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Panel 21 Enhancing the Stature of the IS Field

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PANEL 21

ENHANCING THE STATURE OF THE IS FIELD

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At the AIS'95 conference, many were inspired by Tom Davenport's keynote address. Tom lamented that when *things* happen in the real world about which IS researchers could provide learned insight based on over thirty years of research, the media rarely calls upon us to comment.

A short list of events where we could lend wisdom includes America On-Line going down for nineteen hours, faulty Pentium chips, V chips, how information-intensive companies should cope with hurricanes and other natural disasters, WWW security, JAVA, downsizing, outsourcing, mergers, Windows 95, data warehousing, electronic commerce, digital libraries, telecommuting, telecommunications, privacy legislation, groupware, the impact of new technologies, electronic communities, and so forth. What should we, as academics, do about this IS awareness problem?

The panel includes academics, practitioners and representatives of the media. We will address various facets of the IS awareness problem from the viewpoint of all three.

Non-tenured academics cannot afford to be particularly interested in awareness of the general field, as they are too busy working on tenure. Publishing in trade journals carries no weight in the tenure process, and indeed often is frowned upon as being undignified. General awareness by anyone outside academic circles does not promote their tenure case. Tenured academics would benefit directly only if exposure brought consulting contacts. The other benefits are indirect, benefitting primarily the general stature of the IS field. To the degree tenured academics care for their field, they might make the time to expand its influence.

Journalists, therefore, often get sparse response from academics when they, under very tight schedules, try to find timely, accurate information that would satisfy their practitioner readership. "Academic" has become synonymous with being overly conceptual, high-level and unconnected with the practical concerns of working professionals. Furthermore, researchers often refrain from releasing information until it has been published in a recognized academic journal. The few academics on whom journalists do rely are well-connected to the world of IS professionals, conduct research on topics of immediate, practical interest to IS personnel, and are responsive to tight deadlines.

IS practitioners experience academics primarily in the classroom. Those who did not major in IS probably have not experienced MIS as an academic discipline beyond the professor who taught the spreadsheet course. Few academics are interviewed within or write for the trade press. Often when IS professionals need help, they turn to professional consultants, about whom they have read, instead of cold-calling a university to see if a professor could help.

This panel will address these and other systemic problems in enhancing the stature of the IS discipline, and shall take some stabs at coming up with solutions.