Editors' Comments

Most of this column in this issue is devoted to two special contributions. The first is a co-authored discussion of the role of professional societies. My co-authors and I ask whether the information systems academic community is harvesting the professional leadership it should from our current academic societal affiliations. The second contribution is a piece written by Gerry DeSanctis, our new senior editor for theory and research. Gerry presents her perspective on our "Theory and Research" section and describes a new "Research Notes" section being initiated in this issue.

First, however, I am delighted to announce the reappointment of Jack Baroudi, Ken Kozar, and Allen Lee to our Editorial Board. Each has served the *MIS Quarterly* and our profession with outstanding distinction and dedication over these last three years. As is our new custom, their reward (and our good fortune) is more submissions for them to nurture.

You will notice in this issue a change in our *Application* articles. As we described in this column in March of 1992, we seek to make these papers more readable while retaining or enhancing the quality of the underlying scholarship. This has meant moving some material, such as that required to replicate the study, into footnotes or appendices. Although this has made the body of the paper more focused, the footnotes tend to be distracting and unappealing to the eye. Therefore, with this issue the footnotes for "Application" and "Issues and Opinions" articles become endnotes, which, along with the references and any appendices, appear at the end of the paper. Footnotes will, however, continue to be relied upon for "Theory and Research" articles as well as in our new "Research Notes" section.

—Blake Ives

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Professional Societies:
A Service to Members and Professional Leadership

Professional associations such as the Society for Information Management (SIM) offer significant services to individual members. Associations provide journals such as the *MIS Quarterly* and *SIM Network*; they also facilitate less formal communications through newsletters, mailing lists, and opportunities to interact with individuals with similar interests via member conferences, chapter meetings, round-table sessions, and the like. Professional associations may also institute mechanisms to publicize the achievements of particular members, as in the SIM Partners in Leadership Awards or the SIM Paper Contest.

In addition to serving their members, professional societies also provide sustained leadership and direction for the entire profession. For instance, they take public positions on issues of professional or societal concern; an illustration is SIM's Software Licensing Position Statement Task Force.[1] Societies may also form task forces to investigate environmental changes that will impact the profession; an example is the SIM Working Groups on Total Quality Management that examined how TQM initiatives impact information management. Professional associations can also facilitate or influence the direction of research or educational matters that relate to the profession. For instance, two years ago, SIM introduced the Advanced Practices Council that has since provided funding for several major research projects on topics of interest to SIM. Similar initiatives include SIM's long-time commitment to the International Conference on Information System's Doctoral Consortium and the recent chapter-hosted learning forum intended to provide an educational opportunity for future IT managers. Similarly, many SIM chapters fund scholarships or local research projects.

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[1] Information on this and other SIM initiatives can be obtained by contacting SIM headquarters at: The Society for Information Management, 401 North Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60611-4267; phone: 312-644-6610.

SIM[2] meets the needs of member information executives while providing leadership to the profession. However, by necessity and design, it provides fewer services targeted toward the information systems academic community. As an interdisciplinary field, the members of this academic community have often chosen to retain their allegiance, and professional association affiliations, to the reference discipline in which they (or their advisors) were educated. In the U.S., those with backgrounds in computer science tend to join the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) or the IEEE's Computer Society. For management scientists it has been The College on Information Systems within The Institute for Management Science (TIMS), the Operations Research Society (ORSA), or the Decision Sciences Institute (DSI). There are similar relationships with professional societies representing the academic disciplines of management and accounting. We should strive to develop further alliances with disciplines such as finance and marketing while strengthening or forging alliances with international, European, or Asian professional associations. Although such affiliations can provide benefits to the individual members, they are less successful in providing leadership for the information systems field. Many information systems academicians are members of several of these associations, thus dissipating their professional focus and energies across a myriad of ancillary fields and failing to provide unified leadership to their own field.

Although we draw strength from the interdisciplinary nature of our field, the lack of a central professional society representing the information systems academic professional creates a number of problems. It also leaves us with an unclear professional focus. In the long run a professional association could provide academicians and practitioners interested in information systems with a "shared vision" of the field. In the near term, such a focus facilitates better decisions concerning the allocation of scarce or shared resources and provides a readily identifiable common voice for the field. A professional association would also help to put information systems on an equal footing with the other disciplinary groups within the business school.

Today the academic field of information systems is defined by a diverse set of unintegrated professional activities and products—a variety of journals, an international research conference, tracks within other conferences, a doctoral consortium, unaffiliated regional interest groups, a collegium of non-tenured faculty, a dissertation award process, placement activities, and North American and European phone directories. These serve some of us well and have therefore survived in the marketplace of services. But they do not necessarily serve the broader field and are not driven by a consistent set of objectives or values. For instance, the International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS) has been a continuing success story but primarily provides North American faculty with services focused on research rather than teaching. Unaffiliated groups and professional societies provide alternative venues at lower cost and/or with different programmatic emphasis. Redundancy can also be a problem: in 1992 multiple placement services sought to match prospective applicants with jobs. A professional society, or strategic alliance with an existing society, might conceivably draw many of these dispersed or redundant activities together under a single worldwide tent.

Governance is another unresolved issue. As an illustration, the academic field of information systems is somewhat "governed" by the executive committee of the International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS). Although the ICIS Executive Committee provides leadership with innovations such as a doctoral consortium and dissertation awards, this leadership is not representative and remains largely rooted in North America. The membership of the ICIS Executive Committee primarily consists of past, current, and future conference, program, and doctoral consortium chairs. There is no guarantee that these individuals are representative of the *leadership* of the field. Moreover, the group can be and has been viewed as self-propagating. Similar structures exist in other countries and regions, but often suffer from the same kinds of problems while suffering from a provincial perspective and lack of critical mass.

The current governance structures have little ability to influence or control many of the more significant decisions impacting the field within North America. For instance, the editors of *Information Systems Research* and the *MIS Quarterly*, our field's leading journals, are chosen by groups that may not necessarily always reflect the traditional leadership of the discipline. Our ability to influence the selection of editors

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[2] Information concerning membership in SIM is included in the statement of Editorial Policy that appears at the front of this issue.

for top-tier journals in our reference disciplines (e.g., *Communications of the ACM, Decision Science, Management Science*) is even less apparent.

Opportunities to influence have also been lost in relations between our field and accrediting agencies such as the American Association of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB). In the past, the AACSB found it necessary to contract with individual universities to provide a development program for information systems faculty. This had significant impact on the field, but, because there is no one charged with speaking for the field, required no further consultation or approval.

Information flowing up the system can be equally problematic. Groups such as the AACSB learn about the information systems discipline through feedback from participating deans. These comments in turn reflect the viewpoints of faculty whose interests and outlook may be very diverse; one dean may be briefed by a research-oriented new IS Ph.D. who is among the school's most promising research contributors; another dean may be informed by an old-line COBOL programmer. What they are describing may be quite different from school to school. At some schools, faculty may describe to their dean a required MBA course that provides a hands-on computing experience; for others, this same required course might focus on the determination of a manager's information requirements; at still another set of schools this course might focus on the use of information technology to transform business strategy and structure. Although such diversity is often desirable, the cacophony of voices may leave the impression of lack of consensus, poor planning, and disciplinary fragmentation. Since the sample of views is small, is communicated through deans, and may be given casually, the information organizations such as the AACSB use to make decisions about our field is often unrepresentative, inconsistent, volatile, and easily influenced by the more established disciplines within the business school. It is therefore not surprising that such information can at times lead to inexplicable and surprising outcomes. We need mechanisms to empower our field's leaders as readily identifiable, credible, and armed with a consistent and up-to-date vision of an evolving field.

We also have unmet opportunities to establish the credibility of our field, to market graduates with a consistent and appropriate skill set, and to give the general public a better understanding of the role of information systems. In some universities the information systems field is viewed as necessary to move business and the university into the computer age. Once that is "done," in their view, there will be little need for IS specialists. Although it is obvious to all of us in the field that the impact of information systems on organization design are only now beginning to be felt, deans, department chairs, and non-IS colleagues often cling to a far narrower vision of our field. This perspective can have unfortunate implications for decisions affecting tenure, program content, and new programs. Dispelling this myth and educating our peers must be an important objective of our field's leaders.

We also have the opportunity to develop and support young faculty. The rapid evolution of the field requires constant attention to curriculum design and pedagogy development. Too frequently, we neglect opportunities for economies of scale and scope in teaching by relying on home-grown course designs that reinvent old wheels at considerable expense to faculty who must also focus on research contributions. A professional association must address our dynamic curriculum concerns head on. In the best of all worlds, we would lead the business school in using information technology for the development and dissemination of new teaching materials. Why, for instance, could we not establish an Internet node for distributing course syllabi, case study teaching notes, and interorganizational projects? What about a shared employment database for the graduates of our undergraduate and graduate programs? Why can't we assume a leadership role through the development of worldwide virtual learning environments for our students?

Some of these opportunities are already being carried out on a small scale, but we need a mechanism to identify, celebrate, and diffuse our successes.

We have identified a set of leadership requirements that we believe are poorly or inadequately addressed by our current professional affiliations. Although we have set this discussion in the context of a professional society, we do not see a new society as the only satisfactory alternative. There are risks associated with a new society, not the least of which are the costs that would need to be offset by membership

fees. A new association could not succeed without the endorsement of a large number of the prospective membership.[3] This is one reason we have chosen to bring the issue to your attention and we hope that you will draw it to the attention of others. Existing societies conceivably could offer proposals that might help us better meet our responsibilities to the entire field of information management, rather than just the niche they currently serve. Similarly, joint alliances could be forged; we welcome invitations for such collaborations from throughout the world.[4]

Whatever the solution, it must reach beyond the borders of a particular discipline and of a particular country or region. We hope to initiate a dialog among the members of our community concerning these issues, while perhaps prompting one or more of our affiliated societies to consider how they can reach out to all of us or help us along the way. Until such options are explored, it is premature to endorse a specific solution. Nevertheless, it is our shared belief that the status quo is not meeting the leadership requirements of the academic information systems profession.

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Gary W. Dickson (senior editor, 1977-1982)
James C. Emery (senior editor, 1989-1991)
Blake Ives (current senior editor)
William R. King (senior editor, 1983-1985)
F. Warren McFarlan (senior editor, 1986-1988)

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Theory and Research: Goals, Priorities, and Approaches

I am very honored to begin my three-year term as senior editor for theory and research. It is an important service role in our field and one I take on with great anticipation. I first encountered the information systems research literature as a doctoral student and, of course, much of my reading centered around the *MIS Quarterly*. Through my reading, I quickly became an admirer of researchers such as Izak Benbasat and Michael Ginzberg. To follow in their footsteps at the *MIS Quarterly* is a special opportunity for me. Foremost among my goals as I take on the position of senior editor for theory and research is to maintain the standards of excellence that my predecessors brought to the journal. Their efforts continue to enhance the *MIS Quarterly*'s reputation as a strong scholarly journal.

Strong scholarly journals are required for the field of management information systems to flourish. Through our journals we dynamically define our science—its domain, scope, research methods, and findings. The *MIS Quarterly* is widely regarded as a "top" journal because of its contributions over the years to the formation of a science of information systems. The *Quarterly* has become an important forum for scientific dialogue, both within the scientific community and between scientists and the practicing management community.

If the *MIS Quarterly* is to continue to play a leadership role, we must be enterprising in the face of ongoing changes in technology, organizations, and academia. As senior editor, Blake Ives has introduced a number of initiatives. He has been working hard to advance the breadth and relevance of the Applications section of our journal while maintaining high standards of scholarship. The Issues and Opinions section is being revamped to provide lively discussion of critical matters in the professional practice

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[3] There are 1889 names of North American faculty in the 1992 edition of the *Directory of Management Information Systems Faculty*. There are 800 more names in the 1993 edition of the *Directory of Information Systems Faculty in Europe*. Assuming perhaps 1,000 IS professionals in Asia and the rest of the world, and another 1,000 interested people who are not represented in the existing directories, there might be a total population of 4-5,000 potential members.

[4] A task force to investigate the need for a new society was initiated by Paul Grey and others at the December 1992, International Conference on Information Systems in Dallas. Inquiries, suggestions, and proposals can be directed to Bill King, who chairs that effort. The address is Katz Graduate School of Business, Mervis Hall, University of Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15260.

of information systems. Finally, Blake is providing summaries of the refereed articles in each issue and reflective comments on their contributions to current knowledge in information systems.

Within the Theory and Research section of the journal, Blake and I have a shared commitment to maintain and build upon the rigorous scholarly standards established by my predecessors. We will publish articles that represent "good science" in the sense that they (a) address problems that are important to advancing the body of knowledge concerned with information systems, (b) are robust in theory, method, and analytic approach, and (c) are presented in ways that are interesting and appealing to our readership. With regard to (a), there is always the question of "what is an important problem?" Whether or not the problem addressed in a specific research paper is sufficiently important to warrant publication is ultimately a judgment made by reviewers, but a general rule of thumb for the *MIS Quarterly* is that the paper must address an issue in which a reasonable number of our readers have some interest. *MIS Quarterly* covers a wide spectrum of research topics; it is not narrowly focused. So, authors must situate their work within the broad context of information systems research and present arguments for the importance of their work that take this broad context into account. Over the course of many issues, published research articles start to weave a tapestry we call our field, or science, with patterns and cross-patterns that link similar works together. Authors are asked to develop clear statements of the contributions of their work to the field at large.

What type of material are we looking for in the Theory and Research section of the journal? One of the most distinguishing characteristics of the *MIS Quarterly* as compared to other journals devoted to information systems is its emphasis on management. The research published in our journal must have a connection to management as defined in the broad sense, including management of public and private organizations, government and labor organizations, and professional and social societies. Studies of systems outside of a managerial context are not of interest. A managerial emphasis does *not* mean that every paper will have direct implications for practicing management, nor does it mean that every paper in its entirety will appeal to all readers. The purpose of research is not just to study the problems of today but to provide insight into events and behaviors of the past and to articulate the problems and opportunities of the future. Since the future is never clear, a certain amount of published research may not bring anticipated payoff in terms of utility to practice. This is the research risk; we do not apologize for publishing papers that fail to reap so-called "real world relevance." The potential for relevance is what matters. Each paper must have a strong argument that connects—either directly or indirectly—the presented work with past, current, or future practice in management information systems.

We have no official priorities for papers, but my own belief is that our field could benefit from more theory generation. In the 1970s and early 1980s, numerous "frameworks" for organizing MIS research were proposed. Later, frameworks for specific aspects of MIS (such as decision support and expert systems) were outlined. Frameworks are useful systems for identifying and organizing variables for scientists to study; but they do not lend good insight into cause/effect relationships, nor do they articulate the properties and behaviors underlying phenomena. We need fresh theoretical ideas about causal relationships in order to facilitate understanding and prediction of events in the world. For example, more theoretical thinking might be devoted to the relationship between information technology investment and organizational effectiveness; or to the impact of alternative government or managerial policies on use of information resources. New theoretical ideas will lead, in turn, to fresh streams of empirical work and to lively dialogue about the relative value of contrasting theoretical approaches to common problems. The *MIS Quarterly* is well-known for its contributions to data gathering and analysis. I hope that within the next three years we can also become well-known as a forum for theoretical exchange.

On the empirical side, we welcome research based on positivist, interpretive, or integrated approaches. Traditionally, *MIS Quarterly* has emphasized positivist research methods. Though we remain strong in our commitment to hypothesis testing and quantitative data analysis, we would like to stress our interest in research that applies interpretive techniques, such as case studies, textual analysis, ethnography, and participant/observation. Several of our editorial board members have particular strengths in interpretive research methods. Authors can be confident in our commitment to publish studies that draw from a broad range of methods.

Finally, Blake and I agree that while our field continually is in need of basic and applied research—in the sense of theory development, theory testing, and theory application— we are not in need of "research about research." We are not referring here to indepth literature reviews or reflective essays that advance intellectual thought about a particular issue or set of issues. We invite these kinds of papers. Rather, our concern is with papers that count and categorize articles, authors, journals and the like, to yield listings, rankings, or patterns. Our limited journal space is better devoted to presentation of research ideas and findings than to quantitative summaries of the research literature itself. Though such analyses can provide insights into gaps in literature and can serve as tracking devices for progress in the field, they detract from the core mission of the journal, which is to add to the scientific literature.

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With this issue we introduce a new section to our journal, "Research Notes," which incorporates technical commentaries that previously were published in the "Issues and Opinions" section. We plan to publish only a small number of research notes each year, so it is important that they (a) address an important research issue with broad appeal to the *MIS Quarterly* readership, (b) provide sufficient advance in knowledge beyond already published papers or other reports, and (c) are as succinct as possible. Obvious connections between the note content and other papers published by *MIS Quarterly* are essential. In many cases the note may arouse controversy and encourage dialogue within the field on an important research issue. In other cases, the note may lead to new research directions or methodological approaches. Where notes pertain to a specific paper published by *MIS Quarterly*, we may invite authors of the referenced paper to provide a "Reply" to the note.

Since only a small number of notes will be published, authors are encouraged to discuss their research note with the senior editor for theory and research prior to submission. The senior editor for theory and research will serve as associate editor on all submitted notes.

Submitted notes should be typed, double spaced, and prepared according to the same guidelines as other papers submitted to *MIS Quarterly*. An abstract is not required. Brevity is essential. Published papers will be approximately three to four journal pages in length.

—Gerry DeSanctis