The Faces of Information Research at SLIS
Exploring Information Research at SLIS

Sometimes it seems as if there are as many rankings as there are universities. In any case, the global dominance of US institutions is not in doubt. Remove both Oxford and Cambridge from consideration and the world’s top-10 (top-20, I am tempted to say) universities are all American. That is a remarkable statistic; another is Harvard’s endowment: roughly $34 billion—more than the annual higher education budget of many nations.

The U.S. tertiary education system is unlike any other in terms of scale, resources or academic values. In addition to the Ivy League, the country boasts dozens of public research universities on a par with the very best universities in other countries. And there’s the key word: research. Our great public and private universities are special because of their zealous commitment to research and scholarship. It’s not a question of teaching versus research; the two go hand in hand. The insights and discoveries arising from research keep us intellectually fresh, expose us to new theories and techniques, connect us more tightly to distributed networks of scholars and, ultimately, allow us to speak with earned authority in the classroom. Good scholarship demands critical thinking and analytic rigor, the very qualities we hope to find and nurture in our best students.

When it comes to rating the research productivity of schools of library and information science, SLIS, as I am sure you are well aware, continually ranks among the very best in not only the nation but also in the world (see our website for details). My colleagues are impressively productive and, more importantly, their work is widely and highly cited. Another indicator of quality is the inflow of research funds. In recent years we have secured millions of dollars from bodies such as the National Science Foundation, National Institutes of Health and the National Endowment for the Humanities. That is no mean achievement.

One of the pleasures of working in the school is witnessing the remarkable diversity of research that is undertaken by one’s colleagues, ranging from large-scale data mining and visualization through computer-mediated discourse analysis to folksonomies. Another is observing at first hand how faculty and students collaborate on projects and, increasingly, co-author papers arising from their joint research. In short, one learns so much simply by being part of a multi-disciplinary research culture, whether you’re a dean or a first-year graduate student. I trust you’ll understand why as you read through this issue of the magazine devoted to information research at SLIS.

Blaise Cronin
Dean and Rudy Professor of Information Science
Alumni News

Alumni Board Letter, Keith Kuhn

This issue marks my last as Alumni Board president. While I will certainly miss working with alumni in this official capacity, I am assured that the board presidency will be in very capable hands as fellow Buckeye (though we both remain Hoosiers at heart) Jerome Conley assumes the office of Board president at the Board’s spring meeting in Bloomington. Jerome is coordinating head of special libraries and assistant dean of University Libraries at Miami University of Ohio in Oxford, where he also has served as the mayor. Jerome’s connections to IU are deep, with both bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the Bloomington campus. You can read more about Jerome in the spring ’07 issue of the alumni newsletter, also available online at http://www.slis.indiana.edu/news/story.php?story_id=1489. Jerome already has an ambitious agenda for the board, including increased connections with minority alumni and support for minority students. Graduates of SLIS are fortunate to have a dedicated group of alumni like Jerome and all the other members of the Alumni Board who are committed to developing and maintaining relationships with our alumni. We are also fortunate to have full and ongoing support for alumni activities from the school, and it has been especially gratifying to me during my tenure as board president to see that commitment grow, particularly through the efforts of Dean Cronin and Sarah Burton, director of finance and administration.

While I’ll be stepping down as board president, I’ll still maintain a close connection to the school and to alumni as the SLIS representative on the Executive Committee for the Indiana University Foundation’s Matching the Promise campaign. This major endowment campaign for the Bloomington campus will allow the university to continue to build on former IU President Herman B Wells’ vision of outstanding performance in higher education through the continuing generosity of cherished alumni and friends of Indiana University. The generosity of SLIS alumni can clearly be seen in gifts to Matching the Promise through the end of 2007: SLIS is one of only three schools on the Bloomington campus to have already reached its campaign goal at this early stage of the campaign! Thanks to your ongoing support, we can fulfill President Wells’ vision as outlined above as well as the vision of the university’s current President, Michael E. McRobbie, to move forward together and redouble our efforts to ensure that Indiana University will be one of the greatest universities of the 21st century.

A Note of Thanks

The SLIS faculty and staff would like to express sincere gratitude to Keith (MLS ’76) for his dedication to the position of Alumni Board president during his tenure of more than four years. All the best to Keith and to Jerome Conley (MLS ’90), who begins his term as president this spring.

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Alumni Profile Q&A: Pat Court, Law Librarian

SLIS Alumni Board Member Pat Court, who earned a bachelor’s degree in French from IU in 1975 and a master’s of library science in 1977, works as an associate law librarian at Cornell University Law Library in Ithaca, New York. In addition to earning a J.D. from Hamline University in 1984, Pat worked in public and academic libraries before becoming a law librarian.

Tell us about your current position. What do you like about it?
In my position, I coordinate the day-to-day activities of the Law Library. A lot of our activities are carried out by teams of professionals and support staff. I lead the Instruction Team and the Technology Team and am also a member of the Research Team and the Faculty Services Team, which means in addition to administration, I am definitely a hands-on librarian, staffing the reference desk, serving as a library liaison to faculty, and teaching classes. The librarians at Cornell are greatly involved in the curriculum of the university, the law librarians even more so than others. Among seven of us with library science master’s and law degrees, we teach several Law School classes, and I am the coordinator of our instruction program. My personal specialties are: Administrative Law Research, U.S. Legal Research for LL.M. (Foreign) Law Students, Advanced Legal Research, and Lawyering.

What about your job do you find most challenging?
One of the most challenging aspects of my position is keeping up with all the new technologies—using them effectively in the classroom, to deliver services, and for management functions. When I was in library school, OCLC was new (the O still stood for Ohio!) and we learned how to make punch cards in the Automation course. With Web 2.0 today as a fact of life for students and faculty, the library must match their needs and expectations with the right level of accessibility and information sharing. My law library has been a leader in technology, serving as a mirror site for important European legal organizations, receiving a national marketing award, providing a repository for our faculty scholarship, and publishing InSITE, an annotated database and RSS feed of recommended legal websites, for more than 11 years.

During your career, you’ve made several transitions to different types of libraries and even returned to school to earn a law degree. Do you have advice for other alumni who might be thinking about making a career change?
Librarians have skills that are transferable to many careers—our understanding of technology, people skills, budgets and procurement, and the indefatigable ability that “if I don’t know the answer, I know how to look it up!” So anyone with a desire for a career change can have confidence in the IU education and their own personal experiences to move into something new. For me, flexibility in location was a major factor in my ability to move up to different positions. And, coming from a family of educators, I believe that continuing education, in job skills and avocational interests, is always a great investment.

Which SLIS course(s) have you found to be the most valuable in your professional life?
The course that I loved in graduate school and continue to find valuable was Academic Libraries, taught by David Kaser. I learned a lot by researching in-depth one particular academic library, its history, and current policies. It’s the kind of research that I still do today.

Was there anyone during your time at SLIS who acted as a mentor for you?
Marian Armstrong is my hero! I started library school by taking just one introductory course, taught by Marian. I had the time to pour into that class, reading the recommended readings, reviewing a lot of library literature. But it was more than being immersed in her class. I remember dinners at her house, caroling at the holidays, TA opportunities, and so much that she did for me personally that made me love what a librarian could be. (See more on Marian Armstrong, pg. 6 -Ed.)
Roberta Brooker Becomes Indiana State Librarian

(Over the summer, SLIS alumna Roberta “Bobbie” Brooker, MLS ‘88, became the 32nd state librarian of Indiana. The following press release excerpts have been reprinted with the permission of the Indiana State Library. –Ed.)

On June 1, 2007, the Indiana Library and Historical Board (ILHB) appointed Roberta L. Brooker, Interim Indiana State Librarian, to the position permanently. Brooker is the 32nd State Librarian since the agency was established in 1825. The State Librarian is responsible for overseeing the daily affairs of the State Library, which include developing and providing library services to Indiana citizens and the state government, for encouraging and supporting the development of the library profession, for strengthening the services of publicly and privately supported libraries in the state and for maintaining a complete collection of Indiana documents.

“Roberta Brooker has shown extraordinary leadership throughout her tenure at the State Library and we are confident in her ability to lead the State Library in years to come,” said Tom Hamm, ILHB President. “In addition to Ms. Brooker, the IHLB would like to thank the many exceptional candidates that applied for the State Librarian position.”

Brooker was appointed Interim Director of the Indiana State Library in December 2005. She also currently serves as Associate Director of Public Services, a position she’s held since February 2004. Under Brooker’s direction, the State Library has succeeded in making its collections more accessible to the public, while preserving them for future generations. The Library is also actively pursuing new opportunities and services that will benefit not only the State Library, but Indiana’s entire statewide library community.

Brooker has spent nearly two decades at the State Library, starting as a Reference Librarian in 1988. She went on to serve in several other capacities, including Coordinator of the Indiana State Data Center, and Consultant for the Library Development Office. Brooker was also responsible for incorporating Indiana’s public library districts into a Geographic Information System (GIS). Through her efforts, Indiana became one of the first states to use GIS to analyze data and geography simultaneously, which enabled individuals to compare and contrast library districts given multiple statistical variables.

“I would like to express my gratitude to the ILHB for this tremendous opportunity,” said Brooker. “I look forward to building upon the tremendous progress the State Library has made over the past 15 months.”

By Drew Griffis, Indiana State Library

See the Forest for the Trees

SLIS and the Indiana University Arboretum have been good neighbors since 1984, and several of its trees have connections with the school. This past summer Marian Armstrong, assistant professor emerita, stopped by to check on the pecan tree she donated to the arboretum. SLIS alums who remember Armstrong’s courses will not be surprised by her decision to contribute a tree that would enhance the diversity of species on campus—she wanted to help school children seeking greater variety in the leaf collections.

By Debora Shaw, Professor of Library and Information Science, Blmgtn.

Upcoming Alumni Events

- PLA - Minneapolis, Thursday, March 27
  Dakota Jazz Club
- MLA - Chicago, Sunday, May 18
- NASIG - Phoenix, Friday, June 6
  Pointe Hilton
- SLA - Seattle, Monday, June 16
  Sheraton Hotel
- ALA - Anaheim, Sunday, June 29
- AALL - Portland, Monday, July 14
  Hilton Portland
- SAA - San Francisco, Thursday, Aug. 28
  Hilton Hotel
- ILA - Chicago, Thursday, Sept. 25
  Navy Pier
- KLA - Louisville, Thursday, Oct. 2
- ASIST - Columbus, Monday, Oct. 27
- ILF - Indianapolis, Wednesday, Nov. 19
  Westin Hotel
Faculty News

Thomas Nisonger Retires

In the spring of 1988 Dr. Thomas E. Nisonger came from Texas to interview for a position as assistant professor in the School of Library and Information Science. A TV reporter outside the Union saw Nisonger as an expert and solicited his comments on the basketball coach because he was wearing “a Bobby Knight jacket.” The story has become legend for generations of SLIS students, who have come to respect Tom Nisonger’s expertise in collection development and library evaluation (if not basketball).

Tom Nisonger was born in Ohio and attended the College of Wooster, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts in political science and history. He completed his Master of Library Science degree at the University of Pittsburgh and continued heading east, to graduate from Columbia University with a doctorate in comparative politics. He worked as a librarian at the University of Manitoba and the University of Texas at Dallas before joining the IU faculty.

He is the author of three books, scores of articles, book chapters, conference papers, reviews, and bibliographies; in 2001 he received the K. G. Saur Award for the most outstanding article in College & Research Libraries. The arc of his publications traces developments in the field, beginning with the challenges of evaluating library collections, dealing with vendors and approval plans, observing the impact of electronic journals in the early 1990s, and outsourcing in the late ’90s. Tom’s longstanding interest in use of bibliometric data for evaluation is a continuing theme; his careful analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of citation data was displayed in his 2004 “citation autobiography,” which demonstrated the increasing importance of the World Wide Web in identifying citations to (and impact of) one’s publications.

From his earliest days at SLIS, his colleagues have relied on Tom Nisonger to make things work. He has readily and repeatedly taught foundational courses and both served on and chaired committees that have shaped the school’s programs and faculty. He has been director of the Master of Library Science program, faculty advisor of the award-winning Student Chapter of the American Library Association, and liaison to the Beta Phi Mu honor society.

New IUPUI Faculty Member Brings Insights from Anthropology

On January 1, 2008, Jingfeng Xia began his appointment as an assistant professor of library and information science at the School of Library and Information Science on the Indianapolis campus. In addition to a bachelor of arts degree in history and a master of arts degree in archeology from Peking University in Beijing, he has earned a doctorate in anthropology and master’s of library and information science from the University of Arizona. Upon completion of his MLS, he worked as a digital metadata projects librarian at the University of Florida in Gainesville, and he has most recently served as a reference/instruction librarian in the social sciences at the John Cotton Dana Library of Rutgers University in Newark, New Jersey.

Xia’s recent research has focused on self-archiving in institutional repositories. His work has examined the assessment, development, and use of these online sources of an institution’s scholarly work. Some of his earlier work studied the application of geographical information systems (GIS) to library environments to assist in patron location of materials and library space planning, and he knows of at least one library that has adopted his model. Xia will apply his professional and research experience when teaching Social Sciences Information, Reference, and Introduction to Research at SLIS.

By Marilyn Irwin, associate dean, Ind., and Rhonda Spencer, director of admissions and placement, Blmgtn.
Martha A. Harsanyi, MLS’76, SLIS’93, is a media reference librarian at IU Bloomington’s Herman B. Wells Library.

Judith Kleese Leavitt, MLS’77, is a market research manager for corporate development, for Rockwell Collins Inc. in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. She lives in Cedar Rapids.

Gary D. Wiggins, BA’66, MA’68, MLS’71, PhD’85, is an adjunct professor and director of the Chemical Informatics Program at the IU School of Informatics in Bloomington. He received the Special Libraries Association Hall of Fame Award in June. Only 124 people have received the award since the organization’s inception.

Michelle M. Bradley, MLS’92, Cert’06, is the assistant director of the Frankfort, Ind. Community Public Library. She lives in Lafayette.

Carrie E. Donovan, BA’98, MLS’99, is an instructional-services librarian in the information commons undergraduate library services department at the Herman B. Wells Library at IU Bloomington.

Terrance K. Manion, MLS’98, is the director of information technology and an instructor of law at Georgia State University College of Law. He lives in Decatur, Ga.

Rebecca J. Olson, MLS/MA’99, is a reference librarian at the law firm Alston & Bird in Charlotte, N.C. Her husband, Brad Warren, BA’96, MLS’99, is the grants and public-relations librarian at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Their son, Archer Lewis Olson Warren, was born on Oct. 25, 2006. The family lives in Charlotte.

Thomas E. Pinelli, PhD’90, of Yorktown, Va., was named a fellow of the Society for Technical Communication. He is a distance-learning officer at NASA’s Langley Research Center in Hampton, Va. In 2003, he received the NASA Exceptional Achievement Medal for the development of an award-winning series of science, technology, engineering and mathematics distance-learning programs. In 2002, he received an Emmy Award for his role as executive producer of the science-education television series, NASA Connect.

Guy R. Platter, BS’92, MLS’96, is the principal of Imagine MASTer Academy, a charter school in Fort Wayne, Ind.

Joni Kanzler Warner, MLS’95, is the director of research for development at St. Mary’s College in Notre Dame, Ind. She lives in South Bend.

Gwendolyn M. Buchanan, MLS’07, is a team leader librarian in adult services for Worthington Libraries in Columbus, Ohio. She was promoted after less than three months as a librarian. She lives in Columbus.

Delia Carruthers, MLS’00, works as a reference and instruction librarian at Westminster College in Salt Lake City. She lives in Sandy, Utah.
Christopher H. Ferguson, MIS’01, is the director of competitive intelligence for the United Services Automobile Association. He lives and works in San Antonio, Texas.

Lana J. Gottschalk, MLS’06, is a reference librarian at Taylor University in Upland, Indiana. She lives in Upland.

Catherine H. Hall, MLS’07, writes, “I left Bloomington after I finished my MLS this past May to start my new job as a children’s librarian at the Central Library of the Washington County Free Library System in Hagerstown, Md. This is my home county, and I am thrilled to be here. So far, so good. I enjoy my coworkers, and I’m learning new things everyday. I must admit, I did almost hyperventilate during my first pre-schooler story hour, but comfort should come with time. I’m making all my friends let me sing silly rhymes and read silly books to them. They are afraid I’m going to have too many cats and a maniacal twinkle in my eye before too long. Only time will tell!”

Michael J. Hohnecker, MIS’01, is a project manager in business applications for equipment manufacturer John Deere. He lives in San Pedro, Calif.

Damian S. Iseminger, MLS’04, is technical services librarian for the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston. He lives in Roslindale, Mass.

Marianne H. Kruppa, BA’00, MLS/ MIS’03, is the Web developer librarian of St. Joseph County Public Library in South Bend, Ind. She lives in South Bend.

Nikki A. Krysak, MLS’04, works as a reference and instruction librarian at Carnegie Mellon University — Qatar.

Ilias Kyriazis, MLS’06, works in the music library of the Athens Concert Hall in Athens, Greece. He lives in Athens.

Ashley Large, BA’03, MLS’06, of Fort Collins, Colo., is an agricultural archivist at Colorado State University.

Traci S. Peter, MLS’06, is a collection-development librarian at Brenau University in Gainesville, Ga. She lives in Snellville, Ga.

Rachel C. Radom, BA’02, MLS/ MIS’06, is an instructional services librarian at the University of North Carolina, Wilmington. She lives in Wilmington.

Meredith K. Saba, MLS’07, is a biological and agricultural sciences librarian at the University of California, Davis.

Amanda R. Smith, BGS’01, MLS’06, is adult reference librarian at the Broward County (Fla.) Public Library. She lives in Fort Lauderdale.

The editors gratefully acknowledge the assistance of the Indiana University Alumni Association in compiling the SLIS alumni class notes. To submit information, write to the Alumni Association at 1000 E. 17th St., Bloomington, IN 47408.

Alumni News

We want to hear from you! It’s a great way to keep in touch with your fellow alumni and share your success stories with current (and prospective) SLIS students. Visit http://www.slis.indiana.edu/alumni/newsform.php.

In Memoriam:

George John Poulos

George John Poulas died December 31, 2007, in Bloomington, Indiana. He received an M.A. in Library Science from Indiana University in 1967 and a B.A. with honors in Psychology at I.U. in 1959. George was born June 7, 1933, in New Castle, Indiana, and moved with his parents to Kokomo as a child. He served in the U.S. Army from 1953 to 1955. He worked for several years as science librarian at Bowling Green State University.

SLIS alumnus Charles Davis (Ph.D. 1969) met with him in recent years and wrote, “He thought the world of SLIS. … My earliest recollection of George is that he did research with the famous B.F. Skinner while I was still working as a chemist. I learned just six months ago that he spoke only Greek until he was five. His parents were immigrants. I remember him for his friendship and sense of humor.”
Information Research at SLIS

Introduction by Debora Shaw
Interviews and Summaries by Julie Harpring
SLIS’s high rankings in research productivity and impact reflect the contributions of many faculty members. In the fall issue of SLIS Network we considered the school’s contributions to social informatics. Now we turn to information research that focuses on the general properties of information and collections.

Faculty leadership in library and information science research enriches classroom experiences because students are introduced to contemporary practice within a theoretical context that enhances understanding and provides support for the next stages of their professional careers. Faculty involvement in research also helps to connect the school with alumni; SLIS graduates’ encounters with real-world challenges have prompted discussions and even investigations that suggest new research paths and extend our understanding. How does the research being conducted currently by SLIS faculty members affect the everyday work of practitioners and the greater public?

SLIS faculty contribute to information research in several areas: the philosophy of information, complex systems, scientometrics, informetrics, scholarly communication, citation analysis, serials and journal ranking, discourse analysis, quantitative methods, evaluation and outcomes assessment, teaching and learning, and information seeking behavior. The following vignettes illustrate our school’s contributions to information research.
Philosophy of Information

MAJOR THEMES
How do we define “information” and related terms, and why do we need to define them? The way we conceive of “information” shapes the discourse of academic research as well as our social conversations about libraries, journalism, entertainment, business, and other realms of public and personal life.

EXAMPLE OF FACULTY RESEARCH
Faculty member Elin Jacob and doctoral student Aaron Loehrlein conduct an extensive literature review and describe the various ways that practitioners and academics define “findability” and “information architecture” in a recent paper submitted to the Annual Review of Information Science and Technology.

In addition to this research, Jacob is particularly interested in issues of organization and representation and has recently worked in the areas of metadata and faceted classification structures.

Complex Systems

MAJOR THEMES
How do we create models or simulations of the complex systems that occur in nature and society so we can study them more closely? How else can we represent or explain complex systems effectively? SLIS faculty members are researching ways to help the general public, scientists, and businesses gain a greater understanding of the inner workings of complex systems through new types of representation.

EXAMPLE OF FACULTY RESEARCH

“Complex systems are inside and around us,” Börner says. “We need tools to study these systems, to understand and utilize/sustain them. Visualizations help to communicate and make sense of complex structures and dynamics.”

The taxonomy visualization explained in Börner’s article, which displays the United States Patent and Trademark Office patent classification scheme, is used to illustrate how the taxonomy visualization and validation tool created by her and her colleagues works. The patent visualization is one of 34 maps that have been on display in Börner’s “Places & Spaces: Mapping Science” exhibit, which has been housed at the New York Public Library and, most recently, the American Museum of Science and Energy in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. Other maps in the exhibit display a wide variety of information visualizations on topics ranging from activity in Wikipedia to DNA development, providing powerful new ways to think about potentially overwhelming concepts.

More information about the exhibit can be found at http://scimaps.org, and summaries of more recent work of Börner and her team is available at http://ella.slis.indiana.edu/~katy/gallery/07-openhouse/.

Scholarly Communication

MAJOR THEMES
How do the economics and copyright practices of scholarly publishing affect the dissemination of new and important research to the academic community and society at large?

EXAMPLES OF FACULTY RESEARCH

(The following piece is Dean Blaise Cronin’s Introduction to Volume 42 of the Annual Review of Information Science and Technology – Ed.) It is almost thirty years since Latour and Woolgar provocatively described the scientifically complex activities performed at the Salk Laboratory as “the organization of persuasion through literary inscription.” Almost overnight, academic writing ceased to be a straightforward, after-the-fact activity; it had been, to use the vogue term, “problematized”. To understand science and scientists, one needs to understand the material and discursive practices of those doing and reporting the science. And these days reporting is more often than not a collective activity. In almost every field of scientific endeavor, co-authorship is commonplace. “The author is dead, long live the contributor!” has become the fashionable cry. Sometimes the numbers involved are modest, sometimes massive. As a result, authorship, too, has been problematized. Who precisely is the author, and what exactly does authorship entail when literally hundreds of names appear on the byline? The issues (e.g., trust, oversight, ownership) are many and varied. One thing is clear: what holds for writing holds for authorship. As Biagioli observes: “scientific authorship, whatever shapes it might take in the future, will remain tied to specific disciplinary ecologies.” There are at least as many kinds of writing and as many conceptions of authorship as there are disciplinary cultures and sub-cultures.

Informetrics/Citation Analysis

MAJOR THEMES
What conclusions can we draw from studying citations—how often particular research is cited as well as the ways in which people find research to cite? How does the availability of research sources in particular media affect the amount of times they are cited?
EXEMPLARY OF FACULTY RESEARCH

Thomas Nisonger: Digital Resource Availability

In an effort to check the pulse of digital library collection development, Thomas Nisonger is working to estimate the percentage of heavily cited research documents that are available, preferably in full-text, to on-campus patrons through the Indiana University Libraries website.

This type of availability study dates back to the 1930s, Nisonger says, but very few studies, even recent ones, focus on electronic collections.

So far, Nisonger has found that he could access about 65 percent of his sample of 500 predetermined full-text items from 50 different subject areas. This result compares favorably to past availability studies of physical collections that Nisonger has reviewed, where average patrons found resources about 61 percent of the time.

“This is good news for students and citizens of Indiana who come to use the library,” Nisonger says. Through further analysis, he hopes to find out more about how attributes such as the subject area or language of particular items may impact their electronic availability, as well as how readily available unfound resources from the sample are through public internet searches.

Debora Shaw and Pnina Shachaf: Do Reference Librarians in the Virtual Environment Use a Core Collection?

Faculty members Debora “Ralf” Shaw and Pnina Shachaf recently combined their research expertise in bibliometrics and virtual reference, respectively, to investigate the types of sources that reference librarians use when communicating with patrons online.

They studied the logs of two groups of librarians in their research—Wells Library reference librarians at Indiana University, and reference librarians from Question Point, an electronic reference service run by the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC)—from 2006.

“Library web pages and the local catalogs were by far the most popular resources used by librarians to look up information when they were answering the questions of users,” Shachaf says.

There were also some surprises on the top-20 lists of most-used sources.

“What we found interesting is that some of the sources we wouldn’t expect to be used as heavily were really very high on the list, and Wikipedia is a good example of that,” Shachaf continues. “Even at Indiana University, Wikipedia was number 10.”

Overall, Shaw and Shachaf found that librarians relied heavily on a few resources for most of their reference sessions, using two or three sources as much as 80 percent of the time. This may bode well for reference librarians who are new to virtual reference and may be overwhelmed by the amount of sources to choose from, Shaw says.

“Obviously there are lots of questions that can’t be answered by the top 20, but the list gives you a way to focus, and I think it makes virtual reference much less scary because it is predictable. There is a core collection, and when you’re first faced with being on the reference desk, you can feel confident and capable in your knowledge of that number of sources.”

Complex Systems Research In-Depth

Hamid Ekbia: Artificial Intelligence and the Human Mind


The human mind is a complex phenomenon in many ways. It involves our brains (with almost a hundred billion neurons and a hundred trillion synaptic connections) and our bodies (with hundreds of joints, muscles, and functions), but it also incorporates perceptions, emotions, and memories, as well as numerous interactions with the environment. In short, it is a multifaceted and multilevel phenomenon that should be studied from different perspectives. In my book, I introduce the major ideas in Artificial Intelligence (AI) that researchers have adopted in the study of the human mind—for instance, connectionist, symbolic, robotic, case-based, analogical, and so on. One set of ideas draws on complex systems theory, where researchers try to apply a common language to describe the brain, the body, and the environment.

This is a promising line of research with interesting findings. However, in my view, the human mind is a special kind of complex system that does not lend itself to quantitative methods—you can’t use numbers in talking about human intelligence, experience, emotions, and skills. In my book, I discuss these specific features of the human mind, the limitations of some of the views and theories in AI, and what we have learned from more than fifty years of research in this area. There is a lot of hype in AI in the media, but there is also interesting research done in this area. I try to tease these apart and separate the wheat from the chaff, so to speak, in some of the knowledge claims made by the AI community about the human mind.

I believe that we have learned a great deal from AI not only about computers and their capabilities, but also, and more importantly, about ourselves and our minds. For instance, we have learned that human cognition is much more concrete and contextual than we previously thought, that playing chess or solving mathematical problems are not necessarily the pinnacles of human intelligence, that there is no deep chasm separating the mind and the body, that human creativity is much more pervasive and mundane than we tend to believe, and so on. Many of these lessons were learned because of the unique methods that AI applies in building systems. We could have not arrived at these in the way that we have if it were not for AI research. This is what attracts me to AI, and what makes AI critics fail to understand.

By Hamid Ekbia

Kiduk Yang: Finding Web Opinions About Blog Passages


(The following is excerpted from a research summary by Yang. –Ed.)

In this paper, Kiduk Yang and his student co-authors describe a fusion approach to finding opinion about a given target in blog postings. They tackled the opinion blog retrieval task by breaking it down to two sequential subtasks: on-topic retrieval followed by opinion classification. Their opinion retrieval approach was to first apply traditional
information retrieval methods to retrieve on-topic blogs, and then boost the ranks of opinionated blogs using combined opinion scores generated by four opinion assessment methods.

The Web Information Discovery Integrated Tool (WIDIT) lab, where Yang and his students worked on the project, conducts collaborative research projects that study integrated approaches to information retrieval and knowledge discovery with an aim to combine the capabilities of the human and the machine as well as to integrate multiple methods and sources of evidence.

The WIDIT lab now houses a range of collaborative projects that apply an integrative approach (fusion) to classification, information retrieval, and knowledge discovery. As lab director, Yang has been instrumental in bringing together and coordinating the necessary skills mix to ensure the success of projects that involve both academic research and also practical system development. As a consequence, the WIDIT lab has become a fertile ground for multi-disciplinary, multi-institutional research and development projects.

**Discourse Analysis**

**MAJOR THEMES**

How can an analysis of written, spoken, or signed language inform our ideas about people’s communication goals?

**EXAMPLES OF FACULTY RESEARCH**

**Susan Herring: Talking Through TV**


On an Italian music video channel that broadcasts text-messaged comments from viewers, Susan Herring and her colleagues have found that a significant amount of viewers who submit text messages are attempting to communicate with other audience members—and some of them are actually succeeding. “Users often adapt technology to their needs, regardless of how the creators of the technology intended it to be used,” Herring says.

Despite the “noise” from a deluge of unrelated text messages being posted, the possibility that a sent message might be filtered out by editors, and the chance that the intended recipient of a message might not be watching, Herring says that some texters seem to enjoy the challenge of using the medium to converse.

**Evaluation and Outcomes Assessment**

**MAJOR THEMES**

What types of evaluation methods will lead us to the creation of improved practices? How will we know that our practices are improving?

**EXAMPLES OF FACULTY RESEARCH**

**Rachel Applegate: Planning Effective Library Spaces**


“[The chapter] shows how a multi-method evaluation of library users and their needs informed the design of a ‘commons’ area in an academic library,” Applegate says.

Regarding the aspects of evaluation and outcomes assessment that spark her interest, Applegate remarks: “Evaluation’ can be considered the gathering and use of empirical data to support managerial decision-making. As a practitioner, both within my library and across my campus, we used data to identify trends, demonstrate accomplishments, and point the way to improvements or prioritizing effort. I am enthusiastic about encouraging librarians to join a ‘culture of assessment’ where we try to evaluate how we are doing and what we have accomplished, both internally and in the lives of our users.”
education makes a difference in how people use the Internet.

Digital literacy skills count a lot; the longer you have used the Internet, the more time you spend online and the more information activities you engage in. Everyone uses the Internet to communicate. People with less education and income use the Internet more for entertainment. Among people who use traditional media like television and newspapers for their political information and news, the Internet has increasingly been substituted for newspapers but not for television.

“In the case of the Iraq War, many people, especially dissenter/s, went to the Internet because they were not satisfied with the information they got from traditional media or the government,”Robbin says.

“Dissenter/s were significantly different in how they used email and how they gathered information about the Iraq war. They also engaged in more political activities such as looking for information about a rally or sending an e-mail to an elected official.”

Katherine Schilling: Information Needs for Younger Breast Cancer Survivors

Katherine Schilling is currently examining the information needs of breast cancer survivors under the age of 45 as part of a larger American Cancer Society study investigating quality of life and recurrence of the disease.

“This population has different issues and information needs than older breast cancer survivors,” Schilling says. “We need to develop efficacious resources for these women—who will be dealing with the long-term effects of chemotherapy and other issues related to breast cancer and treatment for the rest of their lives—because there isn’t much out there right now.”

The study concerns a highly focused population, Schilling says, but it points to the significance of health information seeking throughout society. “Health information is such a huge issue, and health science librarians and public and school librarians need to work more closely to make sure that everyone is aware of the resources we have.”

Ron Day: The Importance of Defining “Information”


Ludwig Wittgenstein thought that one of the most important jobs for philosophy was to help clarify linguistic meaning. The question of “what is information?” seems to me to be an exemplary instance of a question in need of such clarification, for confusions about the word “information” have led to some of the most absurd, but intractable, problems in the theory and even the practices of Library and Information Science and have led, repeatedly since the Second World War, to claims that “information” is the cornerstone for all science and human life. In reality, the term “information” means many things. In the same way as we wouldn’t want our heart surgeon in the operating room to interpret the drawn symbol of our heart for the poetic meaning of love, we also need to be vigilant about the tendency to collapse all the meanings and ways of speaking about information into one unifying concept or determining to be information one object or event which we then might suppose could be managed or represented in a single or common manner.

Using a useful distinction of the philosopher Rom Harré (after that of John Locke), we may recognize that information is not a “real essence,” but rather that it is a “nominal essence.” What does this mean? If we take iron, for example, this “essence” or being has the same properties and chemical relations whether we call it “iron” or we call it by the French word “fer” or we use some other term (say, the chemical symbol for iron, “Fe”). However, information isn’t the same type of essence or being. Rather, it is a word whose meaning is understood only by the way and context in which it is used (it is a “nominal” essence—that is, its essence is determined by the act of naming). This means that what information is is whatever we, as speakers of a language, decide to call a thing to be “information.” For example, documents may be taken as information, directions to the gas station may be taken to be information, and the early natural philosopher Francis Bacon even spoke of nature as informing us. Each of these ways of using the term “information” is, what Wittgenstein, termed “grammars”—or regularities—for the use of the term, and these are largely learned by learning a language (say, English, the language of librarianship or information professionalism, etc). Historically, there was a discipline called documentation that was well established before the discipline of information science began after the Second World War. Arguably, “documentation” provided a clearer, less metaphysical way of describing a large majority of the actual practices and materials in librarianship and allied professions than “information science.”

It needs to be mentioned, as well, that there seems to be an historical tendency in the 20th and into the 21st centuries to think of information as if it were an empirical thing (one with intrinsic value, as well as the quality of being countable) and/or as if it were a referent somehow connoting factuality. However, earlier uses of the word in English used it as much to designate affects (e.g., Bacon, above) and possible knowledge, as well as to characterize statements of fact. In other words, there seems to be an increasing reification of the term “information” in English and Western European language use (and with this, an increasing confusion of the term as referring to a real essence). This is greatly harmful, not the least because it adds to the mystification and improper analysis of the social values and uses of information technologies and to the collapse of distinctions between various types of information. It also sometimes leads in Information Science to the mistaken application of empirical methods of research in studies of “information use.”

In short, instead of beginning with the question, “what is information?” we might be better off starting with asking, “how is the word ‘information’ being used in a given situation?”

By Ron Day
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Blaise Cronin
Dean and Rudy Professor of Information Science

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Please make a contribution:
- If you had to pick one example, what did you learn at SLIS/GLS that has been most useful in your career?
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