March 2001

Adding Practitioner Scholars to Our Faculties

Andy Borchers

Lawrence Technological University, borchers@ltu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://aisel.aisnet.org/cais>

Recommended Citation

Borchers, Andy (2001) "Adding Practitioner Scholars to Our Faculties," *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*: Vol. 6, Article 7.

DOI: 10.17705/1CAIS.00607

Available at: <https://aisel.aisnet.org/cais/vol6/iss1/7>

This material is brought to you by the AIS Journals at AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). It has been accepted for inclusion in Communications of the Association for Information Systems by an authorized administrator of AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). For more information, please contact elibrary@aisnet.org.

Communications of the **A**ssociation for **I**nformation **S**ystems

ADDING PRACTITIONER SCHOLARS TO OUR FACULTIES

Andy Borchers

Lawrence Technological University

borchers@ltu.edu

ABSTRACT

At the same time the IT discipline is facing a challenge to the relevance of its scholarship, we also face a severe shortfall of professors. This shortfall is a long term problem that will have to be met through the use of substitutes for the conventional PhD graduate. This article argues that developing mid-career, top caliber IT professionals in "practitioner scholar" doctoral programs can help solve both problems. Practitioner scholars engage in research that is both audience-focused and academically rigorous. Faculty trained in this way can also bring balance to the classroom, avoiding the extremes of strictly academic or practitioner focused education.

As IT researchers ponder the question of relevance, an answer to another pressing problem may help provide an answer. Given the findings of Freeman, et al. in the September 2000 issue of *MIS Quarterly* [Freeman et al., 2000] that the shortage of faculty in our discipline "is structural, persistent and not a short-term anomaly", the IT faculty world will need, somehow, to expand significantly in the coming years. The growing demands of our institutions and students, their customers, calls for more IT faculty. Barring structural changes in the way Business Schools are funded, such expansion will likely not come from ever-larger numbers of traditionally trained academics with full-time appointments. If we employ substitutes, as Freeman, et al. suggest we must, who will these people be? How will they be educated? What will they focus their intellectual powers on? Indeed, how we expand our ranks in the coming years may well impact the relevance of our research.

Today, it would appear that faculty in many IT programs come in two basic flavors -

doctorally qualified academic full-timers who teach and conduct research and a growing cast of masters level and some PhD's from industry working as part-time adjuncts that teach all the sections full-timers can't hope to cover.

Both have their place. Part-timers bring a dose of reality, and vitality, to the classroom - but in so doing risk teaching "for the moment" and not instilling lifelong intellectual frameworks in students. Academic full-timers focus on the latter, but have the unenviable task of trying to keep current in an emerging field, conducting meaningful basic research and, in too many cases, teaching overloads.

As noted by others in the recent ISWORLD dialogue, consider the typical reading material and conference attendance of these two groups. Many academic full timers focus their reading on journals like *MIS Quarterly* and *ISR*. AMCIS, DSI and ICIS are likely their favorite conferences. Part-time adjuncts and their industry colleagues, however, may focus on publications such as *Information Week* and *ComputerWorld* and attend Comdex and other industry shows. While there will always be exceptional people in both camps that cross over, how many of us truly keep one foot in the academic world and the other in the IT industry? It is as though there are two largely

disconnected IT research worlds - an academically focused basic research world and an applied world.

Is there a middle ground between the two extremes? Where can basic and applied research meet?

We may want to observe the growing interest in a "practitioner scholar research model". It has been advanced by, among others, J. Aram and Paul Salipante of Case Western. Their approach is problem initiated, audience-centered research that retains a theoretical base and attention to validity. Such research is epistemologically open - including a mix of methods and knowledge building and testing. Case Western incorporates this model in their EDM (Executive Doctor of Management) degree that may well be a model for training a new cadre of IT faculty. There are other examples. The University of Maryland (University Center) offers a 60-hour, Doctor of Management program aimed at mid-career professionals. At Claremont Graduate University the School of Information Science actively caters to a part-time PhD audience and attracts many students who work full time to a rigorous program in IS. In addition, Claremont runs an Executive PhD program in its Drucker Graduate School of Management. The thought is this - what if we provide doctoral level education to a group of successful, top flight IT professionals? The graduates of such education may choose to switch to academic life or remain in industry. In either case, this group of individuals could initiate "practitioner scholar" research with high levels of relevance and academic rigor. Such research would be of vital interest to both the academic and practitioner communities.

While some of today's PhD students have industry experience, the thought here is to attract truly top professionals - system architects, CIO's, project managers and the like with extensive industry experience. Doctoral education for this group of individuals cannot be done in traditional full-time PhD programs. The pressures of career and family would prevent most of these professionals from pursuing this sort of doctoral education. Part-time programs that retain rigor, but are scheduled to fit into busy lives are in order. The choice of degree titles (DM or DBA versus PhD) can help keep clear the difference between traditional academics and the new wave of "practitioner scholars".

Could such a genre of doctorally qualified faculty members and industry colleagues groomed in the practitioner scholar approach bring about increased relevance in IT research? Could such a group help educate a new generation of IT professionals that are better equipped for a life of learning and for immediate employment?

The answers to these questions are not clear. Indeed, some experimentation with practitioner scholar based education may be in order. But in any case our critical shortage of IT faculty has to be met in some way. The way we go about filling this shortage may well speak volumes to the relevance of the research turned out by our discipline in the coming decades.

REFERENCE

Freeman, L., S. Jarvenpaa, B. Wheeler (2000) "The Supply and Demand of Information Systems Doctorates: Past, Present, and Future", *MIS Quarterly*, (24)3, pp. 355-380.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Andy Borchers, DBA currently serves as College Professor at Lawrence Technological University teaching courses in the MS in Information Systems program. Prior to coming to LTU in 1997, he worked at General Motors and Electronic Data Systems for 21 years in a variety of IT management positions. His current research interests include IT curriculum design, e-Commerce, and data quality.

Copyright © 2001 by the Association for Information Systems. Permission to make digital or hard copies of all or part of this work for personal or classroom use is granted without fee provided that

copies are not made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage and that copies bear this notice and full citation on the first page. Copyright for components of this work owned by others than the Association for Information Systems must be honored. Abstracting with credit is permitted. To copy otherwise, to republish, to post on servers, or to redistribute to lists requires prior specific permission and/or fee. Request permission to publish from: AIS Administrative Office, P.O. Box 2712 Atlanta, GA, 30301-2712 Attn: Reprints or via e-mail from ais@gsu.edu.

Communications of the Association for Information Systems

ISSN: 1529-3181

EDITOR
Paul Gray
Claremont Graduate University

AIS SENIOR EDITORIAL BOARD

Henry C. Lucas, Jr. Editor-in-Chief New York University	Paul Gray Editor, CAIS Claremont Graduate University	Phillip Ein-Dor Editor, JAIS Tel-Aviv University
Edward A. Stohr Editor-at-Large New York University	Blake Ives Editor, Electronic Publications Louisiana State University	Reagan Ramsower Editor, ISWorld Net Baylor University

CAIS ADVISORY BOARD

Gordon Davis University of Minnesota	Ken Kraemer University of California at Irvine	Richard Mason Southern Methodist University
Jay Nunamaker University of Arizona	Henk Sol Delft University	Ralph Sprague University of Hawaii

CAIS EDITORIAL BOARD

Steve Alter University of San Francisco	Tung Bui University of Hawaii	Christer Carlsson Abo Academy, Finland	H. Michael Chung California State University
Omar El Sawy University of Southern California	Jane Fedorowicz Bentley College	Brent Gallupe Queens University, Canada	Sy Goodman University of Arizona
Ruth Guthrie California State University	Chris Holland Manchester Business School, UK	Jaak Jurison Fordham University	George Kasper Virginia Commonwealth University
Jerry Luftman Stevens Institute of Technology	Munir Mandviwalla Temple University	M.Lynne Markus Claremont Graduate University	Don McCubbrey University of Denver
Michael Myers University of Auckland, New Zealand	Seev Neumann Tel Aviv University, Israel	Hung Kook Park Sangmyung University, Korea	Dan Power University of Northern Iowa
Maung Sein Agder College, Norway	Margaret Tan National University of Singapore, Singapore	Robert E. Umbaugh Carlisle Consulting Group	Doug Vogel City University of Hong Kong, China
Hugh Watson University of Georgia	Dick Welke Georgia State University	Rolf Wigand Syracuse University	Phil Yetton University of New South Wales, Australia

ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL

Eph McLean AIS, Executive Director Georgia State University	Jennifer Davis Subscriptions Manager Georgia State University	Reagan Ramsower Publisher, CAIS Baylor University
---	---	---