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The iSchools: A Study

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Abstract

Information School, popularly known as iSchool, played a vital role in the arena of the Information Science. An information school popularly known as iSchools or iSchool or “School of Information”, “Department of Information Studies” and “Information Department” is a nonprofit making university level organization and professional association whose sole objective is to nurture information and technology. iSchools organization, set up in 2005, is a collective effort of iSchools to advance the field of information in the 21st century. Actually information schools refer to the members of the iSchools organization, which is formerly known as iSchools project, governed by the iCaucus (The group of Deans). The group members share their views focusing on the facets of information systems, Library and Information Science, informatics. The paper examines the role of the iSchool in the arena of Information Science. A brief history of iSchool movement is stated here. The paper describes the vision and goals of iSchool. Three major functions of iSchool are also enumerated here. The paper presents a detailed analysis of fifty seven iSchool member institutions and iConference and criteria for membership of iSchool. Some suggestions are stated to conclude the paper, at the end.

Keywords :

Professional Association, Library Association, iSchool, Information School, Information Studies, Information Science, LIS Education, iConference.

“To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield”

-- Ulysses of Alfred, Lord Tennyson

Introduction

It is not possible for a person or a single institution to boost the profession of any field of knowledge. So the collective efforts from an interested group are needed to develop the profession. These collective efforts may be performed by any professional associations or organizations. An information school popularly known as iSchools or iSchool or “School of Information”, “Department of Information Studies” and “Information Department” is such a nonprofit making university oriented organization and information professional association whose sole objective is to nurture information and technology. iSchool organization, founded in 2005, is a consortium of around eighty iSchools spread all over the world to provide right information to the right people at right time to achieve their potential with the help of information technology. Actually iSchools refer to the members of iSchools (www.ischools.org) organization, popularly known as the “iSchools project”, conducted by the iCaucus (Gang of Deans of University). The iCaucus, the decision making board of directors, includes permanent and elected members from the member institution of iSchools. The organization incorporated as iSchools Inc. in 2015, and it was given a non-profit status in 2016 under the district of Columbia Non-Profit Corporation Code, D.C. Code. It is very surprising to note that every year the world creates more than 281 billion gigabytes of information (<https://ischool.syr.edu>). This huge amount of information is really embarrassing to manage. In this respect an intensive study is required to find out the users and uses of information. To manage this situation, information schools offer degrees regarding architecture of information, design of information, economics of information, information policy, information retrieval, information security, telecommunications, knowledge management, user experience design, usability, preservation and conservation, digital preservation, librarianship, library administration, social implications of information, etc. . Information schools give focus on interdisciplinary approach to understanding the opportunities and challenges of information management. They show the relationship between information, technology and people. iSchool has become an important bridge between users of information and designers of Information Systems by linking society with the information it needs. Though different iSchools may have their different opinions but together they exchange a primary interest in the relationships between information, people and technology.

History of iSchool

The movement of iSchool initiated in 1988 when three Deans (<https://ischool.syr.edu>) (Toni Carbo of the University of Pittsburg, Richard Lytle of the Drexel University, and Von Dran of Syracuse University of Information Schools) formed a “Gang of Three.” It must be mentioned that Von Dran was the key person for the development of iSchools and he was the pioneer of the the iSchools movement. Later Richard Budd of the Rutgers University joined the gang called

“Gang of Four.” Then the Gang met for informal conversations at the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE). It is to be observed that all the information schools offered Graduation programme in Library & Information Science (LIS) and undergraduate course on information science, telecommunications, journalism, etc. The objective of this ‘Gang’ was to exchange information among them and to develop the field of Information Science. An informal meeting between the gang members held in the mid-1990 to share their views. In Pittsburgh in 2001 this gang was reorganized under Toni’s leadership and the deans from Syracuse University (Name of the Dean: Raymond von Dran), Drexel University (Name of the Dean: David Fenske), the University of Washington’s Information School (Name of the Dean: Michael Eisenberg), and the University of Michigan’s School of Information (Name of the Dean: John King) met to form the “Gang of Five”. At the onset of 2003, the membership of the Gang increased due to inclusion of deans from the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois (<https://ischool.illinois.edu>), the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina, the College of Information at Florida State University, the School of Informatics at Indiana University, and the School of Information at the University of Texas and the gang was renamed as “Gang of Ten.” From 2003 onwards the deans met due to their common interest twice per year and this group was primarily called “the iSchools Caucus” or iCaucus and the growth of membership became high. As of 2008, twenty-one iSchools in the U.S. and Canada have joined the “iCaucus”, a forum in which iSchools’ deans share their collective interests through “iConference” and the web site of iSchools.

Prior Work

Larsen in 2010 stated the in depth history of the iSchool movement whereas in 2009, In 2012 the key attributes of iSchools have been observed on the basis of intellectual coverage, and research areas by Andrew Dillon in his research paper. He mainly stresses in his paper curriculum coverage of iSchools. Wiggins and Sawyer in a paper discusses the trends of hiring of faculty in the iSchool community and classify the intellectual domains of faculty of iSchools through an analytical study.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of the study is to collect and consolidate information about iSchools. But other objectives are—

- To study geographical distribution of iSchools in the world
- To study the academic unit wise distribution of iSchools
- To know about iConference

Scope of the study

The research is focused on iSchools spread all over the world. But the study is restricted 57 iSchool member institutions spread around the world and the iSchool member institutions have been chosen free from any biasness and from Europran, Asia-pacific and NorthAmerican Region.

Research Methodology

The study offers an overview of iSchools with the objectives as stated above. For the present research, the following methodology has been adopted for better interpretation and understanding of the research.

Survey

The survey was conducted keeping in the mind of objectives of the research and a specially designed excel sheet was prepared for data collection and better interpretation and understanding. After careful data collection, the data was analyzed and interpreted with simple percentage. For the calculation of average, simple percentage is rounded off. To analyze the activities of iSchool the Charter of iSchools was consulted.

Interview

The researchers also sent email to the faculties of the concerned department for bridging the gap of data collection for better results.

Literature Search

Official websites of fifty seven iSchools were also consulted for collecting information.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to fifty seven iSchools spread all over the world and the iSchools were chosen from different regions of the world.

Vision of iSchools

- To increase the member institution of iSchools and to influence them
- To advocate the power of information and technology
- To maximize the potentiality of human resources
- To popularize the information field all over the world

Goals of iSchools

- To become leader and promoter in the information field
- To enhance academic opportunities
- To provide mutual support among member institution
- To make response to their opportunities and challenges in present information era
- To help to run research programme of iSchools
- To become aware with the databases to physical spaces like libraries, information centres, repositories, etc.
- To become aware with the design and preservation of information as online

Three major functions of iSchools

In the field of Education

The iSchools have played a major role in the design and development of curriculum from certificate level to postgraduate level. Corral et al. in 2013 showed that around 33% US iSchools offered one or more curation course.

In the field of Research

The iSchool faculties are interested in original research programme that includes the collection, analysis, and dissemination of information. The iSchools are interested to promote innovative research programme in the field of information.

In the field of Professional domain

The iSchools play a vital role in the professional development of iSchool member institutions by organizing iConference regularly and also provides service through news webpage, jobs webpage, etc.

Charter of iSchools

The first charter of iSchools was adopted in the month of July, 2005 through election among iSchool caucus. Till now the charter was revised five times and it was found that in 2009 the charter was revised thrice. iSchools' collective efforts i.e. the iConference, the web site, and special projects are operated by the iCaucus. The members of the iCaucus have to pay an annual membership fee and can cast one vote on iCaucus' decisions. The iCaucus charter shows membership criteria of iSchools.

Data Interpretation and Analysis

For the purpose of analysis of different aspects of iSchools and following the aforesaid objectives, the following tables and figures have been prepared for better interpretation—

Geographical distribution of iSchools in the World

Name of the States	Number of iSchools	Percentage
Australia	02	3.51
Brazil	01	1.75
Canada	03	5.26
China	02	3.51
Denmark	01	1.75
Finland	01	1.75
Germany	01	1.75
Ireland	01	1.75
Japan	01	1.75
Netherlands	01	1.75
Norway	01	1.75
Portugal	02	3.51
Singapore	01	1.75
South Korea	04	7.01
Spain	01	1.75
Sweden	01	1.75
Turkey	01	1.75
Uganda	01	1.75
The United Kingdom	04	7.01
The United States	27	47.37
Total	57	100

Table -1 : Geographical distribution of iSchools in the World

Geographical Distribution of iSchools

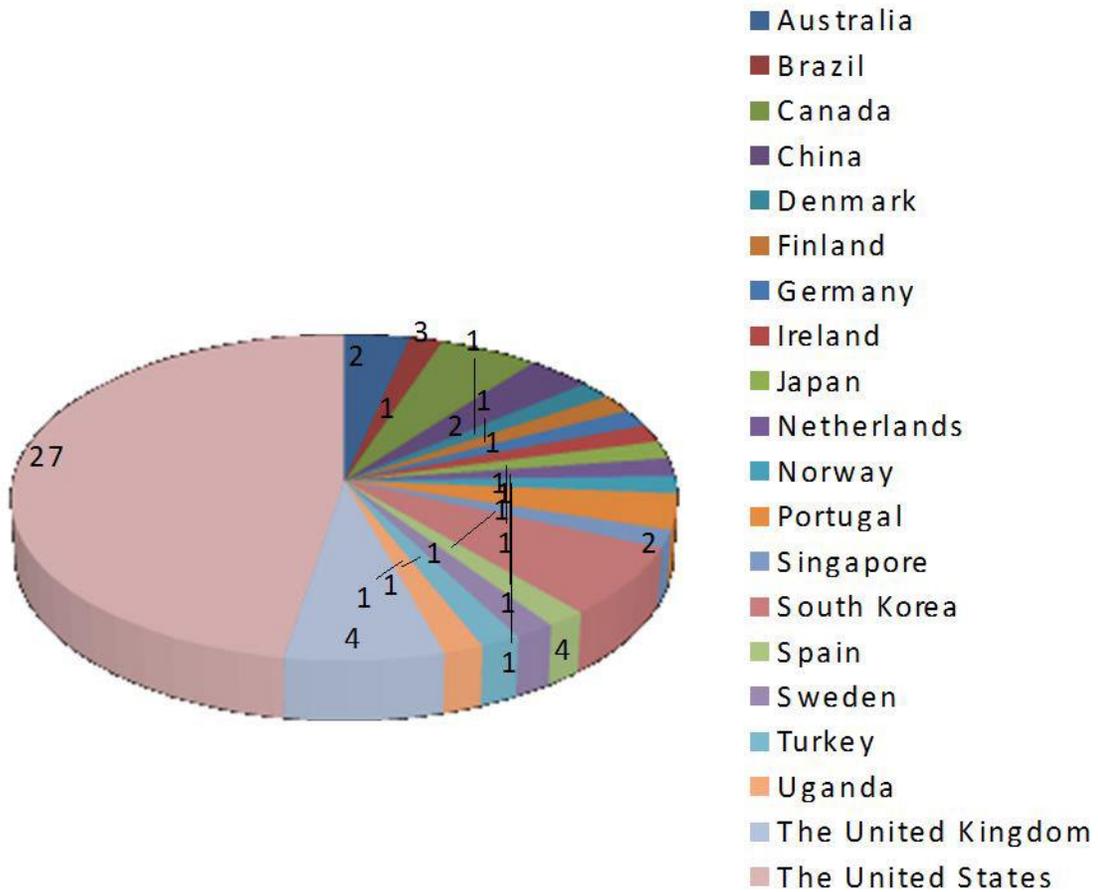


Fig. 1: Geographical distribution of iSchools

The above table-01 and the figure one state the geographical distribution of iSchools in the World. From the above it is found that the United States (27) has the largest number of iSchools followed by the United Kingdom (04) and South Korea (04) and Canada (03). From the above study it is also clear to us that iSchools in North American region have the highest number of members whereas iSchools in European region and Asia Pacific iSchools have not considerable number of members.

Academic unit wise distribution of iSchools

Academic Unit	Number of iSchools	Percentage
School of Library Science	21	36.8
College of Communication and Information	04	7.01
College of Computing	08	14.03
College of Information Science	18	31.58
Faculty of Engineering	01	1.75
Media Studies	01	1.75
IT and Mathematics	01	1.75
Not specified	01	1.75
Humanities	02	1.75
Convergence Science and Technology	01	1.75
Total	57	100

Table - 2 : Academic unit wise distribution of iSchools

Academic unit wise distribution of iSchools

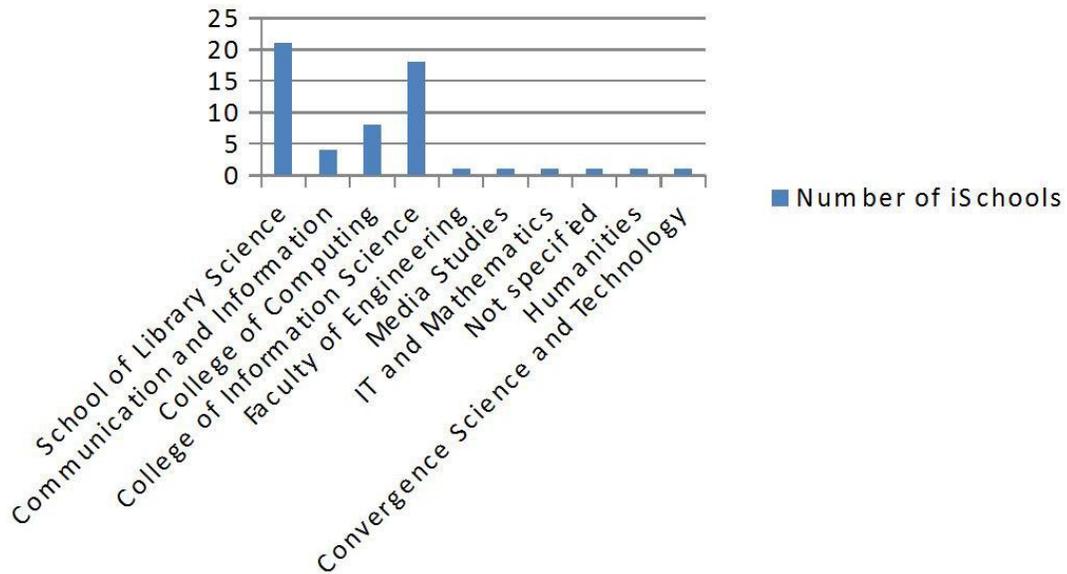


Fig. 2 : Academic unit wise distribution of iSchools

The above table-02 and the figure two clearly state that a large number of iSchools has the academic unit—School of Library Science. The point is to be noted that the School of Library Science is the promoter and leader in the information field. The academic unit related with Information Science is not far behind the Library Science academic unit. It is also observed that 14% academic unit belongs to College of Computing and more than 7% belongs to College of Communication and Information. Other notable academic units include the Faculty of Engineering, Media Studies, IT and Mathematics, Humanities, Convergence Science and Technology.

iConference

Members of iSchools organize a regular academic conference popularly known as iConference hosted by a different member institution each year. In the conference, information scholars and professionals share their views and opinions. Anyone outside the iSchools is also welcome to be present in the conference.

Year, Location, Date, Theme and Host of iConference

Year	Location	Date	Theme	Host
2005	Penn State University, University Park Campus	28 th to 30 th , September, 2005	Bridging disciplines to confront grand challenges	Pennsylvania State University
2006	Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA	15 th to 17 th October, 2006	Research Frontiers in Information	University of Michigan
2007	NO CONFERENCE	NO CONFERENCE	NO CONFERENCE	NO CONFERENCE
2008	Los Angeles, USA	28 th February to 8 th March, 2008	iFutures: Systems, Selves, Society	University of California, Los Angeles
2009	Chapel Hill, North Carolina, USA	8 th to 11 th February, 2009	iSociety: Research Education Engagement	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
2010	Urbana-Champaign, IL, USA	3 rd to 6 th February, 2010	iMPACTS	University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Graduate School of Library and Information Science
2011	Seattle, WA, USA	8 th to 11 th February, 2011	Inspiration. Integrity. Intrepidity	University of Washington, Information School
2012	Toronto, Canada	7 th to 10 th February, 2012	Culture. Design. Society	University of Toronto, Faculty of Information
2013	Fprt worth, Texas (Worthington Renaissance)	12 th to 15 th February, 2013	Scholarship in action—Data. Innovation. Wisdom	College of Information, University of North Texas
2014	Berlin, Germany	4 th to 7 th March, 2014	Breaking down walls—Culture, Context, Computing	Humboldt University
2015	Newport Beach, Marriott hotel and Spa California, USA	24 th to 27 th march, 2015	Create, Collaborate, Celebrate	University of California
2016	Loews Philadelphia Hotel, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA	20 th to 23 rd March, 2016	Partnership with Society	Drexel University

Table - 3 : Year, Location, Date, Theme and Host of iConference

The above table-03 explicates location, time, and theme and host institution of iConference (Annabi, H., Fisher, K. and Mai, J. (2005) ; Harmon, G. (2006). Harmon, G. and Debons, A. (2006); Wiggins, A., McQuaid, M. J., and Adamic, L. A. (2008)). It is noted that the iConference held in the United States of America most of the time. So it is clear from the evident that North American Continental iSchool member institution hosted the most of the conference than other continents. In the last eight years iConference used to held in the month of February or March. If anyone goes through the theme of the conference he or she is overwhelmed to know the development of information field. The conference runs 3 to 4 days and the program typically includes a doctoral colloquium, poster and paper sessions, panels, roundtables, and social events. It must be mentioned that Olson and Grudin presents the growth and development of iSchools and iConference in 2009.

Year wise distribution of papers in iConference

Year	Total Participants	Papers Presented	% of papers presenter	Doctoral Colloquium participants	% of Doctoral Colloquium participants	Posters presented	% of Posters presented	Workshops presented	% of Workshops presented
2005	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
2006	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
2007	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
2008	277	31	11	NA	NA	30	11	NA	NA
2009	305	31	10	NA	NA	77	25	02	01
2010	346	52	15	16	05	77	22	02	01
2011	538	86	16	20	04	90	17	12	02
2012	486	53	11	20	04	95	19	09	02
2013	512	36	07	23	04	93	18	12	02
2014	450	39	09	24	05	66	15	11	02
2015	531	51	10	27	05	99	19	11	02
2016	467	42	09	21	04	95	20	08	02
Average	435	47	11	22	05	80	18	08	02

Table – 4 : Year wise distribution of papers in iConference

The above table 04 states that in 2011, iConference has the largest number of participants, followed by 2015 and 2013. The average number of participants is 435. In 2011, 86 participants presented the papers i.e. 16% of total participants but in 2016 9% of total participants presented papers. It is a notable matter that 4% or 5% of total participants present Doctoral Colloquium from 2010 to 2016. In 2009, 25% of the total participants presented posters whereas in 2008, 11% of the total participants presented posters. In 2011, the highest number of workshop presenters is there but the average number of workshop presenters is almost same in each and every year.

Awards presented in iConference

Name of the Awards	For	Description
Lee Driks Best Paper Award to commemorate the memory of Lee Driks, friend and supporter of the conference. The award was sponsored by Microsoft Research.	Most outstanding paper	Prize of \$5000USD
Best Poster Award was sponsored by Emerald Publishing	Most outstanding poster	Prize
Best Note Award was sponsored by Emerald Publishing	Most outstanding note	Prize
Doctoral Dissertation Award	Most outstanding dissertation of the preceding year	Prize of \$2500USD for winner and \$1000USD for runners up
Most interesting Preliminary Results paper	Most intriguing papers in the preliminary result	Prize

Table – 5 : Awards presented in iConference

The above table-05 presents the awards presented in iConference. The prizes are lucrative and attractive. The researchers are attracted with the prizes and it is encouraging too. The awards were sponsored by Emerald Publishing and Microsoft Research. The notable attribute of the study is that the prize money for the best paper award is the highest i.e. \$5000USD.

Types of Membership

Name of the Membership	Criteria for Membership Institution	Membership Fee
Tier 1 members (iCaucus)--Permanent	Well known PhD programme and large amount of external research money	\$5000 per annum
Tier 2 members (Mid-level)	Doctoral Programme and significant research programme	\$1000 per annum
Tier 3members (Basic level)	Three year old Doctoral Programme and external research funding	\$500 per annum
Associates	Do not meet the requirements of tier one and tier two	\$300 per annum
Corporate Membership – Three Levels	Admit the value of member programs and impact of the iSchools in the society	Corporate Affiliate--\$2500 per year Corporate Associate--\$5000 per year Corporate Sponsor--\$10000 per year

Table - 6 : Types of Membership

The table-6 presents criteria and fee for membership institutions. The criteria for institution membership is not rigid but the information schools who are applying for membership should have sponsored research activity and the schools should train the would-be researchers through a research oriented program and they should work for the progress in the information field and the schools should have a reputation in the arena of research and teaching. From the above table it is evident to the researchers that the membership fee is too expensive to say. It is also observed that two types of membership forms are there. One is for General Member Institution and other is for North American Member Institution.

Other Notable Services provided by iSchools

iSchools News Webpage—All the iSchools member-institutions are encouraged to deposit electronically news stories to publish for iSchool followers in the world.

iSchool Twitter and iSchool Facebook---Both social media (Twitter and Facebook) have been exploited by iSchools organization for announcing their activities, news, conference alerts.

iSchools Jobs webpage—All the iSchool member-institutions are encouraged to deposit electronically job listings for faculty and staff positions for publication in iSchools Jobs webpage through which worldwide researchers, qualified information professionals can be accessed.

SWOC Analysis of iSchools

SWOC (S-Strength, W-Weakness, O-Opportunity and Challenges-C) analysis of the iSchools may be enumerated on the basis of the major key findings from the above —

Strength

- (i) iSchool movement has gained consensus all over the world.
- (ii) The information field becomes popularized.
- (iii) The associations organize conference regularly except in 2007. It is a great platform to share the views of information professionals. The prizes in conferences are great attractions for information professionals.
- (iv) It forms a pivot of the professional development.
- (v) A meeting of the members is sometimes held through internet or other electronic communication technology.
- (vi) They keep informed member institutions by e-mail and twitter and Facebook.
- (vii) At present the degrees offered by seventeen iSchool members out of thirty-three iCaucus members have been accredited by ALA.

Weakness

- (i) North American regional iSchool became the leader.
- (ii) The membership fee is high.
- (iii) Mass awareness regarding iSchools has not been established.

Opportunity

- (i) Avenues are open regularly regarding information science oriented research.
- (ii) Their areas of research will attract the would-be researcher and the iSchools have a great impact on society.
- (iii) iSchools publish directory for its membership institution in the website
- (iv) All iSchool member institutions used to meet annually for shaping the future of organization and they are instructed to use iSchool logo () in their WebPages and promotional matters.

Challenges

- (i) Library and Information Science becomes information science. The particular word –Library is omitted from its counterpart.
- (ii) North American biasness is present in iSchool member-institution.

Suggestion and Conclusion

From the above study it is found that iSchool has played an important role in the field of information but they are still in an early state to establish their identity all over the world. However, the iSchools have enough strength and opportunities to sustain in future but there are many threats and weaknesses behind the iSchools. It is suggested from the above study that institutional membership should be open to all schools not limited to information schools. The membership fee is so high that cannot be met for all member institutions. The membership fee should be moderate. The iSchool organization should make all the iSchools in the world aware of their goals and vision and activities. But it is noted that awareness regarding iSchool has not spread all over the world. For example, the Asian countries are not participated as member institution of iSchools like North American countries. Moreover, iConference has played a vital role in the field of Information Science and lucrative prizes in iConference are very much attractive for researchers. iSchools used to work for the betterment of research in the field of information science. It is also suggested that North American biasness should be decreased and location of conference should be spread all over the world not limited to North America. But it is noteworthy that China in Asia will host iConference in 2017. It is a matter of joy that iSchools faculty members maintain their relation with libraries, information centres, archives and they propose different research proposals and projects. To conclude it may be said that iSchools have not only a great impact in the field of Information science but also iSchools enhance the image of Information Science professional.

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