Preface to Volume 13

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Introduction

As of 1 January 2011, I have been two years as Editor-in-Chief of *Informing Science: the International Journal of an Emerging Transdiscipline (InformSciJ)*. As Volume 13 is readied for printing, I felt the time is right to assess our progress towards achieving the goals I proposed two years ago.

Progress towards Our Mission

When I became Editor-in-Chief, I described the mission of *InformSciJ* as follows:

> *Informing Science: the International Journal of an Emerging Transdiscipline* shall be the principal channel for sharing knowledge about and encouraging interest in informing across a diverse body of researchers drawn from many disciplines and nations.

In many ways, we have remained true to this mission. A quick look at the articles that we have published over the past two years shows that we have continued to be very international in flavor. Historically, less than 50% of our publications have been from U.S. institutions and authors. This is unusual for any journal published in the U.S. and is a trend well worth continuing.

We also continue to publish work from many different disciplines and, particularly welcome, see that many of our articles represent collaborations between authors coming from different disciplines. Such broad representation and collaboration is the lifeblood of a transdiscipline. It is all too easy for a journal to gravitate towards a particular perspective on research. It is heartening to see that the authors submitting their work to *InformSciJ* are resisting that tendency.

I am also happy to report that the linkage between our research and the general problem of "informing" has grown much tighter over the past two years. While there was a time when *InformSciJ* would publish almost any high quality submission from its contributing disciplines (e.g., MIS, education, communications, philosophy, instructional technology), that is no longer the case. Today, every article we publish identifies how its topic relates to informing. I will admit that, in the past, I have been somewhat heavy handed in enforcing that such a linkage be present. Recently, however, I have found authors increasingly taking it upon themselves to relate their findings to informing without my intervention. While the journal has missed the opportunity to publish some excellent work as a result, I am convinced that our long term interests are best served by being true to the central problem that we are studying.

Finally, while we have quite a ways to go before we could be considered the "principal channel" of anything, we have started to gain quiet recognition in other disciplines. In just the past few months, I have been asked to offer the informing science perspective on the research agenda of MIS as part of a panel at the *International Conference on Information Systems* (ICIS, 2010), held in Saint Louis. In spring 2011, a symposium on academic informing systems in engineering is to be held for the first time in Orlando, Florida. In both cases the parties involved approached us after becoming acquainted with work published in *Informing Science Institute* outlets. While in-

forming science has yet to become a household name, it is clear that the work we are doing is starting to spread outside our tight community of scholars.

Hopes for the Coming Years

While I am obviously pleased that informing science continues to move forward as a transdiscipline and that *InformSciJ* continues to evolve as a journal, I remain convinced that there are areas where there is room for further progress. In my open letter to the informing science community of two years ago (Gill, 2009), I identified a number of different types of research that *InformSciJ* was eager to publish. The list I proposed was as follows:

- *Synthesis:* An existing body of theory and observations are organized into a more cohesive whole. A literature review may fall into this category, but only if it attempts to propose a novel systematic organization for the existing literature.
- *Illustration:* The meaning or implications of a particular theory are explained and clarified through an illustrative example. In the business literature, for example, nearly all practitioner-directed publications use this technique extensively.
- *Unexplained Observation:* A rich observation, often having properties not well explained with existing theory, which is offered without serious attempt to incorporate it into theory. It is interesting to note that while research of the form "I observed this but I can't explain it" would be nearly impossible to publish in any social science journal known to me, such anomalous observations often form the basis for scientific revolution (Kuhn, 1970)—such as the Michelson Morley experiment, which paved the way for Einstein's special relativity.

I believe that there is much more we can do in these areas; sadly, much of the excellent research we publish could have equally well found a home in any of a dozen respectable journals. I encourage perspective authors not to view what constitutes "research" too narrowly. *As the topics we study become more complex, the need to communicate our findings (and other thoughts) effectively becomes an increasingly important part of the knowledge creation process.* Many of the issues we study may not diffuse well if presented as precisely worded experiments or objective articulations of abstract theory. I would encourage authors to experiment with more resonant forms of expression.

I would particularly like to publish more interesting stories that relate to informing systems and situations. Every organization, individual and researcher has encountered challenges relating to informing. When we describe these situations in the abstract, relating them only those theories that are familiar to our respective disciplines, we seriously limit the audience to whom they will seem relevant. The well-told story is the form of expression to which we—as human beings—are best tuned. As a transdiscipline, one of our major challenges is finding a common language through which our contributing disciplines can communicate effectively. My hope is that, in the coming years, we will devote more energy towards making our own research understandable to those researchers coming from outside of our immediate disciplines. Those authors who present their work in the form of an engaging, accurate story will find a receptive audience at the highest levels of *InformSciJ*. It would be a sad commentary on the proponents of the informing science if we were to dismiss research simply because it was written in a more resonant form than we are used to.

Conclusions

It has been a pleasure to serve as Editor-in-Chief of *Informing Science: The International Journal of an Emerging Transdiscipline* over the past few years. As I had hoped when I took this office, the relatively minor changes that I have instituted do not seem to have disrupted the many excel-

lent practices that already distinguished us from our peer journals—including our strong culture of mentorship, rapid turnaround, commitment to open knowledge sharing, and appreciation for a wide range of research philosophies and methods. I remain convinced that we will be able to remain strong in these areas in the coming years, even as we continue to press up against the restrictive boundaries of conventional disciplinary research.

References

Gill, T.G. (2009). An open letter to the informing science community, *Informing Science: The International Journal of an Emerging Transdiscipline, 12*, v-ix. Retrieved from http://inform.nu/Articles/Vol12/ISJv12pv-xGill.pdf

Biography

Grandon Gill is a Professor in the Information Systems & Decision Sciences department at the University of South Florida. He holds a doctorate in Management Information Systems from Harvard Business School, where he also received his M.B.A. His principal research areas are the impacts of complexity on decision-making and IS education, and he has published many articles in the areas of expert systems, innovative educational technologies and informing. His most recent book is *Informing Business: research and Education on a Rugged Landscape* (Informing Science press, 2010). Currently, he serves as Editor-in-Chief of *Informing Science: The International Journal of an Emerging Transdiscipline* and an Editor of the *Journal of IT Education.*