



CELEBRATING YEARS OF SERVING SOCIETY 30

Over the next few months, AIS will be highlighting the story of the organization's origins through a series of articles called AIS From the Start. Follow along as we explore how the field of Information Systems continued to grow and how the formation of our 30-year-old organization has helped to support the field through research and innovation.

Piecing Together the IS Puzzle

Before the establishment of the Association for Information Systems (AIS), information systems (IS) research was characterized by a fragmented landscape with limited coordination and collaboration among scholars, practitioners, and educators. While emerging as a distinct discipline, the field lacked a unified platform for scholarly exchange, sharing of knowledge, and advancement of research agendas. Consequently, research efforts were often scattered across various academic disciplines, including computer science, business management, and engineering, resulting in silos that the early pioneers of IS hoped to align.

In the early days of IS in business schools, most academics in the area came from other disciplines such as economics, accounting, organizational behavior, operations research, and management science. Most IS academics had professional affiliations in other underlying disciplines and they did not see IS as its own professional field even though they were teaching and researching IS topics.

As the field grew in the 1970s and 1980s with new IS programs and class offerings, the notion of IS as a professional field of study and practice grew. Many IS academics saw the need for an organization that could represent the professional values and aspirations of IS business-school academics. Although the focus differs somewhat from region to region, the predominant approach was to recognize the different needs of IS academics from those of faculty in computer and information science.

In 1974, Niels Bjørn-Andersen worked to establish an academic network beyond Nordic countries and proposed the establishment of a so-called "Technical Committee" on Information Systems. This was approved by the International Federation for Information Processing (IFIP) Council in March of 1975 as Technical Committee-8. As one of the founding members, he worked strongly to establish Working Group 8.2, where for many years he would have the role as conference chair, co-editor of proceedings, and other various roles.

Across the pond, in 1980, Gordon Davis, William (Bill) King, Blake Ives, Eph McLean, Phillip Ein-Dor, Paul Gray and others started working toward developing the field in both the institutions and research avenues.

The first major effort in this direction came in 1980 with the creation of a major international research conference—the annual International Conference on IS (ICIS)—a nonprofit organization with a governing executive committee that was responsible for site selection and choosing the conference chair and other key positions for upcoming conferences. It rapidly became a major focal point for the research interests of academics across the world.

“In 1980, the only institution was ICIS and it was held only once a year, usually in the US,” said Phillip Ein-Dor in a 2013 interview with Dov Te’eni. The first conference was held at the University of Pennsylvania as the “Conference on Information Systems”.

In 1982, Jan DeGross at the University of Minnesota, worked with Gordon Davis on a project to build out the MIS Faculty Directories. “I developed a database from everybody’s rolodex cards and sent out, by mail, questions to ask, ” said DeGross. “The first edition was in 1983 with 420 people listed.” This directory helped to build a cohesive listing of faculty who were involved in IS in some form.

Throughout the early 80s, IS programs continued to appear at universities around the world. In 1985 IBM awarded \$2 million each to 13 U.S. universities to establish and enhance doctoral programs in information systems. The goal was to help graduate schools of business update their curricula and research to keep pace with the rapid advances in IS. More than 200 proposals were received by IBM and winners included:

- University of Arizona
- University of California, Los Angeles
- Claremont Graduate School
- University of Georgia
- Georgia State University
- University of Illinois
- Indiana University
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- University of Minnesota
- University of Pennsylvania
- University of Pittsburgh
- University of Rochester
- University of Texas at Austin

This investment helped winning programs share their knowledge with programs across the globe. With the rapidly changing infrastructure and the complexity of information systems ever increasing, IS programs worldwide were established.

By 1986, as Canadian and European attendance and participation at ICIS continued to grow, "International" was appended to the name, thereby creating the International Conference on Information Systems.

As ICIS grew and prospered, various informal groups met there to discuss the need for a professional organization to more broadly represent the interests of IS academics. Several studies and surveys were conducted with mixed results and little action.

"Bill King came along with the idea of establishing an association for information systems. We held discussions about where we should go in organizing the field," said Ein-Dor. "From the very beginning, the decision was made that it should be an international organization. The idea was to establish AIS to increase the visibility and influence of the IS discipline in those universities in which it existed. Also, to encourage intellectual development of the field."

The journey of IS from its fragmented beginnings to the early discussions surrounding a formal organization, showcases the evolution and maturation of the field. As IS programs continued to grow and conferences like ICIS gained prominence, the need for a professional organization became apparent.

The next article on the history of AIS will cover the start of the organization and how pioneers came together to blend service and community to form the Association for Information Systems.

Sources:

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