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The Credibility Crisis in IS

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Panel: The Credibility Crisis in IS

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ABSTRACT

A credibility crisis continues to plague the Information Systems (IS) discipline. For almost a decade, IS has struggled to obtain and maintain its stature as a highly-respected academic discipline. The recent demise of several IS programs around the world highlights the credibility crisis, as departments have been subsumed into other business disciplines, or worse yet, abandoned entirely. In a recent MIS Quarterly article, Gill and Bhattacharjee (2009) highlight some of the challenges facing IS: low student enrollments, research that is rarely discussed in our classrooms, and research that fails to make an impact in practice. While useful tactics in terms of research (Dennis et al., 2008), student recruitment (Koch and Kayworth, 2009; Looney and Akbulut, 2007), and pedagogy (Firth et al., 2008) have surfaced in the literature, a holistic strategy for addressing the credibility crisis has yet to emerge. This panel brings together a group of IS professors to offer their perspectives on a series of propositions about the *Credibility Crisis in the IS Discipline*, and engage in an animated debate with each other and the audience on their positions.

Keywords: Education, Future of IS, Enrollment

TOPIC AND TARGET AUDIENCE

IS programs around the globe are under attack, right at the time when the employment outlook for students with IS degrees is one of the bright spots in an otherwise gloomy and overcast economy (Koch et al., 2009). A 2010 report indicates that students in the IS field can look forward to careers ranked in the top 10 best careers for 2010 (Strieber, 2010). The report ranked software engineers at the second best job and computer systems analyst at the third best job in terms of availability, flexibility, and pay. While the job outlook is positive for IS graduates, IS academic units are facing a number of challenges including the rising cost of education, budget cuts, and enrollment declines. In extreme cases, IS programs are disappearing. This panel will be of interest to everyone at AMCIS, as everyone is impacted by the credibility crisis facing IS in one way or another, be it a Ph.D. student going through their program, a newly minted Ph.D. looking for their first position, a 3-5 year IS professor looking towards tenure, or a seasoned and tenured IS professor. In this highly interactive and controversial session, panelists will share their perspectives on a range of propositions regarding “the solution” to the *Credibility Crisis in the IS Discipline*.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this panel is to provide “the solution” to the *Credibility Crisis in the IS Discipline*, which we broadly define as the struggle within the IS field to obtain and maintain its stature as a highly-respected academic discipline. The crisis is reflected by the recent struggles of several IS programs around the world. With so many vested constituents shaping the IS field, the IS community needs some help to determine where to focus its efforts in order to become a key academic discipline in universities. Should resources be focused in the *Introductory to IS* class, the undergraduate program as a whole, the master’s program, the Ph.D. program, or faculty research? What will shape our credibility, and who do we need to shape it

for? IS champions from a variety of institutions will share their perspectives, best practices, and suggestions for building a vibrant IS discipline.

FORMAT

The panel will follow the organizing framework and allow time for audience discussion.

Overview: Hope Koch will introduce the panel. Hope will explain the current challenges facing IS programs in business schools and the panel format. (5 minutes)

Debate: Drawing from their diverse experiences, panelists will share their perspective on one of the following propositions on the future of IS education in universities. Other panelists will offer alternative perspectives or additional thoughts on each panelist's statements. We will weave audience participation through the debate as the audience votes to determine the winning proposition. (50 minutes)

The initial list of propositions includes:

1. We can grow our credibility as a discipline by focusing on:
 - a. Research
 - b. Teaching
 - c. Practice
2. The credibility of the IS discipline lies in aligning our incentives properly with our mission. Promotion and tenure should be based on:
 - a. Quality and depth of research
 - b. Quality and depth of teaching
 - c. Quality and depth of the IS programs at a school
3. The credibility of the IS discipline lies in serving our primary constituents, who are:
 - a. Students
 - b. Colleagues
 - c. Practitioners
 - d. Deans
4. The credibility of the IS discipline lies in:
 - a. How we are viewed by our business school colleagues in other disciplines
 - b. The quality of journals we establish and maintain within the IS discipline
 - c. How well we recruit students to our IS programs.
 - d. How well we place our students (undergrad, masters, and Ph.D.)
5. The credibility of the IS discipline lies in a renewed and invigorated focus on:
 - a. The undergraduate introductory IS class
 - b. The master's of science in information systems program
 - c. The Ph.D. program.
6. The credibility of the IS discipline lies in the design and delivery of excellent courses and curriculum, whatever level they be at (undergrad, master or Ph.D.). These curriculum and courses should be biased toward:
 - a. Technical skills to allow graduates to show a deep understand of technology
 - b. Soft skills to allow graduates to communicate effectively with other constituents
 - c. Business skills to reflect the fact that IS is merely part of the broader business strategy

Audience Participation: The audience will share their own opinions on the future of the IS discipline (15 minutes)

Lessons Learned: Clay Looney will summarize the key lessons learned from the panel (3 minutes)

PANELIST BIOGRAPHIES

David Firth is an associate professor and the Warren and Betsy Wilcox Faculty Fellow in the School of Business Administration at the University of Montana (UM). In 2004 and 2007, Dr. Firth was selected as the outstanding IS faculty member by UM's students. His research interests focus on understanding innovation in organizations, in particular on

understanding organizational memory systems. His work has appeared in *Journal of Information Technology Theory and Application*, *Interdisciplinary Journal of Information Knowledge and Management*, *Communications of the AIS* and *Business Horizons* as well as several proceedings of the *International Conference on Information Systems*.

John Leslie King is Vice Provost for Academic Information and W.W. Bishop Professor and former dean in the School of Information at the University of Michigan. He has published more than 175 academic and professional books and research papers on information technology and changes in organizations, institutions, and markets. Along the way, he has been Marvin Bower Fellow at the Harvard Business School, distinguished visiting professor at the National University of Singapore, and Fulbright Distinguished Chair in American Studies at the University of Frankfurt. From 1992-1998 he was Editor-in-Chief of *Information Systems Research*.

Paul Pavlou is an Associate Professor of Management Information Systems, Marketing, and Management and a Stauffer Senior Research Fellow at the Fox School of Business and Management at Temple University. Paul's research, which has been cited over 1,000 times, has appeared in *MIS Quarterly*, *Information Systems Research (ISR)*, and *Decision Sciences*, among others. Paul has won several Best Paper awards for his research, including the ISR Best Paper award in 2007.

Eileen M. Trauth is Professor of Information Sciences and Technology at The Pennsylvania State University. Her research on human capital in the information economy includes investigations of skills and knowledge of IT professionals, economic development, gender diversity and globalization. She has lectured and conducted research in several European countries, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. She has published over 120 scholarly articles and 9 books with grants from the National Science Foundation, Science Foundation Ireland and the Australian Research Council. She is recipient of a Fulbright Scholar Award (Ireland 1989) and the Fulbright Distinguished Chair in Gender Studies (Austria 2008).

Panel Facilitators:

Hope Koch is an Assistant Professor in the management information systems program at Baylor University, where she leads the program's career development efforts. Dr. Koch has received numerous awards for her efforts building Baylor's IS program including the 2008 ConocoPhillips Faculty Development Fellowship and the 2009 Southwestern Business Dean's Association Innovative Achievement Award. Her work has been published in numerous academic journals and conferences.

Clayton Looney is an Associate Professor and the Ron and Judy Paige Faculty Fellow in the School of Business Administration at The University of Montana. He is the recipient of numerous teaching awards, and much of his recent research has focused on understanding the effects of various teaching practices on student learning and enrollment. His work has appeared in prestigious journals including *Management Science*, *Decision Sciences*, *Communications of the ACM*, and *Communications of the AIS*.

EQUIPMENT NEEDS

We'd like a room with 2 elevated 8ft tables at the front to seat the panelists. We'd like a laptop with PowerPoint, a projector, a projection screen, a microphone and an audio recording system.

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