The Interdisciplinary Study of Information

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OVERVIEW
To mark the 75th anniversary of ASIS&T this panel addresses the nature and recent history of the field of information science. It uses as a springboard The Study of Information: Interdisciplinary Messages, a collection of writings edited by economist Fritz Machlup and Una Mansfield (1983). More than a quarter of a century ago, The Study of Information (for short) presented the mandates of nine research specialties centered on information, namely: cognitive science, informatics, artificial intelligence, linguistics, library and information science, cybernetics, information theory, and systems theory. By illuminating the concerns, similarities, and differences of these related domains the book established one of the first and most lucid geographies of information as an interdisciplinary academic enterprise. In its day, reviewers described The Study of Information as “a quite remarkable overview” (Hayes, 1985), “an extraordinary volume” (Barnes, 1985), and “an historically significant book” (Harmon, 1987).

Against this backdrop our panel reflects upon the intervening years and asks: How has the “interdisciplinary” study of information changed? To begin, Jenna Hartel will introduce The Study of Information: Interdisciplinary Messages (Machlup & Mansfield, 1983) and in a succinct manner outline its structure, content, and interdisciplinary thesis. Next, as the keynote of the session, Steve Fuller, an internationally renowned public intellectual and sociologist of science, will consider the text in terms of what it means to study information today, especially given the increased centrality of information to both personal and public life and the rise of the iSchool movement. Specifically, he will examine these trends in relation to two foundational works from his field that mark their anniversary this year: Thomas Kuhn’s The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (50th) and Bruno Latour’s Science in Action (25th). Laurie Bonnici, lead author of a forthcoming book on the panel’s topic, will report findings from a study of the disciplinary structures of library and information science and the iSchool movement utilizing Abbott’s (2001) Chaos of Disciplines. Discussion will center upon the internal and external factors that contributed to the disciplinary evolution of the iSchools. Then, Rick Szostak, Professor of Economics and Interdisciplinary Studies at the University of Alberta, and the author of several articles in information science, will explore how information science can best serve the needs of interdisciplinary scholarship. Drawing on the presentations of other panelists, he will explore recent developments in both information science and the scholarship of interdisciplinarity. Each presentation will be timed to keep the agenda on schedule. Upon completion of the formal talks there will be a conversation with the audience, hosted by Steve Fuller.

Keywords  
Interdisciplinarity, disciplinary structure, history of information science, theoretical foundations of information science

IMPORTANCE AND POTENTIAL IMPACT  
We feel the nature and recent history of information science is a fundamental concern of all ASIS&T members. The topic at hand determines the constitution of faculties, design of curriculums, substance of conferences, public opinion about information science, and other matters of signal importance. We believe conversation and debate on this matter have yet to engage fully with the larger currents of recent intellectual history, the philosophy and sociology of science, or interdisciplinary scholarship, as offered in this panel.
AGENDA

The panel session is centered on the talk by Steve Fuller. It will be preceded by a brief introduction and followed by commentary. The event runs for 90 minutes and the agenda is listed below.

- An Introduction to "The Study of Information" (Machlup & Mansfield, 1983) by Jenna Hartel [10 minutes]
- Reprising "The Study of Information" by Steve Fuller, [25 minutes]
- Factors of Disciplinary Identity by Laurie Bonnici [20 minutes]
- The Study of Interdisciplinary Information by Rick Szostak [20 minutes]
- Audience Discussion hosted by Steve Fuller [15 minutes]

PANELISTS

Dr. Jenna Hartel, Faculty of Information, University of Toronto

In 2007 Jenna Hartel received a doctorate in the philosophy of information studies from the University of California, Los Angeles and is now an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Information, University of Toronto. She is a specialist in information behavior in everyday life and leisure realms (Hartel, 2010a), and also conducts research into the theory, history, and methods of information science. Dr. Hartel is the creator of Metatheoretical Snowmen (Hartel, 2009, 2010b), a competitive examination of metatheory in information science. She will provide a succinct introduction to Machlup and Mansfield’s text that serves as a point of departure for the panel.

Dr. Steve Fuller, Department of Sociology, University of Warwick

Steve Fuller is an American philosopher-sociologist and the Auguste Comte Professor of Social Epistemology at the University of Warwick (UK). He is credited with founding the field of social epistemology (Fuller, 1988), a normative discipline that addresses philosophical problems of knowledge using the tools of history and the social sciences. He has been a leader in interdisciplinary fields, especially science and technology studies, rhetoric of science and psychology of science. In addition to 18 books, Dr. Fuller has written more than 200 book chapters and academic articles. He has given many distinguished lectures and plenary addresses and has presented to academic and non-academic audiences throughout the world. His writings have been translated into 15 languages and 23 academic symposia have been published on his work. Dr. Fuller will offer the keynote of the panel: Reprising The Study of Information and also facilitate the discussion that follows.

Dr. Laurie Bonnici, School of Library and Information Studies, University of Alabama

Dr. Bonnici is Assistant Professor at the University of Alabama, School of Library and Information Studies. Her research is focused in two areas: information technologies for universal access as well as disciplinarity and education for library and information science. She is currently lead author on writing a book with Dr. Kathleen Burnett (FSU) and Dr. Mega Subramanium (U. Maryland). The book is titled The Study of Information Revisited: Chaos in the Emergence of Disciplinary Identity which evolved from a research study on issues of accreditation for LIS education. Dr. Bonnici will contribute the presentation Factors of Disciplinary Identity.

Dr. Rick Szostak, Department of Economics, University of Alberta

Rick Szostak is Professor of Economics and Interdisciplinary Studies at the University of Alberta. He is the President of the Association for Integrative Studies. His research largely focuses on how best to facilitate interdisciplinary scholarship. He is the author of ten books and some fifty articles and book chapters, all interdisciplinary in orientation. He believes that information science can better serve the needs of interdisciplinary scholarship. He is the author of Classifying Science (2004), and articles in the Journal of Documentation, JASIS&T, and Knowledge Organization. He is at present working on a co-authored book, Interdisciplinary Knowledge Organization. Trained as an economic historian, Rick believes that we need to understand our past in order to plot our future. His talk on the panel is entitled The Study of Interdisciplinary Information.

REFERENCES


