

**Observations by the Dean, Associate Dean, SIS Council Chair, and Program Chairs  
(BSIS, GIST, TeleNet, LIS)**

- 1. Changes in the School / Program over the past 5 years driven by or related to assessments.**
  - a. Shaping SIS Council as an open collaborative platform for School-wide discussion, review, and decision-making, primarily driven by the vision of the faculty/staff/students, annual planning process and other required assessment activities. Serves as a platform for on-going communication between faculty, staff, and administration.
  - b. Making strategic hires of new faculty, as opportunities present themselves, to support building of a stronger unified School. For example, two current hires for Fall 2013 have interest and capabilities to do research and teaching across the whole school; in fact, one of the new hires will also teach Information Visualization for the LIS program. Dr. Farzan (Fall 2012) is teaching both graduate and undergraduate courses. Drs. Farzan and Beaton (also Fall 2012) have built a research working group comprising faculty and students from across the degree programs.
  - c. One unified orientation event for new students across all programs.
  - d. Transition to Pitt Online which will enable the School to expand online offerings to all programs, utilize best practices and a university-supported infrastructure, support faculty in producing effective online learning experiences.
  - e. Embarked upon a year-long visioning process, which is still underway, but which has resulted in the clear definition of several key signature research strengths of the school. These strengths will drive future faculty hires and resource allocations. For example, Information Assurance was one of the signature strengths determined during this process: one of the tenure-stream faculty slots for Fall 2013 was directed to finding someone with research and teaching strengths in this area.
  - f. Led the School in a discussion on revising the Peer Review of Teaching process aimed at making the process more efficient.
- 2. Exogenous trends that have impacted or influenced the changes that have been made.**
  - a. The rapid development of the iSchools movement and the increasing visibility and influence of iField make the identity of the Information Science discipline and schools working in that discipline more prominent and more research-oriented.
  - b. The recent signals about slowing demands for new hires in LIS-related professions, the recovery of IT and Tele-related job markets, and all call

for a careful study about the program structure of the school. The School should clearly define how it wants to expand or redesign academic programs, particularly undergraduate program, to meet market demand.

- c. The economic downturn has made it much more difficult to acquire foundation funding and to be successful in establishing funds for items such as student financial aid and other support, lecture series and program development, and faculty support for travel and research. In particular, the iSchool needs to acquire additional funding for doctoral students; the lack of which will negatively impact both our ability to offer classes (TAs and TFs) and our research programs (GSRs).
- d. For several years, the School experienced critical shortages of faculty. At the same time, the increasing competition for new research-oriented faculty in a number of areas requires increased efforts to recruit future faculty (big data, digital stewardship for example). Pitt and the iSchool must become more competitive in recruiting new faculty. We see that Pitt's timeline for hiring new faculty has changed, but still not in synch well enough with other iSchools. Next year, the School will most likely be searching to fill the Doreen Boyce Chair and an untenured-position in LIS. The School might be looking to fill additional positions in the undergraduate or graduate technology-related programs in the next few years. Hopefully, the School will have the resources to be competitive in recruiting new faculty.

**3. Dominant challenges and risks to SIS and its programs that are informed or driven by current assessments.**

- a. The culture of the School is evolving gradually: we are beginning to explore, to experiment with, and, hopefully, to ultimately embrace a more holistic understanding of our institution as one unified iSchool. However, there remain legacy issues, interests, and concerns for what is lost in contrast to what is gained. The invisible-but-still-existing departmental boundaries in the faculty's ways of thinking, teaching and research still divide the school's attentions, energy and facilities. With each step towards a stronger unified school, and with new faculty hires, this challenge may eventually be resolved.
- b. How to balance the sometimes conflicting requirements of being a professional school in a top-tier research university is another challenge. Faculty members, particularly junior faculty members, often are required to be productive in their research and in seeking external funding seeking -- under heavy teaching loads.
- c. Small faculty body, which results in significant teaching loads and administrative responsibilities, creates the risk of losing junior and senior faculty with strong aspirations for research productivity, with the commensurate impact on the School's reputation.
- d. In spite of the amazing renovation of the third floor space, we work in an increasingly antiquated facility. Even with spot repair and miscellaneous

upgrades, this threatens our reputation with competing I-Schools and other institutions -- especially schools with new and newer facilities (such as Michigan and Penn State).

- 4. Notable opportunities that have become apparent as a result of current assessments.**
  - a. Research and instructional opportunities are emerging with groups on campus with whom we have had little interactions in the past, and beginning to create new opportunities for joint hiring of faculty and/or staff.
  
- 5. Potential scenarios that suggest alternative futures for the School and its programs, that offer insight into the School's 5-year prognosis and contribute to its vision.**
  - a. Recent increases in enrollment in programs other than LIS makes it possible to strategically balance the teaching burden across programs, and plan for expanding undergraduate program. However, the School must carefully consider the teaching capabilities across the school.
  - b. The recent new hires make it possible to have more faculty members who are more open to creating a stronger unified school
  - c. We need to increase our global initiatives to collaborate with other countries on education, information technology, information ethics, and open access to information.
  
- 6. How does SIS assess itself with respect to the iSchool vision and SIS mission (below)?**
  - a. The school is on the right track to become an information school, which has a more interdisciplinary emphasis; the faculty members' background and research interests are increasingly fluent across different programs; and the boundaries of programs are certainly less visible to external audiences.
  - b. The School is undertaking a long-term planning and visioning process, upon the advice of the BOV.
  
- 7. What steps can SIS (and the BOV) take to advance its effectiveness and stature as an information school?**
  - a. Enhance emphasis on doctoral programs, and consider how to recruit high quality doctoral students and then support them with adequate financial aids.
  - b. Continue to improve and expand the physical facilities supporting faculty and student research.
  - c. Develop, clarify, and clearly describe the set of existing and emerging signature strengths of the School that are expressed through our research, colloquia, and curricula.
  - d. Define a series of coherent threads, tracks, or specializations that can extend from master's programs to the undergraduate program.

- e. Clearly define the long-term goals of program development and focus the appropriate level of resources on seeing those plans come to fruition.