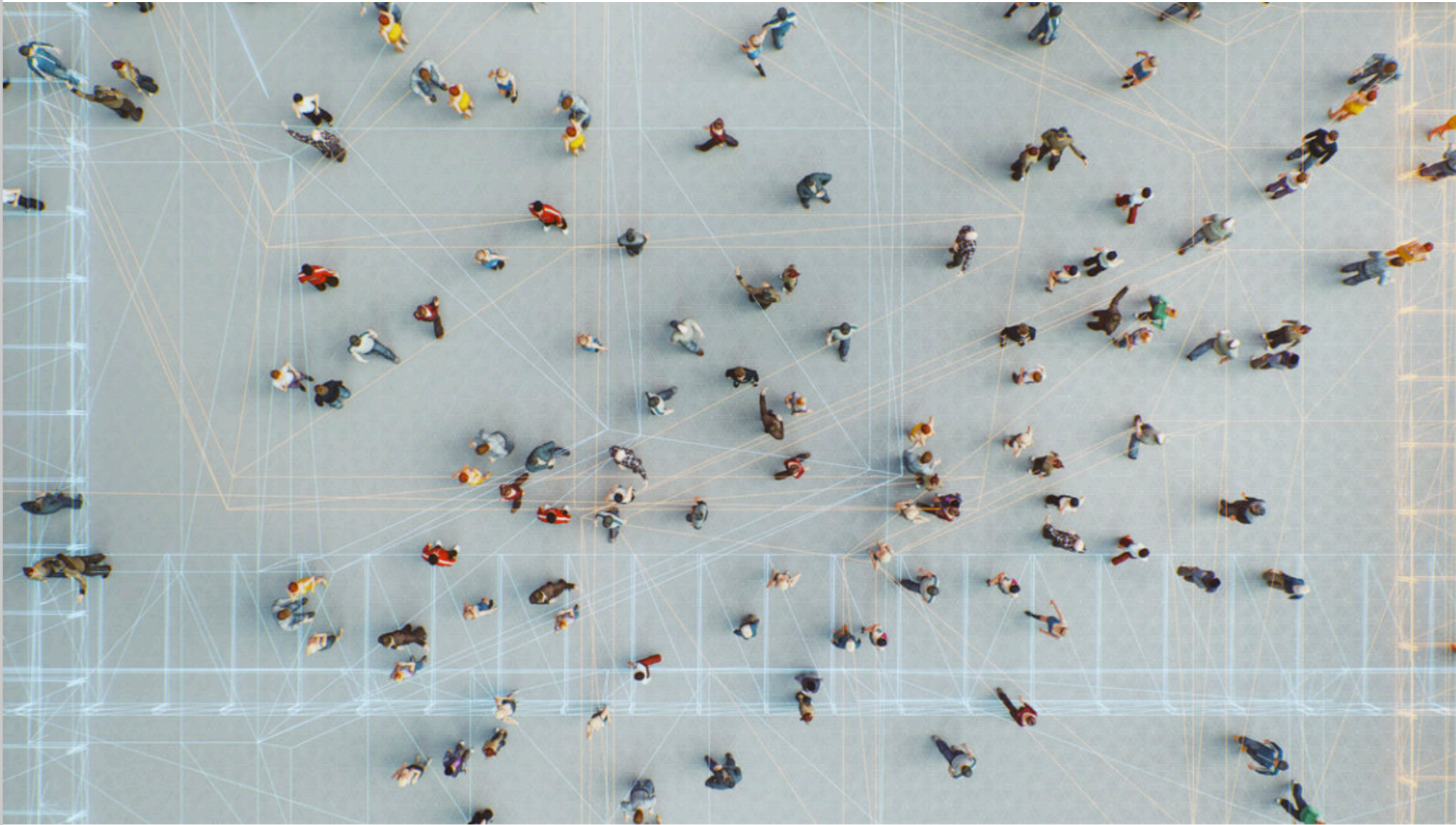# New Grant to Help Align Information Science Curriculum With Serving the Public Good

AUSTIN, Texas — The University of Texas at Austin's School of Information has long been a leader in the field of informatics, the science of engineering data so it can more easily be used to improve society, and now the School of Information is pioneering an effort to further align undergraduate informatics education with serving the public interest.

With a new grant from the Public Interest Technology University Network (PIT-UN), the university will organize a national conference focused on the intersection of informatics and public interest technology.

"This award is just the beginning of our efforts to establish a global network of universities who are leading the way in ensuring that technology serves the public interest," said Eric T. Meyer, dean of the School of Information, the UT Austin representative to PIT-UN and chair of the PIT-UN Membership and Outreach Committee. "The team here at UT Austin will be able to lead the way in the discussion of how to embed understanding the intersection of the public good with technology in undergraduate education."

PIT-UN is a partnership of 21 colleges and universities dedicated to advancing public interest technology. In collaboration with the University of Michigan, School of Information Professor Ken Fleischmann will lead the initiative and bring together scholars from a range of fields who are interested in informatics and developing undergraduate curricula. The ultimate goal is to tailor undergraduate informatics teaching to prepare students for careers in public interest technology, an emerging area of study that combines technological innovation and public policy.

UT Austin is a founding member of PIT-UN, along with other top computing schools such as the University of Michigan, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard University and Georgia Tech. The grant supporting the informatics conference is one of 27 awarded as part of PIT-UN's "Network Challenge," which aims to promote collaboration among the network's institutions. The grant was announced at the first PIT-UN convening at Georgetown University, attended by UT Austin President Gregory L. Fenves and Meyer.

The conference is one step among many already taken by the university in recent years to advance technology focused on the public good.

The university is currently developing a new undergraduate degree program in informatics that includes a strong emphasis on public interest technology. Concentrations such as social justice informatics, health informatics, user experience design, and human-centered data will be offered as part of the degree. Similarly, UT Austin's School of Nursing provides a health informatics certificate program that trains students to help patients make more informed decisions about their health care.

The emphasis on public interest technology is further demonstrated by the Good Systems Grand UT Challenge Initiative, which seeks to ensure artificial intelligence is designed to benefit society. Good Systems brings together students and researchers from more than two dozen schools and units within the university to focus not only on what AI can do, but what it should do for the public good.

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