



Editorial

Real Synthetic Scholarship

I (Michael Best) recently presented to a lower-division undergraduate class statistics supporting the hypothesis that Internet access can enhance a population's political and civil liberties. Most of the students had never taken a statistics course, and one of them—enjoying the innocent curiosity of youth often dispatched by four years of university education—asked *how* I knew that a statistically strong relationship between two variables had not occurred by chance. I fumbled an explanation by noting how we might find a relationship between two independent sequences of a coin toss, that any such relationship would be just a matter of chance, and that we could apply basic probability to determine the likelihood of just such an event. Then I told the truth: I was able to cite a probability, because these days, we all have access to exceptionally sophisticated statistical software, and I relied on the software to calculate it for me.

My cheap cop-out notwithstanding, my confidence that those results are not attributable to chance alone is a case of “standing on the shoulders of giants”; in this scenario, the giant is the brilliant English statistician and geneticist Sir Ronald Fisher. His contributions include the statistical methods that I and my students use to further our research on ICTs and development—without having to constantly reinvent the wheel.

In our introduction to the first issue of Volume 3 of *Information Technologies and International Development*, both of us called on the *ITID* community to also make powerful use of past theories, methods, and results. We extolled the virtues of a “synthetic scholarship”—scholarship that combines past learnings and grounded practices with novel results and approaches to create a new and complex whole. In that editorial we called for such scholarship that was not only contextualized and founded in theory but also empirically analytical, cross-disciplinary, cumulative, comparative, aware of lessons from the past, and globally aware while locally engaged.

We are thrilled to enter into Volume 4 of *ITID* with a collection of eight research articles that exemplify to us these characteristics of synthetic scholarship; these articles demonstrate how our community of scholars and practitioners is growing. This issue, ably guest edited by Kentaro Toyama of Microsoft Research India, presents a best-of from the 2006 International Conference on Information and Communication Technologies and Development (ICTD), which was held earlier this year in Berkeley, California. When you read Toyama's introduction to the issue (which follows these words) you will be able to appreciate the seriousness with which he, his co-organizers, and his program committee members approached their encouragement and selection of the highest-quality research. With the second annual meeting soon upon us (December 15–16, 2007, in Bangalore, India), ICTD has already proven itself as a flagship conference. We, immodestly, hold out *ITID* as the corresponding flagship journal and intend to continue our partnership with ICTD. There is no question that the conference and the journal share

identical goals: to be a platform for the highest-quality research in ICT and development, to serve as a catalyst for a community that nurtures and encourages top scholarship and practice, and to actively communicate these results in ways that affect real-world action.

Upcoming issues will continue our commitment to rigorous research, founded in tried theory, with real-world implications. Our next issue, guest edited by Dr. Sylvia Maier of New York University, focuses on women's empowerment through ICTs—it takes a quantitative and community-based, project-level approach to understanding the gender digital divide and gives due attention to this oft-overlooked dimension to ICT access. Subsequent issues will include a collection of articles on information technology, higher education, and international development.

With Volume 4 we are continuing to publish *ITID* as an open-access journal, which is a critical element in the service of our core goals. We again thank Microsoft for its generous support, which allows us to offer our issues free to all readers. (We are always looking for additional supporters—please contact us with your ideas or offers!) We also welcome two additional new partners to the *ITID* family. The Annenberg School at the University of California, which one of us (Ernest Wilson) has recently joined as dean, has enthusiastically agreed to take on a significant role in the work of *ITID*. More on this soon. In addition, the Georgia Tech Library and Information Center has become an important resource managing the editorial office's online processes. It continues to be at the forefront of thought on new practices in scholarly communication. We are thrilled to welcome these new team members.

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