

iConference 2008: Futures: Systems, Selves, Society

**Wildcard proposal: How “public” is the Internet? A conversation on the nature of human interactions on-line and the implications for research methods.**

*Length: 1.5 hours*

In the past decade, “virtual” research—empirical investigations conducted via the Internet—has increased dramatically across a variety of disparate disciplines. Areas such as cybersecurity and encryption, digital government and citizenship, consumer health informatics, and user behavior in online spaces have emerged to become signature iSchool research areas, often shared with particular disciplinary heritages (e.g., computer science, political science and communication, public health, and sociology—respectively, but not exclusively). In addition, the field of Information Science is dominated by research developing or using emerging technologies. These new technologies often occupy a gray area in which ethical issues either have not been sufficiently well-defined or push against existing definitions. Questions surrounding the “public” nature of the internet and Web 2.0-era information technologies have also emerged and have become increasingly urgent given the tightening of federal, state and University regulations as they relate to the protection of human subjects.

At the convergence of multiple disciplinary and methodological perspectives, Information Science researchers are well-positioned to become more active participants in both scholarly and institutional conversations regarding the appropriate risks and benefits that participants in online research studies might be subject to. Critiques of IRB inconsistencies exist, what we need is a thoughtful and thorough community response to the innately complex nature of virtual research and a map which can guide us towards the future and the study of twenty-first century systems, selves and societies.

Our goal for this wildcard event, is to generate a lively and rigorous debate which accomplishes the following three goals: 1) extends the dialogue within the Information Science field concerning the beneficence and respect for participants in online research; 2) enumerates a set of best practices for iSchool researchers in relation to conducting approved research on-line and; 3) moves us towards the process of drafting an iSchool set of ethical guidelines related to virtual research.

Format: Debate

Participants: Open to all participants

Organizers: Phil Edwards, Doctoral Candidate , UW Information School and Alpha DeLap, PhD, Director of Research Services, UW Information School