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Editorial: Announcing the Department of History of IS in the Communications of the Association for Information Systems

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Editorial: Announcing the Department of History of IS in the Communications of the Association for Information Systems

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Abstract:

This article introduces the new Department of History for the journal Communications of the Association for Information Systems.

Keywords: History, AIS, CAIS.

1   Introduction

In the spring of 2022, *Communications of the Association for Information Systems* Editor-In-Chief Fred Niederman mentioned to me that he was splitting the existing History and Philosophy of Information Systems Department into two separate departments and asked if I would consider being the department editor for the new History Department at *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*. I gratefully accepted his invitation and am writing this communication to discuss my vision (guided by Dr. Niederman) for this new department.

In this editorial, I would like to discuss why IS history is important and what publication opportunities will be available in the new History department. I will address the search for more formal histories in IS and the call for informal recollections, as well as the criteria the department will use for assessing submissions. Finally, we will discuss how this department seeks to help the field remember its past while it develops its future.

1.1   Why Record IS History?

The scientific process is built upon the process of taking existing theory and testing it, building upon it, or using it to develop new theories. These theories do not formulate and write themselves – they require scientists to discover, record, test, and communicate them. We respect those pioneers of the industry and they have been and continue to be lauded by future generations. As far back as 1675 in a letter to fellow scientist Robert Hooke, the great Isaac Newton quipped, "If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants."

With IS being such a new discipline when compared to mathematics, physics, or psychology, and even younger than computer science itself, we have the ability to capture its history. The field is quite broad, and while we may be quick to capture theory related to technology acceptance or relational databases, we may not be so quick to capture past failures and do so at our own peril. While the successes of our field are often found in the journals, the dead ends are not always recorded and easily accessible. Moreover, the reproducibility crisis that has plagued the social sciences in the past decade has caused many to look back at our history and wonder if we could have predicted these flaws with more literature and more access. In short, we now can capture not only past knowledge, but also the players and their impact on the discipline, its journals, its theories, its research methods, and its future scholars.

1.2   Why IS History in Communications of the Association for Information Systems?

The Association for Information Systems (AIS), established in 1994, is the professional organization for IS academics. For once, it gave IS academics a defined home and academic group. The quarter century before that, however, was quite a patchwork of conferences such as the International Conference on Information Systems (ICIS) in 1980, journals either homegrown like *MIS Quarterly* (MISQ) in 1977 or from other academic associations such as *Information Systems Research* (ISR) in 1990. The establishment of AIS made it much easier for us to define ourselves within our schools and colleges at our universities as well as providing more evidence to use to justify our unique discipline and its contributions to our deans and provosts instead of needing to align ourselves with organizations meant for other disciplines, such as Operations Research (ORSA), Management Science (TIMS)[1], Decision Sciences (Decision Sciences Institute), or Computer Science (Association for Computing Machinery).

In 1999, AIS took the bold step of starting two digital, online journals: *Journal of the Association of Information Systems* and *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*. At this time, many academics (and deans and provosts) did not consider an online journal to be a "real" journal and believed that peer-reviewed research needed to be published and printed on dead trees to be valid research (Palmer et al., 2000). Over two decades later, many of us wouldn't consider going to the mailbox to read a paper journal, if they are published in paper at all. This is in no small part thanks to the foresight of AIS in making its flagship research journal digital (and in the meantime depriving generations of doctoral students of the joy of going to the library to make copies of articles for their research advisors).

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[1] Coincidentally, also in 1995 TIMS and ORSA merged to create the Institute for Operations Research and Management Science (INFORMS).

While JAIS was meant to be a journal for the "highest quality scholarship in the field of information systems" (Journal of the Association for Information Systems, 2022), the mission of *Communications of the Association for Information Systems* is much broader. It is to facilitate communications among the members of the field through commentaries, debates, panel reports, and even tutorials (Communications of the Association for Information Systems, 2022) in addition to cutting edge research. If we are to identify, communicate, and preserve our history, *Communications of the Association for Information Systems* is the ideal place for this history to be recorded.

1.3   Why now?

When I entered my own Ph.D. program in 1995, AIS was a nascent organization. It was only a couple of weeks after the first AMCIS conference was successfully held in Pittsburgh. So, from a personal standpoint, I never knew a field without AIS and as such have always looked to it as our home. To assume our history began with AIS in 1994 falls somewhere between doing our founders a disservice and being completely oblivious.

Fast forward to 2019 and AIS celebrates its 25th anniversary. Under the subtitle 'Celebrating our History; Advancing our Future', AIS recognized the timeliness of documenting its history while those who made it were still available to participate in its recording. Little did we know at that AMCIS in Cancun that six months later COVID-19 would work its way through Europe after raging through Asia and then a month later would be raging through North America. This pandemic disease which disproportionately affected older adults made it even more important to document the history in the field while there was still time. The passing of Gordon Davis earlier in 2022, while sad in and of itself, is also remarkable in terms of the amount of institutional and disciplinary knowledge that left this earth with him. As those who studied with Gordon Davis and under him remember and mark his impact on the field, it is also a time to consider how we as a field record this history. Both in terms of the celebrated founders of the field and their experiences, but also additionally from many other perspectives including various locations in the world, contributions to pedagogy and education, service, and relations with practitioners and other IS stakeholders.

1.4   What this Department Hopes to Capture

The history department welcomes informal historical recollections that would be of interest to the readers of *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*. These papers may be either invited or unsolicited. To seed this section, there are two initiatives underway that we will see in publication shortly:

One initiative will focus on celebrating the life and work of Gordon Davis. This will include a series of remembrance pieces from scholars who recall their interactions with him. These pieces will be from those who have seen the field grow and who participated with Gordon Davis in bringing the field from its nascent beginnings to where it is today in 2022.

The second initiative will be titled "In Their Own Words". We plan to feature 3-5 semi-structured articles per year with diverse experienced scholars in the field who will help AIS to capture the history of the field in a more nuanced and idiosyncratic way than quantitative measures of the number of articles published or conference attendees (which are also of interest, but of a different kind of interest).

Moreover, this department also welcomes more formal history research. These formal methods may use primary sources, secondary sources, archival data, and information archaeology to document the history of our field. Scientometric and bibliometric submissions may be appropriate for inclusion in this section. I look forward to submissions that deal with the development of the field in many ways using various rigorous research methodologies. As with other departments in *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, this department will neither be biased towards nor against particular research methods.

Additionally, I do not define "the giants of our field" narrowly, and the department will use many ways to measure impact. For example, while metrics like doctoral student production are of course important, much of the history of our field has little to do with traditional research and doctoral student production. Collectively, the faculty members in IS have trained and initiated into practice tens, perhaps hundreds of thousands of students who populate large swaths of the creation, implementation and maintenance of systems throughout the world. We expect that scholars working in different regions have experienced the IS field and its evolution through different lenses, each of which can provide insight and inspiration to those across the globe. The structure of institutions varies significantly from country to country and if we

are able to capture through personal recollections a sense of how these differ (and where we all have commonality) we hope that each of us will expand our appreciation and understanding of a discipline now much too large for any of us to fully comprehend alone.

Submission and review will follow the standard process of *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*. Authors may request either editorial (reviewed by a single associate editor) or peer review (assessed by an associate editor with support from generally two peer reviewers), depending on the nature of the submission. Authors are strongly encouraged to read and review the guidelines for the submission process and format requirements on the website.

1.5   Assessing Submissions to the History Department

Consistent with the mission of *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*, submissions to the History Department will be assessed primarily on their ability to facilitate communications within the IS field. Submissions should not only be factual, but they should also be interesting. We want this section to be one that inspires us as we look back at the field as well as one that prompts us to think about what we might have been missing as a field. Observations and interpretations that are critical of aspects of the history of the field, particularly where potential flaws may be debated, better understood, and where appropriate corrected or improved in the future, are welcome. Scholars should not only be entertained by this section, but also reflect on the papers they read and the field in general. That said, we are looking to stimulate thought for readers rather than necessarily persuade them to accept a single interpretation of past events.

2   Conclusion

It is often said that those who do not know history are doomed to repeat it. In our profession, we spend much time reviewing literature from our own and related fields to learn from those who have gone before us, build on their successes, and avoid spending too much time repeating the same mistakes as others who have made them for us. In this History Department, we do not seek to create a database of theories or constructs or survey instruments (Li et al., 2020), but rather a multi-faceted portrait or mosaic of the field.

Papers in this section should be written to document the field for those who come after us. They should assume readership among current scholars across the globe and that these articles will reside in our digital library repository for examination by the descendants of the descendants of today's readers. Today's doctoral students will in time be passing on their own stories to the new scholars of the following generations. Let this section provide the home for this history of our field.

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About the Authors

Andrew Urbaczewski is an Associate Professor in the Department of Business Information and Analytics in the Daniels College of Business at the University of Denver. He is also currently serving as a Distinguished Visiting Professor in the Department of Management at the United States Air Force Academy. He received a PhD in Information Systems from Indiana University, and also holds an MBA from West Virginia University and a BS in Finance (with honors) from the University of Tennessee. He has been involved in AIS heavily, serving on the Technology Committee and is a Past President of the AIS Special Interest Group on Education. His research interests include IS Education, health informatics, sports analytics, and electronic monitoring of employees. His research has been published in several prestigious journals and conferences, including J*ournal of Management Information Systems, European Journal of Information Systems, Communications of the Association for Computing Machinery, Journal of Organizational Computing and Electronic Commerce*, and *Communications of the Association for Information Systems*.