

Letter from the Editor Keeping Current

Robert G. Brookshire

When people I meet find out that I teach computer information systems, one of the most frequent questions I get is, "How do you manage to keep up with all the changes in your field?" I explain that I use a variety of different strategies depending on whether I am trying to keep up with new developments in research, in the profession, or in teaching.

To stay informed in research, it is of course imperative to read journals such as the *Information Technology, Learning, and Performance Journal*. Refereed journals like this one are our most important forums for the presentation of research results. We all know, however, that by the time an article appears in a refereed journal, it has often been one, two, or sometimes even more years since the original research work was done. The process of preparing a manuscript for publication, going through the peer review process, and making revisions means that the research about which we read in journals is hardly current.

One can get previews of forthcoming research articles by attending academic meetings such as OSRA's Annual Research Conference. At our February 2002 meeting, I saw presentations of papers which I eagerly anticipate receiving as article submissions in the near future. Although papers presented at conferences do not always represent the authors' final, polished work, they provide the first public glimpse of the fruits of serious scholarly inquiry.

There are so many meetings in our field, though, that one cannot possibly attend all of them, even if our travel budgets were unlimited. Even in a single meeting, there are often multiple tracks, so it is impossible to attend all the presentations. And those presentations that we do go to are often so brief that it is difficult to get much more than an overview of the research being reported.

Serving as a reviewer for a journal or conference proceedings gives one a much more detailed look at current research. Granted, the quality of the papers under review is not always outstanding. Even the papers that are not ready to see the light of day can be instructive, however. A reviewer learns much by carefully evaluating the work of others, suggesting revisions, changes, or new approaches. At the same time, the reviewer gets in-depth exposure to a wide range of research.

It is easy to become a reviewer for the *Information Technology, Learning, and Performance Journal*. All you have to do is to drop an e-mail to me at brookserg@jmu.edu giving me your contact information and letting me know what kinds of manuscripts you feel qualified to review. You will gain a valuable, comprehensive view of the publication process as well as a first look at new research. You will also get the satisfaction of serving your profession in an important capacity.

For staying current with the profession, I find on-line newsletters and discussion lists particularly helpful. Discussion lists like OSRA-L and ISWORLD deliver announcements of conferences, calls for papers, job openings, and research inquiries directly to your e-mail inbox. Some lists, like OSRA-L, usually generate only a few messages a month, while others, like ISWORLD, can generate a dozen or so a day. To subscribe to OSRA-L, send the e-mail message SUBSCRIBE OSRA-L your_first_name your_last_name to listserv@listserv.vt.edu. To subscribe to ISWORLD, send the message SUBSCRIBE ISWORLD your_first_name your_last_name to LISTSERV@listserv.heanet.ie.

Robert G. Brookshire is Professor and Director of the Computer Information Systems and Operations Management Program in the College of Business at James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia.

For staying abreast of teaching innovations, I find that nothing beats face-to-face contact with my colleagues, whether they are at my own institution or farther away. Hallway conversations with other instructors, in my own department and in other fields, have consistently provided me with the most inspiration to try new techniques. From the construction of test questions, to livening up a PowerPoint presentation, to dealing with student problems, associates at my own institution have been invaluable.

At conferences such as OSRA's, I get opportunities to exchange teaching tips with instructors from a variety of institutions and settings. I meet colleagues from large, research-oriented universities, from small departments and schools, and from industry training organizations. These contacts provide me with unique outside perspectives, introducing me to challenging new ideas.

About This Issue

I also learn much about teaching from journals that publish pedagogical articles. In this issue of the *Information Technology, Learning, and Performance Journal* we are concentrating on teaching-related research and practice. We had not intended to put together a special theme issue on teaching, but we were lucky enough to receive a wealth of stimulating submissions on pedagogy.

Across the country, faculty have increasingly been called upon to teach both distance and face-to-face classes. In "Collaborative Accounting Problem Solving via Group Support Systems in a Face-to-Face Versus Distant Learning Environment," Jacqueline Burke compares these two modalities, introducing different levels of task difficulty into the analysis. She finds that perceptions of social presence play an important role in stimulating student participation.

Randy McCoy's article, "Computer Competencies for the 21st Century Information Systems Educator," presents the results of a Delphi study conducted to determine what computer skills are needed by educators in the new century. Randy reports that hardware, software, programming, and integration skills were found to be important, as well as general knowledge about computers and information systems.

Susan Kruck and Harry Reif address a common classroom management problem in their article, "Assessing Individual Student Performance in Collaborative Projects: A Case Study." As information systems educators use more group work in their classes, how are they to measure the contributions of individual group members to the project? They present several strategies worth considering.

Jensen Zhao faces a problem common to many who teach information technology topics. Developing useful web applications often requires that student employ tools that are difficult to learn. Jensen finds that complex financial applications can be developed for the web using spreadsheets rather than programming languages, but developers and instructors must be aware that not all web browsers have the capability to run them.

Finally, Lila Waldman reviews *Office Space Planning: Designing for Tomorrow's Workplace* by Alexi Marmot and Joanna Eley. Lila had originally considered this book for adoption as a text in an Information and Office Environment Management course. Although she finds this book doesn't meet her needs for a textbook, it is a valuable resource for teachers.

We offer for your consideration these articles to invigorate and inspire your teaching. We hope that you will find this unplanned special issue on information technology pedagogy useful and informative.

GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

The *Information Technology, Learning, and Performance Journal*, formerly known as the *Office System Research Journal*, publishes articles related to the field of organizational and end-user information systems (OEIS). Submissions may present the results of research in the discipline, deal with research methodologies and data treatment techniques, or describe research or experiences related to instruction in the discipline. For the “Making a Difference” section, manuscripts that discuss our theoretical bases or describe an innovative policy, procedure, method, technique, or practice that has potential benefit for systems professionals and/or educators and technology trainers are encouraged. We also accept reviews of current books—both academic and popular presses—related to OEIS. All submissions are submitted to a blind review process.

Authors should follow the style described for manuscripts and bibliographies in the Fifth Edition (2001) of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*; however, tables should be single-spaced. Authors should not be identified anywhere in the manuscript. Submit four copies of the manuscript. On the original copy, include a cover page with author name, title, organizational affiliation, telephone number, and email address. A 100-150 word abstract of the manuscript should be included with the manuscript.

Manuscripts should be submitted exclusively to the *Information Technology, Learning, and Performance Journal*. Previously published manuscripts are not acceptable. Manuscripts are selected through a blind review process involving the editors and referees selected from the Review Board. The Journal is indexed in the *Business Education Index*, the *Current Index to Journals in Education*, and the *Computer Literature Index*.

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