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RECALLING OUR LEGACY AND HELPING US INFORM OUR FUTURE: DOCUMENTING THE HISTORY OF IS EDUCATION

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Abstract:

This document is to discuss the new History of IS section within *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, and discuss the need and opportunities for publishing papers covering the history of IS education in this section.

Keywords: IS History, Education, Scientometrics

I. INTRODUCTION

This third decade of the 21st century has been witness to many changes not just in the IS field but in the academy overall. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic led to a mass shift from face-to-face education to online education, even if only temporary. What is not temporary is the millions of people who have died from COVID-19. Such relatively sudden and tragic events can cause us to spend time thinking about our own mortality and the mortality of our own species.

While COVID was certainly top of mind for many since 2020 if it is still not, at the same time the relative age of our field means that we are starting to lose some of our pioneers. Most notably, in May 2022 Dr. Gordon Davis of the University of Minnesota passed away, and with him certainly a wealth of knowledge and information (Janz & Wetherbe 2022). While he is certainly not the first pioneer of the field to pass on (this author particularly misses Dr. Paul Gray), his death does cause us to consider what we can do to capture the contributions made and information held as we pass the torch of the field into younger hands.

If we think about the educational methods Dr. Davis may have used in teaching those first classes and throughout his career, they may look like a history film to today's doctoral students:

In 1967, it was likely that Dr. Davis would have been teaching computing with very limited opportunities for the students or even him to touch an actual computer. He may have been working with a language like COBOL or FORTRAN (1967 was even pre-C) by writing instruction statements on a blackboard. Students would then have to key in their programs by taking the instructions they had written in notebooks (three ring binders with paper, not 3-pound computers) or tablets (100 sheets of paper bound at the top and pages removable once but not able to be put back, not something made by Apple or Google to watch movies on an airplane) to a keypunch machine to "type" their instructions onto a series of punch cards which would then be fed into a card reader to go into a computer that might be as large as a classroom. How frustrating it must have been to have a simple spelling error cause your entire program not to run, and trying to find

that error somewhere in the stack of punch cards you created. And please don't drop your box of cards!

By the early 1980s Dr. Davis might have been teaching some classes in a microcomputer lab which had individual computers that would fit on a desktop. Incredibly slow by today's standards but just as available as a desktop, these would have been invaluable resources to students as they would see the results of their work almost immediately. Of course, these labs were both very expensive and highly in demand, so getting them for classroom scheduling and for students to do their homework would have been challenging! For bigger jobs they may still have needed to use the larger computers, but they may have had access to a terminal interface where the students could log on to this computer somewhere else on campus and had access to it via a keyboard that sent commands to that computer and a dumb terminal which displayed the commands they typed and the results from the computer. No more punch cards necessary!

In the early 1990s, Dr. Davis may well have been making presentations in PowerPoint. Likely though at first he was printing the slides onto clear acetate pieces that he would then put on an overhead projector. It was quite the upgrade from writing notes as he went on the rolls transparencies that would have been connected like a scroll to the projector, but still required the notes to be carried to class in a file folder, kept in perfect order like those punch cards from the 1960s.

If he were lucky enough to have a "tech classroom" then by the late 1990s Dr. Davis would have been able to save his presentation to a 3.5" diskette and bring them into the classroom where he would load them onto a computer permanently mounted in the room. It would then be connected to a projector where it would be displayed on a screen in the front of the room like his printed overhead slides, but now it acted as a second monitor, displayed not to him but to the entire class. Not only was this useful for the PowerPoint presentation, but he could also show in real time how the code he was writing would execute in the IDE, or how the logical design of the database would be translated into the physical design that was understood by the computer. He might even have his own website for the class where students could download his slides and his code and anything else digital that he wanted them to have so that they could practice and be proficient.

Fast forward into the early 2000s and the diskette would no longer be necessary as he would be bringing his laptop to class and plugging it into the projector in the classroom. While many classrooms would still have chalkboards and maybe a mobile projector screen, he probably didn't have to do too much negotiation with the scheduling czar at the university to be sure he was in a classroom that would support the technology. Into the mid and late 2000s students might be bringing their own laptops into the classroom to follow along, although by then they may well also be distracted by Facebook or online poker or fantasy football or maybe even watching YouTube videos with the sound off. Coding standalone systems was no longer in vogue as the Internet had become a staple of business computing as well as for social media, so students needed to learn these methodologies as well.

Also by the mid-to-late 2000s no longer would the education include network technologies but it may be delivered online as well. Its acceptance was slow when compared to what might have been called "real" face-to-face education by some traditionalists. However when the COVID-19 pandemic would come to our classrooms, education by and large switched to a virtual environment, whether we wanted it or not (Prinsloo & Singh 2021, Toney, Light, & Urbaczewski 2021).

The assessment methodologies used by Dr Davis were likely to have changed many times over the years, especially as the technology changed as well. Multiple choice exams may have gone from circling the correct answer to filling in a scantron sheet to completing a quiz on a student information system like Canvas or Blackboard or Moodle. Students may have gone from exams to portfolios of work to a Github site showing their project material.

While all of these are related to technological advances that happen to be in an educational setting, there have been advances in educational techniques as well. Members of SIGED are likely to be the most involved and interested in those techniques.

II. CAIS AND HISTORY OF IS DEPARTMENT

In July 2022 *Communications of the Association for Information Systems* Editor in Chief decided to create the History of Information Systems department (Urbaczewski 2022). Subsequently, he asked me to be the Associate Editor for the department, and I agreed. The purpose of this department is to capture the history of our field. While of course there will be biographies and oral histories of and from the giants of our field, neither EIC Niederman nor I define the term “giant” as strictly through metrics like FT-50 publications authored or doctoral students produced. Just as important is for us to record the histories of other area which make our discipline a field of study.

III. FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

Articles to be published in the History of IS department will cover the traditions and histories of IS worldwide. If we can capture a sense of the similarities and differences, we can have an appreciation for the education of students in our discipline and a sense for how it has unfolded in a way that is much too big for any of us to understand individually. The papers we would like to see should be of general interest to any of the readers of *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*. The department welcomes both formal histories and informal histories from those who would have been in the leadership in education research and implementation in the IS field. We should remember that the doctoral students of today who read these papers will in the thirty to forty years be the ones recounting their own histories for us.

In education, there are many opportunities to document the pioneers of the field and those innovations of those who came before. I encourage potential authors to read the papers in the History of IS department in *Communications of the Association for Information Systems* (CAIS Vol 51, 2022) to see the types of manuscripts which we are interested in publishing and how they are formatted.

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