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**Interfaces' Interview Series Presents****Paulo Goes**

Paulo Goes, Senior Editor of ISR was interviewed by Ray Patterson, Director of Web Strategy for INFORMS ISS in Winter 2006.



*What are you working on these days? What are your current interests?*

I think I can summarize my current research work into three main areas, which are somehow inter-related and have evolved during the past few years. The first one relates to the work with electronic markets and online auctions, which started back in 98 with Ravi Bapna and Alok Gupta, and has continued on over the years. We have looked at many interesting aspects that are particular to the online environment that have challenged the traditional economic theory of auctions. The online environment allows so many different possibilities for mechanism design of electronic markets. Active web data extraction as a basic tenet of our research has enabled so many interesting analyses, particularly with respect to participants' behavior and strategies and understanding bidding dynamics in these economic information systems. The premise of web data extraction that we were exploring led to the second main research area, which is related to the whole process of web data extraction - web data validation - web data storage and web data analysis. With seed money from UConn, we have founded in my department, CIDRIS - Center for Internet Data Research and Intelligence Services, to support this research. There are many interesting research problems in each one of the steps above, from the design of data extraction tools based on ontological models of the online environment, to extraction of information in blogs and unstructured data, to validation and piracy preservation, to advanced statistical and data mining methods. The third research area that I have been pursuing lately relates to trying the concept of "information markets" to evaluation of emerging technologies. It is still in very preliminary stages, but I believe there is a lot of potential there. Yes, I've been busy, but that's part of the fun.

*Given the declining numbers in IS majors, how do you see IS as an academic area today?*

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IS continues to be an exciting discipline, one in which change is the norm. However, in addition to the constant, incremental changes driven by technology advances, in IS we experience big jumps at points in time. That's when disruptive technologies are embraced and adopted in a significant way. This was the case in the 80's with end-user computing, later in the decade with the client-server, networked systems, and in the 90's with the Internet and the web. I think that realizing the dynamics of these processes is important in how we, the IS community, define and position the IS academic area.

IS is about using technology as enabler of business. Almost by definition it is about interdisciplinary linkages. As the enabling relationships evolve, IS academic units need to take the linkage notion to heart. What generally happens is that when we have the disruptive technology cycles and consequent "bubbles", IS academic groups benefit from them, turn inwards and tend to embrace the "empire building" mode. This reaction is of course facilitated by the business environment of high demand for IS skills and IS talent. We saw that in the early 80's and then again in the late 90's. When the boom goes away, typically driven by the market economic forces (such as the outsourcing phenomenon these days), we are generally caught off guard trying to adapt to the new realities of declining enrollments and the need to justify our existence. After the peak of the dot-com boom, MIS programs faced substantial decline in the enrollments to levels of just a small fraction of what they were around the year 2000. In some schools it has meant going from 300 majors to 50 majors. Gone are the good old days of multiple sections of the same course, increasing flow of overenrollment requests, hot faculty market, when IS was the envy of other Business School disciplines. Now, IS academic units scrambling to redefine their course.

***And what should that course be?***

It is important for an academic discipline to be anchored in an academic home, a department, an area, a concentration, a major, etc. It is a matter of survival and identity. In a sense we parallel what businesses do. Businesses aren't planning to do away with the roles of CIO's and CTO's. They realize the importance of IT and the IT organization. If we justify our IT/IS academic units or areas, I don't think we will ever be in danger of facing what happened to a discipline such as Operations Research. Today OR doesn't have a strong academic anchoring in departments or teaching areas. To preserve and foster our anchoring as an academic discipline, we need to design and position our IS units around the following premises. First we have to continuously provide interdisciplinary linkages through offering well designed courses that appeal to non-majors. At the University of Alberta you have been very successful with this approach ---enrollments in IS courses are at all time high. . But we need to be leaders in the linkage (pushing), not followers (being pulled). For example, we need to take the lead in offering courses in Data Mining and Business Intelligence, and not wait for Marketing to define the area. Or take the lead in offering IT-based Services Management. We also need to be comfortable with the notion that we can play a great secondary or minor concentration role for Accounting,

Marketing and Finance. There is nothing wrong with it and enrollments in our courses will rise. Courses on data management, data mining, process modeling, etc. are good candidates for this. The second premise is to continue to have a core major or concentration, but be aware that we need to proactively update the curriculum. We are witnessing now a gradual surge in the demand for IS majors, but we need to recognize that the enrollment levels in majors will never go back to the peak years, not in the short run, not until we face another innovative, disruptive technology wave. The market now demands a different type of IS major, graduates with skills in project management, security, technology evaluation, data analytics and business analysis. No longer is a wide variety of programming and coding skills demanded.

***What about IS research?***

From my involvement in the editorial process, attendance and organization of conferences and workshops, I really think that the quality of IS research is very strong and is getting better. We need to promote this reality more. Unlike the teaching, programmatic dimension of IS, our research hasn't been following peaks and valleys, but is steadily rising in quality. This is due to the infusion of a new wave of well trained junior faculty who come from strong research institutions, and the pursuit of very exciting research areas. At more focused workshops and conferences I'm very familiar with, such as WITS, WISE and CIST, one can witness a very vibrant IS research community in action with both quality submissions and attendance rising. Overall, the impact factors of IS journals have also been growing. I also think that in the research dimension, exploring the interdisciplinary aspects of IS has been a very successful endeavor. I'm co-chairing the next CIST conference in November with Arvind Malhotra from North Carolina. We have deliberately chosen the theme of IS interdisciplinary research and are looking forward to what I guarantee will be a strong research program.

***As a Senior Editor of ISR what do you see in terms of general trends? Any common mistakes that authors make that can be avoided?***

As I said in the answer to the previous question, overall I see increasing quality in the research being submitted to ISR. My role as SE has been to handle the technical / design science papers (WITS community, if you will), analytical modeling and economics modeling papers. The main issues with such papers that reviewers usually raise are related to external validity, justification for assumptions, etc. The other issue that comes up all the time is about the extent of the contribution. This is very true for some analytical modeling papers, in which sometimes the overall contribution is just incremental, i.e., new results are obtained by relaxing one or two assumptions or by making the math a little more sophisticated. Authors some times lose sight that the real impact is on the problem being solved, not the methodology. That's where IS research becomes relevant to practice. There is no shortage of important problems out there, where IS research can be impactful: outsourcing and BPO, IT

governance, information integration, new organization forms, all the interdisciplinary problems I mentioned before, from virtual communities to electronic markets, online retailing, privacy and security, IT-driven supply chain, evaluation and justification of technologies, etc. You talk to CIO's and top management in general and you realize that these are problems that are indeed relevant to practice.

***Given the current state of the IS discipline, what are your thoughts on what it takes to be a successful IS academic?***

It is redundant to say that being successful as an academic in research institutions is to generate and publish top research. Teaching and service are very important, but one should formulate them as constraints to be satisfied at given levels established by the institutions, and research as the objective function in the optimization problem. Many ingredients are necessary to maximize this objective function. When I started my career, a very successful researcher gave me the following advice. I think these points cover all the ingredients, from topic selection, to execution, to facilitating the publication process. I have found that it is easy to stray away from these guidelines, but they do help set up your priorities as a young researcher.

1. Stick to your knitting. Develop research streams instead of going after the latest fad.
2. Protect your peak hours. Recognize your most productive time of the day, and guard those hours any way you can. This might involve doing things like asking your department chair to not schedule your teaching in the morning, or reach compromises with your family if you are most productive at night. Avoid committee work during your best research times.
3. Learn to say no to activities that pull you away from time spent in research. When in doubt, don't!
4. Leverage co-authors. Research is much more fun when you work with someone else. Nothing beats the back and forth of that stimulating intellectual exchange. Also, nobody can do everything very well. Hook up with people who can complement your deficiencies, e.g., writing, empirical work, etc
5. Never send a manuscript in before it is ready. Workshop the paper first, especially if you are targeting a top tier journal. Study the style of successful authors and emulate them.
6. Give a good show. Do your best in conference presentations. That's where you will meet future reviewers, editors, etc. Networking is of fundamental importance. Volunteer to program committees, refereeing, etc.

About the Interviewer

*Ray Patterson is Associate Professor in the Accounting and Management Information Systems faculty at the University of Alberta and Director of Web Strategy for the INFORMS IS Society.*

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