INNOVATION IN EDUCATION: THE ROLE OF COMPUTING AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS IN SUPPORT OF COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

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PANEL 15

INNOVATION IN EDUCATION: THE ROLE OF COMPUTING AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS IN SUPPORT OF COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

Panel Chair: Jack Baroudi, New York University, USA
Panelists: Maryam Alavi, University of Maryland, College Park, USA
Starr Roxanne Hiltz, New Jersey Institute of Technology, USA

Many educators intuitively feel that the integration of computing and communication technology into the classroom will enhance learning and the student ability to apply knowledge and skills to problem-solving situations. Despite this belief, pedagogic practice has not yet fully integrated the computer and communication technology into the curriculum, and this technology remains greatly under-utilized in this context. This integration is by no means trivial and is not simply a matter of training the instructors in the use of hardware and software. The integration requires a fundamental change in the instructional process so that the computer-mediated classroom becomes pedagogically superior to the traditional modes of instructions.

This panel focuses on two innovative but dramatically different approaches to course delivery enabled by the recent progress in the computing and telecommunication technology. The first approach, computer-assisted cooperative learning (CACL), involves computer-mediated face-to-face (same place, same time) interactions in the classroom. The second approach, the Virtual Classroom™, consists of asynchronous (any time, any place) interactions among the students and instructor. The underlying technology platforms and the lessons learned at the University of Maryland and New Jersey Institute of Technology involving these two approaches will be discussed and debated by the panel members.

Cooperative learning is a philosophy of classroom instruction encompassing a variety of face-to-face small-group interactive instructional procedures (referred to as structures). Application of groupware tools (e.g., brainstorming and information synthesis and evaluation) to the cooperative learning structures in the classroom will be discussed by Maryam Alavi. The impact of the computer-mediated cooperative learning strategies on student performance and attitudes will be explored.

The Virtual Classroom is a computer-mediated communication system with special enhancement to support distance learning. Rather than being a building of bricks and boards, the Virtual Classroom is a set of group communication work "spaces" and facilities constructed in software. Some things that are simple in the traditional classroom (such as smiling at a student) are greatly diminished in the virtual environment. On the other hand, some kinds of interactions and learning become possible and "natural" in the Virtual Classroom that are difficult or impossible to conduct in a large, traditional classroom. The impact and experience with the Virtual Classroom will be described by Roxanne Hiltz.

In addition to the above innovations, the "mixed" mode of course delivery (i.e., combining the Virtual Classroom courses with a reduced number of face-to-face meetings, or combining computer-mediated cooperative learning with traditional lecture and discussion format) will also be discussed by the panel members.
MINITRACK: INFORMATION SYSTEMS RESEARCH IN EUROPE

Information systems research is always dependent on the economic, social, and political context in which it is carried out. Because of this, the research traditions and profiles of information systems research in Europe are quite different from those in North-America (and the Far East). The choice of information systems research objects is shaped by contingent historical events, just as many organizational choices are shaped by their context. For example, research into information systems in the public sector is very different in Europe, especially in Scandinavia, compared to that of North America, because of the general goals, policies and practices associated with the Scandinavian welfare state. In addition, the prevailing research institutions, funding policies and research evaluation practices, which vary considerably in these two contexts, shape significantly the institutional context in which information systems research is performed. In addition, such issues as scale factors, national or institutional boundaries, and linguistic publication policies make information systems research different in Europe.

With the united European Community forging ahead, the European research arena in information systems is of particular interest to an international audience. Within the next few years the current nine members will turn into thirteen or fourteen members. Increasingly, researchers in Europe are beginning to think in terms of European research collaboration and cooperation. At the same time, the European research "market" is growing much larger, soon, perhaps, to rival in size that in North America. The liberation of the Eastern Block, which has removed significant technological and ideological barriers to information systems implementation and research, has also added a remarkable intellectual potential to the European information systems research community.

The purpose of this minitrack is to survey and then discuss the information systems research arena in Europe and to point out how it is shaped by specific economic, social and political factors. The minitrack will present major European IS schools of thought, defined by geographical and cultural criteria, discuss several different research philosophies that underlie European research, and evaluate the status and prospects of European IS research. The minitrack will consist of two sessions. The first — the survey session (Panel 16) — will explore at some length the evolution of European IS research, identifying economic, political and cultural factors that have shaped its content, and discussing major research themes that have been prominent in European IS research. The second session — the debate session (Panel 17) — will engage the audience in a debate on the strengths and weaknesses of European research traditions and point out areas where cross-fertilization of IS research is possible by the exchange of research strategies on both sides of the Atlantic.