

iSchools Forum
Microsoft/iDeans Partnership Brainstorming Session
July 20, 2011

1. iCaucus Chair Harry Bruce (Washington) appealed first and foremost for something that would benefit *all* of the iSchools, and help improve their visibility. He pointed to a key commonality—all of the iSchools have doctoral programs (a Caucus requirement)—so something targeting this level would be highly desirable. When polled, the deans seemed to agree that the priority level was: 1) PhD students; 2) Undergrad students; 3) Masters students.

In terms of **doctoral-oriented programs**, suggestions included:

- A “targeted and prestigious” dissertation award sponsored by Microsoft.
- Scholarship and Fellowships—including sponsoring of a dissertation.
- Interest was also expressed in the Cambridge-based “PhD summer-school” concept that Alex Wade (Microsoft) described.
- Elizabeth Liddy (Syracuse) suggested something that would involve teams /competitions across the schools, picking up on the contest idea floated by Lee Dirks (Microsoft) in his presentation.
- Bruce suggested that Microsoft could indicate “these are the things we are targeting,” and this in turn could be picked up by students (advised by faculty).
- [Incidentally, Clark Heideger (iCaucus) notes that were a contest to be tied to the annual iConference cycle, it would greatly benefit the iSchools’ publicity and engagement efforts.]

2. Several deans noted that **undergraduates are typically more interested in industry/entrepreneurship** (grad students perhaps being more focused on academia). Liddy noted that if there could be a commercial product at the end of whatever the program was, “students would love that.”

Wade floated the idea of a project/contest where finalists get to make a VC-style pitch to MS. Liddy liked this. Larry Dennis (Florida State) endorsed the summer school idea, noting that it brings “what Microsoft is doing back to the iSchools.” Called for joint work on projects between students and researchers.

3. Liddy stressed that all fields and businesses increasingly need people who can do **Big Data**. She said there are few tools out there, and the schools are new at teaching this. So it is a huge need and a huge opportunity: “work together to utilize tools, not just for research, but for preparing students for industry.”

4. Several deans pointed to other **partnership models**. John Unsworth (Illinois) noted that libraries at roughly a dozen iSchools are involved with the Hathi Trust. Michael Seadle (Berlin) mentioned their Europeana project.

David Fenske (Drexel) listed a number of Microsoft products and services (Academic Search, Bing, etc.) He noted that as far as the iSchools were concerned they had a commonality of

interest in metadata, so perhaps something could be “tied to a platform on which to build these answers.”

It was noted that ChronoZoom came out of partnerships with academic institutions—looking for something similar w/ iSchools.

Jeff MacKie-Mason (Michigan) noted that some researchers have begun using Mechanical Turk as a cheap source of experimentation subjects (although there are some inherent challenges in the quality of results). Could something like this be designed with researchers in mind?

5. Ron Larsen (Pittsburgh) picked up on Harry Bruce’s visibility theme, noting that the iCaucus was founded to **establish identity and visibility**. While relatively successful internally, there is still a need for greater visibility on campuses. Larsen appealed for things that would attract students to the field; new ideas that foster student interest. (Industry and iSchool relationship = “pipeline development.”)

It was also noted that students maybe assume that Microsoft is primarily looking for computer scientists [with the implication that perhaps they should clarify the need for information technologists]. Something as simple as a quote/positioning statement from Microsoft saying: “iSchools are in the right position to solve these problems.” It would be “huge” for Microsoft to say “*this* is important.”

Other profile-raising ideas:

- Robert Schnable (Indiana) cited ACM and Google awards, noting that “awards get attention.”
- Liddy recommended that participating students *be required* to blog and tweet, using social media to get attention.
- Fenske called attention to the (Xbox-based) avatar-conferencing methodology utilized earlier in the summit, noting its educational potential in terms of collaboration, working with autistic children, etc. He wondered if there might be an opportunity here.
- Chuanfu Chen (Wuhan) suggested a contest for information literacy.

6. Odds & Ends

- MacKie-Mason noted his school’s work in digital preservation— analog audio and video are under-preserved, and can’t be preserved with perfect fidelity.
- Seadle stressed a need to understand people and what they are doing, and how they use the tools that Microsoft is building.
- Seadle also noted that they are developing relationships new to US, and could use help in that bootstrapping effort.
- Chen also *seemed* to suggest a willingness to fund a Microsoft research position at Wuhan, perhaps focused on internet data-seeking information [this would need to be confirmed, as language issues may have confused the message.]