

Communications of the Association for Information Systems

Volume 6

Article 19

March 2001

We ARE Doing Relevant IS Research: It's The Truth

Lorne Olfman

Claremont Graduate University, lorne.olfman@cgu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://aisel.aisnet.org/cais>

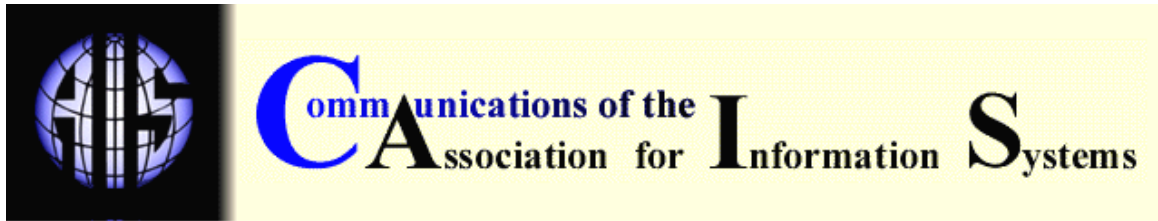
Recommended Citation

Olfman, Lorne (2001) "We ARE Doing Relevant IS Research: It's The Truth," *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*: Vol. 6 , Article 19.

DOI: 10.17705/1CAIS.00619

Available at: <https://aisel.aisnet.org/cais/vol6/iss1/19>

This material is brought to you by the AIS Journals at AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). It has been accepted for inclusion in Communications of the Association for Information Systems by an authorized administrator of AIS Electronic Library (AISeL). For more information, please contact elibrary@aisnet.org.



WE ARE DOING RELEVANT IS RESEARCH: IT'S THE TRUTH

Lorne Olfman

*School of Information Science
Claremont Graduate University*

lorne.olfman@cgu.edu

ABSTRACT

Research and teaching are closely linked in a professional academic field such as Information Systems. Research informs textbook writers. Textbooks inform students. Students practice what they learn. Research is disseminated to students/practitioners through reading assignments, class presentations and discussions, and easily accessible publications. Our field should be concerned with quality over quantity of research since "good" research is what we want to disseminate to practitioners.

I. INTRODUCTION

I want to contribute to this discussion by suggesting that:

- research and teaching are closely related, and
- practitioners are interested in research.

I was drawn into the discussion because many of the early responses came from colleagues whose intellectual and research abilities I greatly respect: Detmar Straub, Maung K. Sein, and Kieran Mathieson. Remarks by one of my former doctoral students, Murray Jennex, who I admire for combining academics and practice, further stimulated my desire to contribute.

Moreover, I cannot have a say in this discussion without noting that my colleague M. Lynne Markus introduced me to the concept of "research for practice" some time ago. Her suggestions led me to integrate that concept into a "Principles of IS Research" doctoral seminar. In this seminar, I require students who are in their first semester of doctoral studies to read about, reflect on, and determine how they could make research relevant to practitioners. Nor can I contribute without reference to my mentors, Bob Bostrom and Paul Gray. Both led me to realize the value and importance of the practical applications of research.

II. THE EVIDENCE

As I read the messages that began to form the "Relevance of IS Research" discussion, one question in particular seemed to gnaw at me. It was Kieran Mathieson who asked: "What is the evidence that MIS faculty research informs teaching, executive or otherwise?" From my perspective, the evidence seems quite strong. When I look at most textbooks, I find that the authors do cite research (as well as trade press articles). I believe that IS textbooks would not be nearly as useful without the inclusion of research findings. Not all teachers do research, but those

who do not would have a hard time teaching the core curriculum of courses without the input of researchers.

For specific courses, there are stronger bonds than others. The database systems course includes a good dose of data modeling. These chapters follow from Peter Chen's (among others) seminal research work on semantic data models. The information systems policy course is typically based on case studies. While causal conclusions do not follow from these studies, the fact is they are a style of research that informs students. The standard human factors course uses a textbook written around the rather extensive research base of the Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) community. Doctoral seminars typically use research articles as the basis for reading assignments and analysis. Given these examples, I conclude that MIS faculty research, as well as research in reference disciplines, does inform and impact MIS students.

III. RESEARCH RESULT DISSEMINATION

Kieran also asks why individual MIS faculty members do research. I believe there are many reasons, but I do not think it is an important question. The key issue is whether those who do research disseminate it. In academia, we reward researchers who want to publish their ideas and findings. It follows that those who do so will inform teaching. I am a sample of one, of course, but I venture to say that I do not stand alone. For example, like most teachers, I use textbooks, which as I noted above, are typically rooted in some form of research. As well, I use published research to inform and supplement my teaching, and have done this from the day I began my first academic appointment. It was not hard. Bob Bostrom showed me that a good selection of articles (research and otherwise) could provide the most current views on most subject matter that is not well documented in a textbook.

As I continued my research career beyond doctoral studies, and began to work with my own doctoral students and colleagues, I brought the results of my and others' research into the classroom regularly. I have had students read papers by Detmar Straub, Maung Sein, and Kieran Mathieson (to name a few), and reported findings from numerous articles and dissertations to my students in masters and doctoral classes. I have not done the same at the undergraduate level because Claremont Graduate University, where I teach, does not have undergraduate students. Yet, I would not be reluctant to use this approach for undergraduate teaching.

Now, how about the relationship between practitioners and research? My experience tells me that practitioners do consume research. Detmar makes a strong case that academics disseminate research through teaching executives. Yet, not all IS faculty teach executives, myself included. But, those of us who have the opportunity to teach part-time graduate students do interact with practitioners. I have taught (and currently teach) numerous students who tell me that what they most enjoy about taking a graduate degree is that, after almost every class, they can apply something learned to their workplace.

In my opportunities to do IS consulting, I brought to bear ideas that were generated through my research or the research of others. These consulting opportunities often come from former students who learned that research could be applied effectively to practice. And, what about the Advanced Practices Council of SIM (directed by Bob Zmud and Madeline Weiss)? Here is a perfect example of a group of practitioners who value faculty research highly and are willing to fund it with their company's money. Not only do they take this research into their practice, but the same research is disseminated to other researchers, and from there to textbooks or directly into the classroom. At least that is my experience. And, I have not even mentioned numerous software products and innovations, generated by researchers such as Andy Whinston and Jay Nunamaker, that are used by practitioners.

Finally, I want to dispute a couple of statements made by aforementioned colleagues. I disagree with Detmar's opinion that we can write research for researchers that does not have to be consumed by practitioners. I recall reading a chapter about writing papers by the noted

psychologist Daryl Bem (I have to thank Sirkka Jarvenpaa this time). He states that a good article is one that "your grandmother can read". If write-ups of our research are readable to that extent, then we should not have to worry about who might read what we write.

I also disagree with Murray's opinion on counting all journal publications equally as being a way of encouraging more research. I think this approach creates a problem because all published research is not necessarily "good" research. The best journals are the ones that are most likely to ensure that what has been published is valid. We should want all researchers to have their work certified to that extent, and we should reward them for doing so. At the same time, I should note that "good" journals may not always publish empirical research. *Communications of the ACM* and *Communications of the AIS* provide excellent articles that explicate a range of current relevant information for researchers, teachers, and practitioners.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Lorne Olfman is Dean of the School of Information Science and Professor at Claremont Graduate University, where his academic career began in 1987. In his role as professor, Lorne finds great satisfaction in working with doctoral students. He currently chairs a number of doctoral dissertation committees, and previously chaired 20 committees. Of these 20 former students, 12 are teaching in higher education, and the rest have jobs in academic administration, research, and consulting. In his role as Dean, Lorne leads a Board of Visitors that includes practitioners who are committed to learning from and providing input to academicians.

Copyright © 2001 by the Association for Information Systems. Permission to make digital or hard copies of all or part of this work for personal or classroom use is granted without fee provided that copies are not made or distributed for profit or commercial advantage and that copies bear this notice and full citation on the first page. Copyright for components of this work owned by others than the Association for Information Systems must be honored. Abstracting with credit is permitted. To copy otherwise, to republish, to post on servers, or to redistribute to lists requires prior specific permission and/or fee. Request permission to publish from: AIS Administrative Office, P.O. Box 2712 Atlanta, GA, 30301-2712 Attn: Reprints or via e-mail from ais@gsu.edu .



Communications of the Association for Information Systems

ISSN: 1529-3181

EDITOR
Paul Gray
Claremont Graduate University

AIS SENIOR EDITORIAL BOARD

Henry C. Lucas, Jr. Editor-in-Chief New York University	Paul Gray Editor, CAIS Claremont Graduate University	Phillip Ein-Dor Editor, JAIS Tel-Aviv University
Edward A. Stohr Editor-at-Large New York University	Blake Ives Editor, Electronic Publications Louisiana State University	Reagan Ramsower Editor, ISWorld Net Baylor University

CAIS ADVISORY BOARD

Gordon Davis University of Minnesota	Ken Kraemer University of California at Irvine	Richard Mason Southern Methodist University
Jay Nunamaker University of Arizona	Henk Sol Delft University	Ralph Sprague University of Hawaii

CAIS EDITORIAL BOARD

Steve Alter University of San Francisco	Tung Bui University of Hawaii	Christer Carlsson Abo Academy, Finland	H. Michael Chung California State University
Omar El Sawy University of Southern California	Jane Fedorowicz Bentley College	Brent Gallupe Queens University, Canada	Sy Goodman University of Arizona
Ruth Guthrie California State University	Chris Holland Manchester Business School, UK	Jaak Jurison Fordham University	George Kasper Virginia Commonwealth University
Jerry Luftman Stevens Institute of Technology	Munir Mandviwalla Temple University	M.Lynne Markus Claremont Graduate University	Don McCubbrey University of Denver
Michael Myers University of Auckland, New Zealand	Seev Neumann Tel Aviv University, Israel	Hung Kook Park Sangmyung University, Korea	Dan Power University of Northern Iowa
Maung Sein Agder College, Norway	Margaret Tan National University of Singapore, Singapore	Robert E. Umbaugh Carlisle Consulting Group	Doug Vogel City University of Hong Kong, China
Hugh Watson University of Georgia	Dick Welke Georgia State University	Rolf Wigand Syracuse University	Phil Yetton University of New South Wales, Australia

ADMINISTRATIVE PERSONNEL

Eph McLean AIS, Executive Director Georgia State University	Jennifer Davis Subscriptions Manager Georgia State University	Reagan Ramsower Publisher, CAIS Baylor University
---	---	---