The Slippery Slope of MIS Academia: A Discussion of the Strive for Relevance in our Discipline

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The MIS discipline faces the need to constantly re-establish its relevance to both academics and practitioners. Evolving technology forces our discipline to change at a rate far exceeding other business disciplines. In the workplace, rapidly evolving IT management issues and technologies lead corporations to manage technical employees differently. In academia, however, MIS faculty exist under the same expectations as other business faculty. Our current model as an academic discipline has many issues, including:

- Effective teaching of IS requires considerable time to understand and incorporate evolving business and technological changes into IS courses.
- The time required to learn new software packages, programming languages, and infrastructure technologies is typically an unrecognized additional burden. Reward and incentive systems for IS faculty do not adequately recognize or give credit for keeping up with change: some might even argue there is a disincentive to stay current due to the time it takes away from other activities.
- The research we do publish (and spend much of our effort doing) is often criticized for its lack of direction and relevance to MIS practice.
- MIS academicians are less able to explore important practitioner problems, technical developments, and tools (i.e., offshoring, XML, Web services).
- Can multiple research models address different facets of MIS (as a technology, in the organization) without destroying its coherence as an identifiable academic field?

The result is that MIS research and teaching lag practice. One might argue that as the field matures, we are falling further behind. “More established” faculty are less likely to embrace the effort of learning new technologies and techniques and often lean on younger faculty to teach current technologies and emerging issues. However, new faculty arrive from doctoral programs where they are taught and mentored by “more established” faculty. Furthermore, doctoral programs typically focus on academic research—not on learning the latest technological developments, tools and pervasive practitioner problems.

We assert that the MIS discipline is on a slippery slope. This “slippery slope” threatens our existence as a business discipline. We argue that the discipline's current model encourages irrelevance, both in our research and in our teaching. For the MIS discipline, we must find a new model that rewards relevant contributions to practice and to our students.

The purpose of this panel is to begin a discussion of the “Slippery Slope of MIS Academia”. Does it exist? What are the important issues? How can we change to address the issues? Should we?

The panel consists of representation from three types of academic institutions; more research focused, more teaching focused, and an intermediate focus. Panelists will respond to a series of questions about the “Slippery Slope” from their institutions’ perspective. We hope that the panel session evolves into an open discussion and encourage additional questions and comments from attendees. Panel members include:

- Dr. Dennis Galletta – Professor, University of Pittsburgh
- Dr. Fred Niederman - Shaughnessy Endowed Professor of MIS, Saint Louis University
- Dr. Al Harris - Editor-in-Chief, Journal of Information Systems Education, Appalachian State University