes and will unfold according to the following agenda:

[15 minutes] Introductions
[15 minutes] Rapid Fire Sticky Note Exercise
[10 minutes] Discussion
[10 minutes] Flash Ideation Session 1
[10 minutes] Flash Ideation Session 2
[15 minutes] Curation Session
[15 minutes] Closing Discussion and Dissemination Charge

3   Format

We will begin by introducing ourselves to one another following a simple template that both "breaks the ice" and imbues the session with a playful, prototyping spirit. We will follow with a rapid-fire "sticky note" session meant to elicit a diversity of ideas from the participants related to the globalization of our community. Specifically, participants will suggest globalization-related topics, themes, and questions of their choosing on a note, affix the notes to a wall (or tabletop) alongside all of the notes from others, and collectively begin classifying the notes according to commonalities. We are currently exploring how we might digitize this exercise with an online whiteboard tool like Padlet or Lino, which may increase the possibilities for spirited participation. Our desire for this exercise is that it has the potential to raise issues that might have been overlooked in the iSchool globalization discourse to date, and that clustering common themes will reveal conceptual hot spots and research opportunities that could fuel follow-on activities such as future publications or iConference panels and workshops.

This ideation/classification task will be followed by a brief discussion to reflect on the conceptual hot spots and their perceived meaning among the participants.

Following these warm-up exercises, the participants will break into small groups to engage in a second ideation task, this time prompted by the organizers to fill in pre-printed strips of paper with phrases such as "In 5 years, an iSchool will be a place _____" or "In the future, information will _____". Groups will rotate during Flash Ideation Session 2 to engage in the same task at a different table that has a set of different ideation prompts. During the curation session, individuals will curate and cluster the strips from all three tables to create presentable artifacts (i.e., affix a groups of strips together to fashion a statement or commentary of some kind). We will work with the local organizers to find an appropriate venue for presenting these creations for public view during the conference, such as during the poster session or in the room where coffee breaks will occur. We particularly value this opportunity to reflect our work back to the community because of the emergent and fertile nature the topic of globalization has within our community. We expect that some type of public viewing may act as type of gentle provocation to open up this area for further thought and discussion more broadly.

With regard to other outcomes, we plan to document the experience with photographs and will work with the webmaster at ischools.org to create a blog post or photo reel for the website. Additionally, depending on the insights gleaned from the experience, the two organizers may write a piece for JASIST or a similar journal that expands on the themes that emerge from the session on the globalization of the iSchool community.

4   Preferred number of participants

In the hopes of attracting a diverse and lively crowd to this event, we will not cap participation in any way.

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