Some iGeneration students we face in our classrooms today were just seven years old when the iPhone was introduced. They are profoundly different from previous generations in ways that often make them challenging to engage, but delving into those distinctions offers strategies to meet the challenges. The panel is drawn from different roles in different programs that have been exploring such strategies in their classrooms, leveraging the iGeneration’s penchant for social media and compelling story-telling to engage them in innovative IS education. These programs are experimenting with experiential learning cast as blog postings from a fictional student character that vicariously places real students inside a Silicon Valley startup, crafting a mobile/web app using Salesforce.com’s innovative enterprise technology platform. Preliminary data has suggested promise and the panelists share their perspectives, as instructors, administrators and iGeneration students themselves, based on their early experiences, to help identify lessons learned and stimulate creative discussion.

Keywords
Storification, Social Media, Innovation, Engagement, iGeneration, Salesforce, Business Systems Labs, IS Education

PANEL OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVE
Among our IS colleagues, one often senses significant frustration in attempts to engage the iGeneration students ("iGens") that we now encounter in our classrooms and there is literature that helps explain why. It has been posited that their brains are wired differently, having grown up with advanced technology at their fingertips (Rosen, 2010). Some of our students were just seven years old when Steve Jobs introduced the iPhone, so with respect to technology and innovation, they come with broad assumptions and high expectations that can present particular challenges for IS education. In their paper on designing experiential learning experiences for introductory MIS courses, Wu and Sankar (2015) conclude “a major challenge faced by those teaching business education, including management information systems (MIS), is to get students excited about the concepts.” Intuitively, we recognize that engagement is key to effective instruction and there is evidence that bears this out (Burch et al., 2015) but if we are dealing with brains with “wiring” different from our own, how do we do this?
Hill and Nance (2016) suggest meeting iGens on their own terms by leveraging the students’ penchants for both social media and compelling story-telling. They describe innovative hands-on lab materials known as the “Max Labs” aimed at engaging iGens in introductory IS courses with a story told through blog postings by a fictional peer, a female undergraduate at San Jose State University named Max. Through these materials, Max blogs her experiences as she is learning to use Salesforce’s Force.com platform in her introductory MIS course and stumbles into an opportunity to work with a Silicon Valley startup, creating a mobile app for their internal use. Her postings invite her “fans” to follow along as she describes the challenges she faces and the solutions she innovates. Real students follow the detailed steps she provides to replicate her work and in doing so, they experience her story vicariously. So the labs use a unique delivery innovation to expose the students to the innovation industry and to tools from the company (Salesforce.com) placed #1 or #2 on the Forbes.com list of Most Innovative Companies for six years running. The paper reports preliminary data suggesting this may indeed be an effective approach to engaging iGen students and other universities are now experimenting with it as well. The panel is provided as a forum for exploring how the approach is manifested in different institutions and programs and for sharing considered observations about the extent to which it actually succeeds in the engagement challenge we face.

The panelists represent a wide range of different perspectives–one instructor has been using this approach for several semesters while another is new to it. One of the panelists is an administrator, working to provide the leadership and support structure to integrate the approach in a large course with many instructors, while another is herself an iGeneration student who can relate her reflections from working through the labs herself but also as a lab support coordinator, setting up grading rubrics, trouble-shooting resources, etc. The institutions vary as well, from a small polytechnical institution to a large public university located in Silicon Valley (the Max Labs setting), and a university far from Silicon Valley, in the Northeast. Panelists will address a range of issues and questions, including:

- What are students saying and what are we seeing in terms of student engagement?
- What kinds of things are we doing that seem to work (or not) in our effort to engage?
- Which elements of this approach are key engagement triggers, eg. the story itself, specific character traits, the informal blog-style writing tone, the humor, etc?
- What else could we be doing to engage even more?

The panel is an opportunity to explore these questions with those “in the trenches” who are interfacing with the faculty and students using this approach on a daily basis.

**PANEL LAYOUT/DESIGN**

The panel is designed to be interactive and engaging. As attendees arrive, prior to the start of the session, they will be greeted by the moderator and asked to jot down, on index cards provided, what are the primary challenges they see in engaging iGeneration students. The results will be collected and used to “prime” the discussion with panelists.

The moderator will begin the session with a brief welcome and introduction of the panelists, followed by a 5-minute summary of the session’s genesis, purpose and objectives. Then each panelist will give a brief overview (5-min), presenting 5 slides each to explain how they are applying the approach at their particular institution.

The moderator will then announce the engagement challenges submitted by the attendees for panelists to keep in mind as they respond to questions and comments from the attendees and from a list prepared by the moderator in advance. Every effort will be made by the moderator to engage the attendees actively in the discussion.

**PANEL PARTICIPANTS**

**Mart Doyle (Temple University)**

After 20 years working in the IT industry with consulting giants CSC and IBM and as Chief Technology Architect for a Fortune 500 global, Mart Doyle joined the full-time faculty of the MIS department in January 2005, earning multiple honors for his teaching across the undergraduate, graduate, Executive MBA and International MBA programs. Mart also serves as Department Vice-chair and coordinates the department’s large Introduction to MIS course.

This spring, Mart integrated the Max Business Systems Innovation Labs across all sections of the Intro course, exploring their storified, social media format as a way to engage his iGeneration students on their own terms. Mart leveraged student assistants and worked with the instructor team to ensure a smooth rollout across such a large course (1,200) and joins the panel to highlight the administrative challenges encountered and strategic imperatives for success.
David Kocsis (Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo)

Prior to entering the doctoral program in Information Systems at the University of Nebraska, Omaha, David Kocsis spent more than 15 years at Fortune 500 financial services company First Data, working in a variety of IT and management roles and managing dozens of IT projects important to user experience, information security, and operations for 30,000 users. During his time at UNO, Dave worked with professors and other graduate students to design, develop, and implement a virtual learning platform to deliver online leadership training to emerging leaders in rural Nebraska and he was recognized with the Anjuman Changez Memorial Award for Determination and Dedication in Doctoral Study in 2014.

Dave recently joined the faculty at Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, where hands-on, experiential learning is a pedagogical cornerstone throughout the campus. This Spring, in the Introduction to Information Systems course, Dave has been experimenting with the storified, social media-based lab format to engage his iGeneration students and “concretize” concepts discussed in class. Dave lends his experience and gained insights to the panel, adding a polytechnic institutional perspective as well as that of an instructor integrating the labs entrepreneurially rather than as part of an administrative initiative.

Rebecca Jackson (Temple University)

Having received her first computer at age 7, Rebecca Jackson, is herself a bona-fide iGeneration student and an undergraduate majoring in MIS and Marketing at Temple. As an assistant to the Department Vice-chair, Rebecca has been instrumental in piloting the storified, social-media format lab approach at Temple. Ensuring success for a launch of this scale (1,200 students) was a monumental task requiring creative advanced planning and agile adjustments along the way. Rebecca created a helpdesk staffed by lab assistants, a grading rubric, customized lab instructions, a troubleshooting website, and integrated lab references and due date reminders strategically into the pre-existing course materials. Rebecca’s contributions the panel include her experiences both as an iGen student working through the lab materials herself and as “the boots on the ground,” coordinating support for the students and the faculty using the labs. She will speak to the question of engagement with respect to both herself and her iGen peers, based on her direct experience throughout the Spring semester.

Richard Sessions (San Jose State University)

As an instructor at San Jose State University, Richard Sessions brings to his classroom more than 30 years of professional experience in new product development, channel sales, demand generation programs, and sales-ready-marketing processes as well as integrated CRM, ERP, CMS, and SharePoint implementations. Richard has been quoted in numerous articles and books and has collaborated on several management books including “Beyond the Financials.” He is a founder and executive board member of the Social Innovation Institute at San Jose State University.

Richard has been using the storified, social media format lab approach for several semesters as a way to illustrate the conceptual material and make it real and tangible for students in his Introduction to MIS classes, required for all undergraduate Business majors, as well as in the capstone course he teaches specifically for MIS students. Drawing the experience of these last years, including informal one-on-one post-lab discussions with the students, he can highlight the impact he has seen on the them and how he has learned to leverage that impact to facilitate more meaningful classroom discussions.

REFERENCES


