Editor's Comment

In the prior issue I briefly discussed one of the problems in the MIS field about which I wrote letters to many hundreds of MIS academics and practitioners. In this issue I would like to better define the problem and to provide some information about the *MIS Quarterly* that is relevant to it. As well, I want to discuss more fully the new *MIS Quarterly* feature — an "Issues and Opinions" section that will from time to time occupy this space.

To begin, let me emphasize that while the problem that I shall discuss directly involves academics, it is of great importance to the future of the MIS field, and should therefore be of interest to practitioners as well. Indeed, as I move about the country and see various MIS academic programs, I have come to the conclusion that it is now significantly affecting the quality and nature of the students that are being produced in this field.

The problem, as I see it, are the sometimes-unfair standards for the promotion and tenure of faculty members that may result from the unfamiliarity of senior academics with a "new" field such as MIS. Most MIS academics exist in larger organizational contexts such as an accounting department, a quantitative methods department or a "general business" department. In such contexts, they are evaluated for promotion and tenure by some senior people who do not intimately know the MIS field.

This is necessary and proper, but in a newly emerging field such as MIS, there are few senior people who *do* intimately know the field to complement the judgments of those who do not! I know, for instance, of one school where the relatively large MIS faculty group is entirely made up of junior ranks who do not even have a representative on the key departmental committees because these key posts have traditionally been limited to senior faculty members!

In such cases, the senior people who make the evaluations cannot but be biased, however much they may attempt to be objective and fair. For instance, how can they be expected to know how publications in a journal such as *MIS Quarterly* should be evaluated relative to those in other more traditional academic journals? To those academics who are unfamiliar with the *Quarterly*, its applications orientation, which is so important for a quality journal in the field of MIS, may be superficially viewed unfavorably when contrasted with the "pure research" orientation of traditional journals that do publish some MIS material.

What is the impact of this? I suggest that it tends to bias young academics toward trying to publish in inappropriate places, to "adjust" their interests, activities, and papers to conform to standards that they do not really accept, and to limit the promotion and tenuring of high quality academics. (Please note that I can take this stand rather objectively since I personally achieved my promotions and tenure long ago when, as some of my colleagues point out, standards were considerably lower.)

I wish that I could prescribe a simple solution to this problem, but I cannot. However, I think that broader awareness of the problem and of the realities of the MIS field is of prime importance, and I am going to use this problem and the need for awareness as an opportunity to describe the *MIS Quarterly's* review process. If such information is widely known, publications in this journal should not be discounted or viewed with any suspicion, because I can attest that the review process is rigorous and comparable to *any* other that one might wish to use as a standard.

Briefly, it works as follows. When a paper is submitted, I read it and assign it to a Consulting Editor and an Associate Editor. I also assign it to one or more topic categories that are used as a basis for selecting reviewers. The Consulting Editor then reads it and recommends whether it is to be processed further. This screening eliminates about 20-30 percent of the submissions because they lack relevance or quality, and saves us from expending the significant reviewing resources that are required for the other 70-80 percent.

Then, reviewers are selected based on their expressed interests in topics, their prior reviewing performance and a "load leveling" factor that seeks to avoid reviewer overload. This is done by a person at the publication office without the involvement of any of the Editorial Board.

The reviewing process is "double blind;" authors' names are never revealed to reviewers or to the Consulting and Associate Editors who handle the papers. A total of four or five reviewers is assigned to each paper, depending on the subject and situation. At least one of these will be a person from the category other than that for which the paper is being reviewed. In other words, we get at least one practitioner to review every "Theory and Research" paper and at least one researcher to review each "Application" paper.

When the reviews are in, the paper and all reviews go to the Associate Editor, who makes a publication recommendation. I then review everything and make a decision. The most common recommendation and decision is "reject" and the next most common is "revise and go through the whole process again." I have not yet had a "pure accept" — one that needs no revision, but I eagerly await the opportunity!

At our current rate, only about sixteen percent of the papers submitted are eventually published — a statistic that is relevant, but misleading, as a surrogate for journal quality. In any case, for those who find it useful, our acceptance rate is comparable to that of the top quality journals, and "better" than many!

So, this "double blind" process requires that at least seven qualified people evaluate each paper; in my case, I do it twice — once to make a general assessment and once to make a final decision. I know of no journal that routinely has so many reviews, and since *we have instituted a procedure in which I rate the quality of each review so that these ratings can be used in assigning reviewers (as well as in purging our system of poor reviewers)*, I know of none that has the overall comprehensive and systematic reviewing process that the *MIS Quarterly* has.

I go into this detail to explain the process for those who may be unfamiliar with it as well as to provide some basis for those who are aware of its rigor to communicate that information to the uninitiated. I shall repeat a statement that I made in letters to various people when I took over the Senior Editorship; I have been actively involved in a variety of high quality journals and I know of none that have higher quality standards, or a more rigorous reviewing process, than does the *MIS Quarterly*. (Certainly some have *different* standards, and that is as it should be.)

If such information is widely disseminated among senior academics, it can only help in improving the personnel decisions of academic institutions. I hope that some may find it useful to use this description to provide this information to others. If it is desired, I shall be glad to communicate directly as well. While these efforts will certainly not solve the problem that I have described, they may lead to fewer quality researchers being refused tenure and promotion, with the consequent negative effects on program quality and the quality of MIS graduates. This is a field that has tremendous potential, but it will not be achieved if it "feeds on itself" by driving away those who can train others, by "using" people in inappropriate ways (such as by avoiding the issue by putting people in non-tenured positions and fostering inbreeding by hiring one's own graduates as faculty members), as expedients to surmount the generic problems of a new field.

I hope that this exposition will lead to a wider understanding and discussion of the problem as well as to new ideas concerning its solution. One of the places in which such discussion might take place is the "Issues and Opinions" feature that will periodically occupy this space.

The Editorial Policy Committee has approved my suggestion that this space in each issue be used either for an "Editor's Comment" or for an "Issues and Opinions" feature that is written by someone other than the Senior Editor. *I therefore invite all readers to consider submitting an "Issues and Opinions" feature of no more than 1250 words to appear here.*

The criteria for publication of such pieces are simple: they should be relevant, important, interesting, and well-structured. The last of these criteria warrants some explanation. While the "Issues and Opinions" feature clearly invites opinion, we shall require that the opinion be put forth *after* the relevant issue has been clearly defined and structured. We do not solicit unstructured opinion. A typical piece will state an issue, define it, provide some structure within which it can be rationally discussed, and *then* give an opinion on it. The operational criterion will be that the structure provide some basis for contrary opinion, although it must

be recognized that there will always be those who will choose to offer contrary viewpoints on the structure as well.

I encourage all who have something to say, and who may believe that their ideas would not qualify as a paper, to consider this new opportunity for communication. I shall refer submissions for this feature to a less-formal reviewing process as seems to be desirable and warranted in each case. I hope to publish a wide variety of such writings and therefore to save us all from the other option of having me harrangue the readership with additional "Editor's Comments."

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