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A Perspective on the History of the MIS Academy

Blake Ives

Abstract:

One observer's perspective on over fifty years in the information systems academy, with a focus on service.

Keywords: History, AIS, ICIS, MISQ.

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1 Prologue

Several months ago, *Communications of the Association for Information Systems* (CAIS) editor-in-chief Fred Niederman asked me to consider writing what he called a “lessons learned” opinion piece for the journal. Only half in jest, I replied, “you want me to write my own obituary?” I turned him down gently, perhaps because it was unclear to me that I had learned much and didn’t want to appear as self-aggrandizing. “But, why had he asked me?” I wondered. Then, I remembered a recent CAIS review I had been asked by an AE to referee. It was in its third round, and still there was no consensus among members of the review panel. In my private note to the editor, I fretted that perhaps CAIS might have strayed a bit too far from Paul Gray’s initial vision and been pulled by gravity too close to the scholarly mission of its sister journal, the *Journal of the Association for Information Systems* (JAIS). Perhaps to reassure me that CAIS had not been hijacked, Fred sent me a fuller description of his unfolding vision for a set of essays for the CAIS history department. These he described to me as “*in their own voices.*” For mine at least, let me add, “*...and faded and jaded old memories.*” As I saw that Fred’s entrepreneurial vision was something CAIS founding editor, and computer historian, Paul Gray, would probably have appreciated, I agreed. In the unlikely hope you might forgive my sins of omission, inaccuracy, and bias, I describe what follows as an “oral history.” Nevertheless, I have tried to check dates, and, where possible, confirm the relative accuracy, or at least acceptability, of quotes.¹ For the latter, sprinkled in for color, I took some literary license.

My goal is not to offer the lessons Fred might have initially hoped for, but instead to bring to life one participant’s perspective of the short history of our field. Or, as I warned Fred, one blind man’s description of a couple of appendages of an old, wrinkled elephant. My hope is through my experience, young and future faculty might vicariously experience an absolutely essential side of our profession that transcends teaching, researching, and publishing. I also hope you will find that I have captured the ever changing institutional, technical, and relational infrastructure that, in always changing combinations, meld us together as a profession. Infrastructure, that while easily taken for granted, must, like democracy, be nourished and valued if it is to survive.

2 In the Beginning

If you are old enough, a movie buff, or a fan of Dustin Hoffman, you will recall a single word from the movie *The Graduate*. Conspiratorially whispered to young Benjamin (Dustin Hoffman), Mr. McGuire, an acquaintance of Benjamin’s parents, unbidden, offered the succinct career advice: “*plastics!*” In that same year, 1967, my mother’s own assortment of Mr. and Ms. McGuire friends offered similar earnest career advice over cocktails. “Computers,” one declared emphatically. “Oh yes,” another purred appreciatively, as she sipped her martini, while still other learned heads nodded in agreement. Few knew what computers were or what they could do, nor had they the slightest notion of what computers would become a half century later — no more than we can predict what they will do fifty years from today. But ignorance failed to diminish my would-be mentors’ confidence or enthusiasm.

The mysterious careers these quasi-advisors had painted in the very broadest of strokes seemed almost magical! Especially to me! I was a nineteen year old college junior who, despite a lackluster grade-point average, had just limped into university from a community college; a lost soul with no idea what to do with my future, or even how to get a date! Both inadequacies were increasingly troubling. The word, “computers” became like a germ, and my career desperation its Petri dish. Computers it would be! Whatever they were! Then there was FORTRAN, a mysterious computer programming dialect, that the university had recently decreed could now count as a required foreign language. I was all in!

I would eventually grow to dislike programming, but my first computer science course, one that required me to master a toy assembler language running on a computer emulator, caused me to fall in love with it. Programming was to me like puzzle solving and, unlike Calculus, Intermediate Accounting, or the Modern American Novel, courses I had struggled with, was both easy and fun. Two years later, I enrolled in a

¹ Thanks to several friends for helping me with the facts. For instance, I had prematurely, and embarrassingly, put “late” before one very much alive founder’s name, got the year of a conference I co-chaired wrong, but was delighted to be able to embellish one remembrance with the names of two Fairmount hotel suites. I am also most appreciative of Jan DeGross who once again, forty five years after she typed my dissertation, took me to school for my creative use of commas!

Master's program in computer science. For my required thesis, I wrote a program to play, albeit poorly, hearts, a card game popular with my CS student colleagues. Sitting in the lobby of the computer center we would play, often till late at night, as we impatiently waited, sometimes for hours, for the operators to finally input our card decks into the computer's card reader, and then waited again for them to retrieve and distribute our, far too often disappointing, results. I keypunched my assigned programs onto buff-colored cards, and then made the necessary fixes on cards of other colors. Each color reflecting yet another frustrating wait for program execution. The rainbow colored decks of cards appeared to amuse the all-powerful operators, safely locked away in their glass house. While we necessarily treated them as gods, we felt certain that they were punishing us by their inattention to our decks and deadlines.

3 Oceans of Data

A Master's degree in hand, I landed a job with Mohawk Data Sciences (MDS). A few months prior to my hiring, MDS had been a Wall Street darling having invented a way to replace computer cards, keypunches, and key verifiers, at that time the nearly universal tools for companies to enter both data and computer programs into a computer. Their first product, the MDS "Data Recorder," was a key-to-tape device that, rather than punching holes in an 80 column Hollerith card, transferred keystrokes to magnetic tape. It still required rooms full of data entry operators, 99% of them women, whose tedious key-entry jobs remained essentially unchanged.

I was hired to teach MDS systems support staff, salesmen, and sometimes, customers, all of them males, how to program the company's newest product, the MDS 2400 remote job entry computer. MDS advertised this computer as useful for integrating and preprocessing tapes from the Data Recorders, editing and otherwise preparing the data for eventual use by a customer's expensive "mainframe" computer, as well as for off-loading printing.

MDS was understandably proud that they had no keypunch machines in their company, only Data Recorders. I soon discovered, to my dismay, that to learn to program using the proprietary Mohawk Data Language my students, or someone else would have to key initial programs onto tape using the Data Recorder and then, as inevitable corrections were found to be necessary, run a sequential file update with three tape drives loaded with three magnetic tapes. The latter included a master file tape containing the original program, the update file tape holding the intended changes, and the new master file tape that would be the output. Only then could the now updated program on that third tape drive be read in and executed. This, as opposed to typing up a replacement card and inserting it in the original card deck. The proposed scheme was ridiculous and impossible! Eventually, word bubbled down from the executive suite that I, and I alone, would be authorized to possess the company's only keypunch machine; it was to be locked in a closet and by no means should a customer ever see it. I was also told that our department secretary would punch up the customers' program decks.

Within a year or two another company had invented a key-to-disk device, with direct access capabilities. This soon destroyed Mohawk's sequential processing key-to-tape business, but left in place, and for years to come, the legions of stultified key entry operators still required for batch processing of business transactions — my first glimpse of the potential adverse impact of technology on job design and the need for socio-technical systems design.

4 Back to School

I escaped the MDS keypunch closet and, in 1971, took a job teaching data processing at a two-year agricultural and technical college. Until several years before I arrived, "data processing" referred to learning how to use card processing machines, not computers. When I arrived, all those big gray IBM "tabulating machines" — sorter, collator, card punch, printer, and accounting machine — were tucked away in what might as well have been a museum, located down the hall from the shiny red computer that had antiquated them. The card machines were controlled by wired plugboards that were programmed, literally by wires. Many wires! For instance, to add the number in columns 1-6 to the number in columns 10-15 and perhaps punch the answer into columns 3-9 on a different card required a wire to be strung from a hole in the board corresponding to one column, say column 1, to another hole corresponding to the

column in the card it was to be added to, say, column 10. I was the first member of faculty in the department who was not required to learn how to wire these boards.²

Instead, I taught assembler and systems programming — the latter primarily focused on mastery of the job control language (JCL) that tied various programs and data together in the sequence they would be executed. I also decided to expose my students to machine language level coding by bringing them into the computer room after hours and teaching them to key tiny hexadecimal programs into the operators' console on the front panel of the CPU. Adult supervision would quickly end that potential security disaster.

During my first two years there, two members of our faculty would leave to join the University of Minnesota's PhD program in MIS. The first to leave was Bob Bostrom, followed the next year by Paul Cheney, both of whom, years later, would end up on the MIS faculty at the University of Georgia. As Bob was about to depart, I asked him what MIS was. Looking skyward, no doubt for inspiration, he pondered my question for a moment, and then proffered what I took at the time to be the seminal definition, "*It's like computer science, but with people.*" Seven little words and then he was off to Minnesota. It sounded good to me!

Paul followed Bob the following year and in the next, 1974, I joined them. The small group of students in residence in the program included, among others, future dean Margi Olson; future dean, AIS president, and *MIS Quarterly* Editor-in-Chief Ron Weber; as well as Izak Benbasat, the future editor-in-chief of *Information Systems Research*, who, with over 75,000 citations, is undeniably one of our field's preeminent scholars, as well as, in 2020, the recipient of the Order of Canada, awarded to those "who make extraordinary contributions to the nation."

5 Graduate Student Offices & MISQ

I'd been teaching for four years and decided that was plenty. Looking back, I guess I was apparently oblivious to the contradiction of being about to take the first step toward a career that would involve quite a lot of time in front of thousands of students. The doctoral coordinator humored me and assigned me to two senior faculty members that had just landed a big grant. As their RA, I was given a windowed office, a nice big desk, and a comfortable chair with fresh sales tags still hanging off it. I was pleased! There was even a phone on my fancy desk. It never rang; no one ever came in; I was given very little to do. Whatever the profs were doing, I apparently couldn't help. In time, I began to fret that someone would discover that I was being paid but doing absolutely nothing.

To escape guilt and fear, I volunteered in the second semester to be a TA and in the following year to teach! At least I knew how to do that. My new basement, windowless office, half the size of the original, and infested with five or six other harried doctoral students, was overflowing with big, army surplus metal desks, and decades old chairs with broken seat adjusters and tattered leather seat covers. But there were people to talk to! It was glorious! Among my office mates was Margi Olson, who would eventually become my co-author on three reasonably well-cited papers examining the relationship between two of our field's earliest constructs, user involvement and information satisfaction.

Scott Hamilton, a fellow student, and I enrolled in a seminar class offered by Gordon Davis, the undisputed, to me at least, godfather of the MIS field. Four years later, a *Management Science* publication, "A Framework for Research in Computer-Based Management Information Systems," emerged from that class. That was quite an accomplishment as, in those days, the MIS department of *Management Science*, edited by Charlie Kriebel, was really the only top tier MIS outlet specializing in information systems research. Today, of course, partially depending on a university's Carnegie research classification and expected teaching load, there may be two (the UTD list), four (ours at U of Houston), eight (AIS Senior Scholars "basket"), fourteen (the ABDC A*) or more journals considered to be in the highest ranks. Our paper had been submitted in February of 1977 and was published in September of 1980 — three and one half years later, and with only six months of those 44 months in our hands for a single revision. The memory of that delay may have been an early inspiration for an *MIS Quarterly* editorial I wrote in June of 1993, entitled "Cycle Time Reduction for Disseminating Scholar Research," where I demonstrated that *Management Science* numbers of months from submission to publication had steadily risen from 13

² For those curious about one of our technological forebears, there is a picture of a plug board for the IBM 402 accounting machine at <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b7/IBM402plugboard.Shrigley.wireside.jpg>

months in 1962 to 35 in 1993. We could do better, I opined, and hope that, by better harnessing technology to the process, those numbers have since improved.

The ordering of authors on our “Framework” paper was Ives, Hamilton, and Davis. Many years later, Gordon would kid me, good-naturedly, about exactly how it had come to pass that his name had ended up last, on what would become his third most cited paper, while I was first. My response was that one day he and Scott had both fallen asleep in our three-person seminar — if you knew Gordon and Scott, you would also know that possibility is not as unlikely as it might seem — Gordon, for instance, was one of the only attendees to ever fall asleep in the middle of a live Rolling Stones’ concert, whereas Scott, sitting in the front row of a four student seminar, had fallen asleep as our professor, Dennis Severance, was answering a question that Scott himself had just asked. Thirty years later, Dennis still remembered that incident!

“While you two snoozed,” I explained to Gordon, “I listed all our names on the board and under the header ‘authors.’ I then walked over and opened and then, loudly, closed the door. Suddenly awake, you each assumed, incorrectly, that the other two must have agreed to the ordering while you were asleep and therefore had missed your opportunity to protest.”

The truth, instead, was that the ordering of our names largely reflected Gordon’s generosity and his concern for the success of his students. But, my story also demonstrates the power of being the person holding the chalk or pen, taking notes, or, as in this case, writing a bit of history.

One day, probably in late 1976, Gary Dickson, like Gordon, a founder of our field, popped into our gritty office and handed each of us a paper. We held in our hands the page proofs of the first five papers that were to be published in volume 1, issue 1 of the *MIS Quarterly*. Gary, who would be my dissertation advisor, would serve four years as its founding editor. As Gary headed out the door, leaving us with our “to be expedited” proof-checking assignments, he turned to sternly warn us: “Don’t let me ever hear you calling it miscue!”

That was my first experience with the *Quarterly*. There would be many more in the years to come.

6 Looking for Work

Eventually, I was graduated and went looking for work. There are always imbalances in the supply and demand for PhD’s. That year the balance was over the top — and, fortunately, very favorable to the graduates. B-Schools had recognized the importance of IT/IS, but there were still very few schools turning out research-qualified faculty. In 1977, there was also no information systems professional society or placement service. There was barely a conference, with the first ICIS still four years in the future. The conference that job seekers did attend was the Association for Decision Science (AIDS), later renamed, for obvious reasons, the Decision Science Institute (DSI). There must have been a rudimentary placement service at AIDS, because when we job seekers checked in to the hotel, most found great piles of little notes awaiting us at the hotel’s front desk. We spread them on our beds. Like boys (and girls) with baseball cards — counting, sorting, ranking, and comparing our invitations to hotel interviews.

Having spent about five years enduring Minnesota’s eight months of winter and four months of poor ice skating, I had set my eye on schools in paradise. Campus interviews would be in the winter, so the three interviews I set out on were all in Florida. The IS group on one campus was housed in the engineering school, an unfamiliar and, for me at least, not very appealing, configuration. At the second campus, while I was presenting my research, two of four attendees fell asleep — perhaps justifiably, now that I recall my dissertation. On my third stop, the university’s recreational swimming pool bordered on the business school, with students arriving to class, often in wet t-shirts pulled over scanty wet bathing suits. I admit, that option was tempting — too tempting. I refocused on universities further north, and closer to home.

I was really keen on the University of Rhode Island. My colleague Margi Olson, interviewed there too. One of our faculty members had sent reference letters for both of us; in mine, he described me, truthfully but tongue-in-cheek, as towering head and shoulders above my fellow doctoral student (I am 6’10”). This reference likely had been sent to people who had no idea what I looked like. Nevertheless, despite her relative diminutive stature (5’6”), Margi got the offer from URI. She instead chose NYU, while I went to SUNY Binghamton, the latter a couple of hours from my co-author and a similar distance from my hometown.

7 Traveling Man

Three years later, in 1981, I moved to Dartmouth College's new Computer Information Systems (CIS) Program, housed, not at the Tuck Business School, but in the College of Arts and Sciences. Dartmouth's Master's in CIS program had started up a year earlier, founded by Steve Garland and Tom Kurtz. Twenty years prior, Kurtz had been one of the inventors of the Basic programming language as well as the ground-breaking Dartmouth Time-Sharing System (DTSS). The CIS program, intended as a boundary spanner between business and computer science, turned out to be neither fish nor fowl. After only six years in operation, it had been deemed to not be nearly as successful as its two cross-campus, and far better known, big brothers; it would soon be canceled.

Before that had happened, I took a leave from Dartmouth to spend a semester at the University of Georgia and the rest of that academic year and summer as visiting research scientist at IBM's Los Angeles Scientific Research Center. For the following year, Dartmouth generously approved me for another leave, this time as a Marvin Bower Fellow at the Harvard Business School. That fall, despite my two-year absence, I was granted tenure in the CIS program at Dartmouth, only to be notified in the late spring that the program would close two years after the graduation of the cohort that had already been admitted for the following year. With the program's understanding, I never went back, instead spending a year at Templeton College, Oxford before, in 1988, accepting Southern Methodist University's offer of a chaired full professorship where I would be across the hall from my good friend Dick Mason and sharing an office suite with two retired Fortune 500 executives.

The opportunity to travel, and to easily plug into a new university with old friends and distinguished colleagues is a unique and valuable feature of being a professor. Those mentioned above were among over a dozen positions I eventually held as a member of faculty or visiting faculty, including a year each in England and Ireland. Having neither spouse nor children until I was in my 50s made it easy to take advantage of those opportunities.³ For the contract positions, moving can also usually mean a nice raise, but also perhaps the risk of being disparaged as just a "hired gun."

8 MIS Quarterly

By 1987, the time of my Bower fellowship at HBS, I had published several pieces in the *MIS Quarterly* and reviewed dozens of submissions. Warren McFarlan, whose office was now just down the hall from mine, had been appointed the *MIS Quarterly's* third Editor-in-Chief the previous year. So, one day I get it into my head that maybe I should be on the *Quarterly's* editorial board. "I will just ask him," I think. So, I get up my courage; I walk into the great man's office and stumble through my pitch. Warren just stares at me like I had flown in from Mars! He then very quietly, almost too quietly, explains to me, very serious-like, that this is just not the way it is done. "*These positions are earned!*" he tells me, "*You don't apply for them!*" I am like pudding now, my mouth is dry, my legs are about to give out; I am looking for a window to scamper out of, anything to escape this disaster. Then, Warren goes on, "*However, I was about to ask you, so...*"⁴

Five years later, in 1992, I would become the fifth Editor-in-Chief of the *Quarterly*. I found, as Warren had told me, that supplications, such as mine to him, were indeed rare and to be discouraged. It was excellent advice from someone who had many talents, particularly in bridging from the academy to practice, and who would inspire me in many ways.

During my time in office as the *Quarterly's* Editor-in-Chief,⁵ I along with our other Senior Editors, first Mike Ginzberg, and then Gerry DeSanctis, tried to broaden the reach of the editorial board. As Jim Emery, my predecessor had done before me, we continued to bring in more scholars from outside the U.S. and to be more welcoming to scholars who employed qualitative methods. We also sought out objectively supported nominations from our editorial board for future associate editors.

³ Starting in 2001, now with a family, I happily spent the remainder of my pre-retirement career at the University of Houston.

⁴ I ran this quote by Warren, who probably had no recollection of the meeting but replied, "This sounds completely credible and certainly is in the vein I would have used if I had thought about it carefully. The quote is fine as is."

⁵ Initially, and until the very last issue of the *Quarterly* I was responsible for, there was no official title of editor-in-chief. Rather in keeping with Gary Dickson's original "bridging research to practice" vision, there were for many years two Senior Editors, one for Theory and Research and one for Applications. However, the Applications editors had traditionally played the role of EIC, and to reflect the reality Gerry and I, presumably with input from the publisher, decided to formalize the title before Bob Zmud took over as EIC.

Expediting papers was a big concern. Gerry and I worried about the time lag for reviews, and, even more so, about the months, and sometimes years, that authors often spent on revisions — time that for untenured faculty was precious. We decided to impose deadlines on revisions as well as reviews. “It’s for their own good,” we reassured each other.

I also tried to apply more IT to our processes, for back then most submissions and reviews were still coming in by Federal Express, the reviews often arriving on the very last day of any deadline. My efforts to streamline our own processes by requiring emailed submission and reviews were endorsed heartily by Gerry; but her endorsement came with a big caveat. “*Great idea, but, not until my term ends!*” As the Research and Theory SE, Gerry was overwhelmed with manuscripts. As was her nature, Gerry said it very sweetly and I never felt threatened that she might quit. Nevertheless, I hastily pushed it to the back burner, and past my term as EIC, which ended a year before hers. Meanwhile, I moved the appointment of additional SEs to the forefront. At that time, we were publishing about 6 articles per issue with Gerry, typically handling about four of those published and probably dozens more that were not. Today, *MIS Quarterly* has 30 SEs and 40 AEs and published 20 articles in its most recent issue. *ISR* has about 25 SEs and 45 AEs and published 17. Gerry, it seems, was seriously overworked.

The Editor-in-Chief (EIC) of *MIS Quarterly* sat on the international board of directors for the Society for Information Management (SIM). At that time, SIM and the University of Minnesota jointly owned the *MIS Quarterly* and every SIM member received a copy four times a year. A journal that bridged the academy and practice was a vision that had been deeply championed by founder Gary Dickson and, to some extent, reinvigorated in 1986 by the appointment of Harvard Business School’s Warren McFarlan as EIC. It was endorsed, once again by Bob Zmud in his inaugural editorial in March of 1995, when Bob took over as *MIS Quarterly* EIC. But, in the long run, I contend, bridging to practice, while well intended, and even occasionally successful, has far more often proven to be mostly window dressing and a bad idea. Practitioners want prescriptions or at least research they, or a designee can easily read and, better yet, apply. Promotion and tenure committees instead want rigor and work that pushes other research forward (or aside). Not so much practice. Journals such as the *Harvard Business Review*, *Sloan Management Review*, or the *MISQ Executive* do try to bridge that gap, often successfully. Such outlets lean far more towards relevancy and readability than rigor.

Even publications in practitioner-facing journals with the strongest brands may or may not meet the tenure standards of B-School or Information School tenure committees.⁶ Where are *HBR*, *SMR*, and *MISQ Executive* positioned on your school’s journal list? The more prestigious the university, I suspect, the lower they will be. Indeed, in my many years serving on promotion and tenure committees, I do not recall any member ever saying anything remotely along the lines of, “I just wish his/her work was more applied.”

Nevertheless, I heartily endorse Gary, Warren, and Bob’s good intentions. I agree with them that our work should be more valued by practitioners. My year at HBS as a Bower Fellow, much of it writing cases with future AIS President and Dean, Mike Vitale, another year at Oxford’s Templeton College working with Michael Earl and David Feeny on executive programs, and my subsequent five-year involvement as Director of Research for the Society for Information Management’s Advanced Practice Council, reinforced my early desire to carry out, encourage, and support, practice-facing research.

This research vs practice/rigor vs relevance issue came to a head for me when I, as the *Quarterly*’s most recent Editor-in-Chief, walked into my first meeting of the SIM Communications Committee in 1992. My plane had been delayed and I was the last to enter the hotel’s conference room. At one end of a very long and glorious wood conference table, surrounded by a dozen or more very comfortable, high back, leather chairs, sat Harvey Shrednick, the CIO of Corning Glass and Chairman of the SIM Communications Committee. Gathered around the table were CIOs from mostly Fortune 500 firms. At one side, and at the far end from Shrednick, was the remaining empty chair. With my entrance, Harvey had stopped speaking and turned to look at me curiously. They all turned to stare at this giant thing that apparently had just invaded their space. Harvey then says something like, “*And you are...*” I introduce myself as the new EIC

⁶ The problem, I believe, lies not with the journals but with the tenure committees. It is their decisions that shape our reward systems, our tenured faculty, and the identities of our prestigious journals. I saw no obvious solution to this problem as *MIS Quarterly*’s EIC, and I see none today. Even with a viable solution there are too many forces, too many layers of tenure decision makers, and too much inertia to overcome. Other professional schools, particularly law and engineering, face a similar challenge and have carved out, for better or worse, somewhat different evaluation criteria.

for the *MIS Quarterly*. “Ahh yes,” Harvey says, with a sigh, “and you, I suppose, are here to try to keep us from de-funding the Quarterly. Have a seat.”⁷

In the next year, we tried a few tweaks that we hoped might appeal to the SIM audience, but it was pretty much window dressing and pushed us in a strange direction that I believe was counter to the continued growth of our necessary academic credibility and stature. By the end of that first meeting, however, I was well aware that it was only a matter of when, not if, SIM funding was going to dry up. We would soon have a problem that lipstick would not cure.

I conclude my *MIS Quarterly* memories with one that, while self-serving, is a bit more positive. Editors reject a lot of papers; a lot more than they accept. The rejections go out as written documents as do the acceptances. It can get pretty depressing for the messenger as well as the recipient. But towards the end of my term as EIC, I started to call authors whose papers I had handled and accepted. I wanted to give them the good news in person and to do so before they had received our letter or email. I just enjoyed hearing the delight in their voices and sharing their accomplishment. For some, that acceptance might mean tenure! I suspect my call made no difference to the authors. It just made me feel good. Yeah, I know. Selfish! Try it!

9 The International Conference on Information Systems

I have attended more ICIS conferences than anyone but Eph McLean, the well deserving victor in the ICIS attendee tontine.⁸ I have co-hosted the conference twice, and also co-chaired the doctoral consortium. I look forward to ICIS and seeing so many good friends, though I don't enjoy still being in the hotel at the end when the faces of so many friends quickly give way to those of strangers.

I have many interesting memories of ICIS conferences. Here are several drawn from those of which I was an organizer.

ICIS 1990 took us to Copenhagen, the first time the conference was held outside of North America. Henk Sol, at the time a professor at Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands, and I were nominated as co-chairs of the doctoral consortium. Recognizing our unique opportunity, we drew up a plan with a decided cross-cultural bent. A year or so prior to the conference, we were summoned to share our intentions with the ICIS Executive Committee. As the first ICIS consortium outside North America, we told them that the consortium offered unique opportunities that we intended to harvest. We told them that we would organize so as to promote internationalism and cross-cultural sharing while broadening the attendees' research perspectives. We also informed them that we envisioned separately selecting two equal-sized groups: one mostly from North America and the other mostly from Europe. However, once on site, we proudly declared, the students would stay, meet, and learn together, mentored by faculty pairs drawn from both regions. While Henk and I trumpeted the opportunities, some members of the Executive Committee, most of whom were from the U.S., seemed drawn instead to the challenges and the risks. Several were clearly dismayed by our proposal. There is no need to name names or reveal prejudices — the latter having been epistemological bias rather than of gender, culture, age, status, or race. But there was considerable pushback. We had gone into the meeting blind, poorly prepared and then read the room wrong.

Our proposal was tabled, to be considered again at a planning meeting in six months. Immediately after that first meeting, we were approached by Jack Rockart, the Director of MIT's Center for Information Systems Research (CISR). Jack was the committee member who had moved to table the proposal and, by so doing, at least temporarily, gotten us off the hot seat. He took us aside and reassuringly said, something along the lines of, “Don't worry, I will handle this at the next meeting.”

Six months later, Jack did lead the discussion and it went smoothly, though not in the way Henk and I had hoped. The consortium, Jack informed the committee, would be integrated for the social events but not so the research presentations and discussions nor the supervising faculty. The North Americans would meet

⁷ Harvey Shrednick, who himself published an article in the *Quarterly* that same December, does not recall the details of that SIM meeting, but, in his words, “Didn't feel that I was negatively biased against MISQ.” Harvey retired from Corning in 1995 and joined the faculty at Arizona State University where he joined AIS.

⁸ Part lottery and part insurance, a tontine is, according to Oxford Languages, an annuity shared by subscribers to a loan or common fund, the shares increasing as subscribers die until the last survivor enjoys the whole income. You didn't have to die in our version, and all the winner received was a round of applause.

separately from the Europeans, each with their own segregated faculties. Jack's described scheme found quick support. At the meeting's close, Jack again pulled Henk and I aside. He never gave us the chance to complain that he had thrown us under the bus. He just said something like, "*Okay, it's approved. Now do it as you always intended to!*"

We did, and it went well. We never admitted what we had done nor were we forced to beg forgiveness. The students all assumed it was just the way ICIS consortiums were always run. Their faculty mentors enjoyed the diversity. No one complained. The only glitch was at the conference luncheon when student participants, as was customary, were introduced by name. As I recall, Henk, perhaps wisely, had offered me that opportunity and I attacked it with gusto — but in doing so, bungled the pronunciation of the names of many of the European students. Thirty-two years too late, I do apologize if yours was one of those I so badly disrespected.

Two years later, in 1992, ICIS Dallas was hosted by Jack Becker and the University of North Texas and co-chaired by my new SMU colleague, Dick Mason. The professor originally recruited to be Dick's co-chair was a pretty visible scholar, so visible, in fact, that nobody on the ICIS Executive Committee had looked closely at his scholarly credentials. Two years before the conference, Dick and Jack learned that he had been denied tenure. He would therefore not be acceptable going forward. Soon, Dick walked across the hall to see if I would be interested. I was! I welcomed the opportunity and the visibility. I also valued Dick's characteristic openness in warning me that he had only initially agreed to be co-chair with the understanding that his role would be more one of providing hard-earned wisdom rather than day-to-day management. I understood that this wouldn't change, but also that unless this got sorted out soon, Dallas 1992 would be "Somewhere Else 1992." Fortunately, my new faculty position at SMU included a half-time secretary, Denise Langione, who was both competent and keen for a challenge. We took it on. Denise did most of the work and well deserved our sincere thanks.

It was traditional for the program committee to meet a few months before the conference to finalize the acceptances and lay out the program. Jack had found a restaurant near UNT that could accommodate the committee. Sometime after lunch, however, the other side of the room, separated from our group only by a non-soundproof and moveable screen, had been made available for a bachelor party. No further embarrassing details will be forthcoming.

We had two social events that year. Jack arranged to have the pre-planned event at the Dallas Infomart. That night's festivities included, among other things, a square dance caller and dance lessons, including the Texas two-step. The next night featured a never advertised appearance by the Dixie Chicks. Six months before the conference we discovered we had a budget surplus and I asked Denise to book what was at that time still a local group, and to ensure we had a big enough venue. The Chicks, as they have recently renamed themselves, cost us \$5,000 U.S. During the intervening months they had several national hits, so they were a bargain. I got to introduce them: "Ladies and Gentlemen — **The Dixie Chicks!**"

My second stint as ICIS co-chair was ICIS 2001 in New Orleans. This time, my co-chair and former colleague at LSU, Joey George, had agreed to do the bulk of the work managing the conference, with the mutual understanding that my role would be, as Dick's had been in '90, more visible than substantial. I would, however, take on responsibility for chairing the executive committee for the following year.

Decisions about hotel locations are made years in advance, and we had started talking to potential sites five years before, as we were preparing our eventual winning bid. A particularly aggressive, if delusional, hotel sales manager had rather mysteriously tracked me down in a hotel suite in New Orleans two days after my wedding and apparently just before his year-end sales-closing bonus deadline. That morning my new bride Mimi and I were scheduled to fly to Paris, the first leg of our honeymoon. Unfortunately, the night before departure we had slightly overdone the toasting as we celebrated with friends who had stayed around after our wedding. We failed to request a wake-up call. The salesman's desperate follow-up call, a quickly truncated one, triggered our mad dash to the airport, and a just barely caught flight. Despite his fortuitous timing, we would eventually contract with a different hotel.

Joey, my hard working co-chair, made ICIS New Orleans a great success. He arranged for a Mardi Gras parade down Canal Street, complete with a marching jazz band. He pushed the tech curve by making this the first ICIS with wifi and the first to put the proceedings on CDs. Moreover, despite the conference being three months after 9/11, Joey had to find overflow space to accommodate an unexpectedly high number of attendees.

But it wasn't all smooth sailing. We faced a big crisis in the months leading up to the conference. One of our designated conference program co-chairs suddenly resigned. The program chair is the most taxing of all conference roles. We were already well into the process, but with the bulk of the reviewing work still before us, we needed a new co-chair, and fast. Someone proposed Veda Storey who, on top of the six sons she already had, was about to have a seventh child. "Veda's expecting," someone protested, with the implication that, with a newborn and many siblings to care for, we must consider other candidates. "It's her call to make, not ours," I countered. I thought she might value the visibility but failed to recognize that it might be difficult for her to feel she could say "no." Sumit Sarkar, our remaining program co-chair, made the phone call and asked her to serve. Thankfully, she agreed. We were saved and Veda, Sumit, and their fine team did a fantastic job. Veda's daughter was born in late April of 2001, just a few weeks before submissions started to roll in.

Two decades later, Veda reassured me, "*Being ICIS program co-chair was one of the best things of my career. It allowed me to be on the Senior Scholars committee, long before I would have been otherwise, and that has always been my favorite part of ICIS.*"

One of the typical perks for a conference chair, and sometimes other officers, is assignment, or self-assignment in this case, to one of the hotel's complementary suites. These are usually, at least in North American hotels, part of the conference package. Both Joey and I ended up in quite lovely spaces. Mine, I recall, was the Presidential Suite while Joey was settled into the Empire Suite. Gabe Piccoli, my recently graduated student had taken a position as assistant professor at Cornell's School of Hotel Administration three months before. Gabe was attending ICIS with a member of their faculty, Roy Alvarez. Roy was well acquainted with a different entitlement system. He had previously phoned a contact he had within the hotel's senior leadership, a former Cornell student, and had arranged a complimentary upgrade. The upgrade turned out to be the hotel's finest suite — the Imperial! Who could blame Gabe for immediately inviting me up for a short tour?

Like Veda, my wife Mimi, whom I had married soon after I turned fifty, and I also welcomed a newborn in 2001. My first responsibility as incoming executive committee chair was to lead a meeting to be held on the last afternoon of the conference. But Julie, then two months old, was to be baptized that afternoon in New Orleans. Joey, very thoughtfully, stepped in to oversee the meeting.

10 The Association for Information Systems

I was elected as the seventh President of the Association for Information Systems for 2001. The presidency rotates among the three regions, and I was the third from the Americas Region. As EIC of the *MIS Quarterly* in 1993, I conspired with Bill King, the second EIC of the *Quarterly*, to write an editorial in the journal to promote the need for our own professional society. Bill, a strong proponent of an association, who would later be elected as the first AIS president, happily obliged. I circulated the draft among the other three former EIC's, all of whom agreed to join Bill and me as co-authors. Perhaps to ensure unanimity among us, we did not explicitly call for a society, but Bill had presented a compelling case as to why we needed one. The editorial, with the five names appended, ran in the March 1993 issue of the *Quarterly*, supplanting my usual editorial. While the five of us were by no means the only ones promoting an association, the bully pulpit of the journal and the stature of past and current *MIS Quarterly* editors-in-chief were difficult to ignore.

Gordon Davis was among those who had initially, if quietly, leaned a bit away from a new association. He too soon joined us, perhaps partly because the journal that his institution owned and published now appeared very close to endorsing the idea. Gordon would become the second AIS President from the America's region several years later. Others who had previously resisted, often strong proponents of neighboring disciplines' associations or even of the ICIS Executive Committee, became less vocal in their opposition. Less than two years after the editorial, the Association of Information Systems, aggressively championed by Bill King — a force of nature, was born. Today, 27 years later, AIS has nearly 5,000 members from over 100 countries. Apparently, we were right!

My initial enthusiasm for creating an Association linked back to my disastrous 1992 meeting with Harvey Shrednick, and the SIM Communications Committee regarding the ongoing funding of the *Quarterly*. As I had feared, SIM had eventually withdrawn much of its financial support and I continued to worry about where future support would come from. Perhaps, I thought, an association could help.

By 2001, now serving as AIS President, I had a more lofty ambition, one shared by Gordon Davis, Paul Gray, Bill King, Eph McLean, Ron Weber, and many others: how could we gather all the field's assets in one basket, or at least under one umbrella — AIS, ICIS, ECIS, PACIS, MISQ, MISQE, and even the recently created web resources of ISWorld and ISWorld List? Some assets, of course, were unreachable. *Information Systems Research*, first published in 1990, was a journal of INFORMS, a neighboring professional association, while *The Journal of MIS*, first published in 1984, along with its long serving and founding editor, Vladimir Zwass, were economically tied to a commercial publisher. Still, a 2001 merger of ICIS and AIS was a really big step.

At the ICIS spring planning meeting that year, AIS officers and ICIS Executive Committee members, having voted that afternoon in favor of a merger, met for dinner in the Rex Room at Antoine's. I chose that venue because Antoine's, a legendary New Orleans restaurant known for its French-Creole cuisine, was opened in 1840 by my wife Mimi Alciatore's great, great grandfather, Antoine Alciatore. I requested the beautiful Rex Room, one of Antoine's three Mardi Gras themed dining rooms, and where Mimi and I had five years previously hosted our rehearsal dinner. This time, however, the bride and groom were to be AIS and ICIS. We highlighted the dinner and toasted the marriage over a very large Baked Alaska, a house specialty at Antoine's, adorned in scripted whip cream with the initials AIS/ICIS.

Today, if you examine the pull downs on the AIS website, you will see that much of the original vision has been realized over the past 20 years. Listed there are four AIS conferences, including ICIS, AMCIS, ECIS, and PACIS as well as over 20 chapter and affiliated conferences. Under publications we find *JAIS*, *CAIS*, *MISQE*, *AIS Transactions on HCI*, *AIS Transactions on Replication Research*, and *Pacific Asia Journal of AIS*. However, we see only the *Journal of the AIS* from the senior scholars' "basket" list of journals. A disappointing absence, to me, on that pull down list of AIS journals is *MIS Quarterly*. In the spring of 1992, Gordon Davis, at the time publisher of *MIS Quarterly*, and I, as President of the AIS, had signed a contract establishing an alliance between the two organizations⁹ and, in 2002, Ron Weber, as a past AIS president and current *MIS Quarterly* Editor-in-Chief, announced details of a further alliance that would strengthen the journal's finances while making the journal accessible, online, to AIS members.

Today, I am assured by Jan DeGross, Gordon Davis' long-time secretary and a recent past managing editor of the *Quarterly*, that the journal's finances are as strong as its sterling academic record. So strong that they can provide undergraduate student scholarships via a University of Minnesota asset management account. Jan was instrumental in establishing two additional scholarships, the Gordon B. Davis Scholarship and the Janice I. DeGross Scholarship. These scholarships all provide funding for undergraduate IS majors. The *Quarterly's* surplus continues to grow, buoyed both by cost savings from the transition to online publishing in 2020, and revenue increases collected from aggregators and copyright clearing houses. While only listed on the AIS website as an AIS affiliated journal, *MIS Quarterly* remains free of charge to AIS members.

AIS leadership has also created, captured, or allied with many other assets such as student and regional chapters, colleges, the AIS listserv, the AIS (nee, MISRC/McGraw-Hill) faculty directory (first published in 1983, the directory listed 135 programs with 504 faculty in the U.S. and Canada), the AIS eLibrary, and so on. The credit for these achievements is shared among the 27 AIS presidents and their councils, as well as the past and present leadership and staff of the Association.

Earlier, I described Bill King, our first president, as a force of nature. That attribution also fits Eph McLean, the founding Executive Director of AIS, who was instrumental in the development of our field and many of its strategic assets. All that, while accumulating, at last tally, 50,000 citations for nearly 200 published papers!

The future of AIS is now in the hands of at least some of you reading this memoir. A professor's value, at almost all universities, is measured by the trinity of research, teaching, and service. Typically, for non-tenured faculty our expectations are modest — paper reviews, a committee membership, assistance with faculty recruiting. But for more senior positions or other post-tenure rewards, I suggest raising our expectations from *service* to *leadership*. External service might be membership in your local SIM chapter, while leadership is guiding the chapter, say as Vice President of Programs. Refereeing papers is service but writing them well enough to get chosen for an editorial board offers an opportunity for leadership. Chairing an ICIS panel is service, but as I illustrated here in describing the contributions from Gerry, Joey,

⁹ In September 2002, *MIS Quarterly* editor's comments, "The Alliance," Ron Weber revisited the history of our attempts to knit together an alliance with *MIS Quarterly* and AIS.

Sumit, Henk, Veda, Dick, Eph, Bill, Paul, Ron, Gordon, and the two Jacks, leadership is what they and so many of our friends and colleagues have done, before and since: running a great conference, consortium, or program, editing a journal, being an officer of AIS, developing curriculum or accreditation standards or playing other essential roles — all while trying to do it better than those that came before.

11 Epilogue

Many key “incidents” didn’t make my list, some because they were too painful. One was when ICIS was embezzled and individual faculty and their departments had to bail us out. Another was during my time at LSU where I placed too many chips on one highly self-confident, but under-delivering PhD student, while pretty much neglecting for over a year a more self-deprecating one; that second student, Gabe Piccoli, currently EIC of *MISQ Executive*, has since earned 6,000 citations to our four co-authored papers and now holds the same chaired professorship at LSU from which I had once erroneously ignored him. Left off as well was my founding of, the now largely defunct, ISWorld and *MISQ Discovery* online initiatives, as well as our, perhaps premature research on virtual worlds (a.k.a. the metaverse). I also regret my tortured vote on the ICIS Executive Committee to cancel, out of overblown fear, an ICIS already scheduled for Israel.

I am guilty here of omitting well deserved recognition of dozens of individuals who have been instrumental in my life and career and in helping to push our discipline forward. I have also been largely silent about my own research and teaching and thus have left unmentioned the many students, co-authors and colleagues who have mentored, supported, guided, redirected, or rescued me. Others, too, have gone unacknowledged, including many friends and colleagues who have joined or led me as we have tilted at the windmills of our field’s own, often lagging, information systems infrastructure. If you are among any of these groups, I hope you will forgive me and accept my thanks.

Thanks also to my mother’s friends — the ones that over a half century ago sold me on a career in computing! What word would their grandchildren, or you, suggest to a nineteen-year-old today: quantum computing, blockchain, the metaverse, robotics, machine learning, virology, saving the environment, NFTs, influencing, ...?

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