

iConference 2021 - Proposal for a Panel i4G - Shaping the iSchools' Identity and Interaction in a Globalized World.

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In 2020/2021, we conducted a survey on the current situation of the iSchools organization in relation to the field of information and its place within society as well as the organizational, political, economical, and societal structures iSchools operate in.

Based on a large number of qualitative interviews and a survey we gathered a comprehensive inventory of data, which allows an inductive analysis of the state of iSchools today. The project is realized internationally with funding by the Mellon Foundation. Involved institutions are the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany, Strathclyde University, UK, and Wuhan University, China for the implementation of the research design and the iSchools, Inc. as project consultant.

The emergence of the COVID-19-pandemic added an unexpected additional layer to our study. While it inevitably forced an unpredicted and complicated condition on our survey itself, it also provided interesting first-hand insights into the adaptability and resilience institutions like the iSchools need to maneuver successfully in global and highly dynamic developments and, obviously, distortions. The collaborative and international nature of the project was a use case itself and provided interesting cultural insights for everyone involved.

While a pandemic marks, hopefully, an extreme exception, innovations, disruptions and crises are a common and perpetual condition of the environment for most, if not all, iSchools. Hence, one central conclusion from our study is a general sense of less and less certainty and normality on many levels including around the concept of information itself. We see this play out in several ways. For one, related to content, “mis- and disinformation” is a predominant challenge many of the participants referenced when asked about the most pressing issues for the field of information today. Furthermore, related to identity, iSchool activities are increasingly interwoven with interdisciplinary, cross-campus, and extra-academic developments as a necessity for staying relevant. Such intercon-

nectivity leads to an array of new challenges and calls for new ways of management, teaching, and research. The iSchools' idea and culture can be ideally seen as a way to convey, instruct, and foster the needed collaboration to steer and evolve successfully within changing, often volatile settings.

The interviews unveiled a row of insights, most prominently on how iSchools are coping with contemporary challenges including, as stated, a pandemic and lockdown-situations. There is a lot of insight on three broad levels:

- how the schools are generally situated within their particular environment and how content they feel in their setting,
- where they respectively see the field of information and their teaching and research activities evolving to, and finally,
- how they perceive the role, branding, messaging, and services of the iSchools organization, its values and its current shortcomings.

The proposed panel presents the most significant - preliminary - findings of our study and a set of arguments deducted from our reading of the findings. Those will be the starting point for an in situ panel discussion as well as, subsequently, an open, ongoing, and moderated discourse in a digital forum. We opted for this two tier-approach of presentation and discussion as we aim to be as open for participation for the iSchools community as possible. An extensive summary of our findings will be provided by the time of the panel and available as an annotatable document for further discussion.