

The Asia-Pacific iSchools

by Sam Oh

EDITOR'S SUMMARY

The Asia-Pacific iSchool regional chapter, initiated in 2014, consists of nine of the 11 iSchools across Australia, China, Japan, Korea and Singapore. The curricula and research areas of the iSchools in the region vary widely. Sungkyunkwan University in Korea offers a general B.A. in library and information science and a more technical B.S. in data science, as well as master's and doctoral programs geared to research. Other schools in the chapter offer programs ranging from publishing and e-commerce to software engineering and information systems. The vibrant young chapter is working creatively on mutual support, outreach and funding. Member schools agree on a number of agenda items to strengthen the chapter, but, without a shared body for collaborative work, most maintain stronger partnerships with institutions in Europe and North America.

KEYWORDS

iSchools
information science education
Asia
Australia
curricula
collaboration

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iSchools Around the World

While participating in the 2014 iConference at Humboldt University, the Asia-Pacific (AP) iSchool heads gathered together informally for the first time to discuss the establishment of an AP-iSchool regional chapter. We agreed that it was the right time for us to take this important step forward. Sungkyunkwan University (SKKU) offered to host the first AP-iConference, which took place in Seoul from December 4-6, 2014.

The inaugural AP-iSchool regional meeting dedicated its first day to a data science workshop and doctoral colloquium, its second day to presentations introducing each program's forte and its last day to a meeting of eight AP-iSchool heads (one from Australia, one from Japan, one from Singapore, three from China and three from Korea). Sam Oh (SKKU, Korea) was elected as the first AP-iSchool chair during this meeting. The AP-iSchools now convene annually, with plans to alternate hosting responsibilities among the five countries comprising the chapter. Membership fees have been waived for the present.

The second AP-iConference was held at Wuhan University in China on October 24, 2015. The morning session featured presentations by the AP-iSchool heads concerning the major developments and changes in their programs since the last meeting. Michael Seadle, iCaucus chair, gave a keynote speech. The meeting of the AP-iSchool heads took place from 2:00 to 5:00 in the afternoon with seven heads from the regional chapter in attendance, as the Melbourne iSchool had a new interim dean who was unfortunately unable to join us in Wuhan.



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The third AP-iConference is scheduled to take place in Japan at Tsukuba University's Graduate School of Library, Information, and Media Studies December 5-9, 2016. This event meeting will be co-located with other regional conferences to encourage joint efforts between similar academic activities in the iField.

Although the AP-iSchools have only recently begun to organize, the level of commitment that they bring to the table forecasts a strong, vibrant future for the new regional chapter. We believe that maintaining strong regional chapters fortifies iSchool institutions across the globe by ensuring each contributor knows the needs of its own area and presents a unique case to benefit the iSchool brand. We accordingly look forward to more active collaboration with the Australian iSchools.

Geography

The geographical distribution of the 11 Asia-Pacific iSchools is as follows. Australia has 3 iSchools, but only Melbourne School of Information is active at AP-iSchool. China has three iSchools – Wuhan,

Nanjing and Sun Yat-Sen – all of which have ties to library education, but are now expanding to cover many other areas in the iField. The only iSchool member in Japan is the Graduate School of Library, Information and Media Studies at Tsukuba. Korea has three iSchools – SKKU, Seoul National University (SNU) and Yonsei University. SKKU and Yonsei share a similar background in that each started with an emphasis on library education, though both have since broadened their horizons. However, unlike its two fellow iSchools, the SNU iSchool has no history of library education, having instead begun as an interdisciplinary program combining biotechnology, nanotechnology and information technology. Finally, the School of Information Systems at Singapore Management University (SMU) offers diverse programs related to applied computing and information systems, particularly focusing on analytics, intelligent systems, mobile & IoT, cybersecurity and economics of IS.

Unlike the EU, the AP-iSchools do not have a funding body that encourages teamwork among schools in the Asia-Pacific region, which has prompted us to be more creative in finding ways of supporting one another

in teaching and research. Also reaching out to other disciplines to consider iSchool membership is one of the important tasks that we face in this region.

A full list of the iSchools in the Asia-Pacific region can be found in Table 1.

TABLE 1. iSchools in the Asia-Pacific Region

COUNTRY	SCHOOL	URL
Australia	Charles Sturt University, School of Information Studies	www.csu.edu.au/faculty/educat/sis/home
	University of Melbourne, Melbourne School of Information	www.msi.unimelb.edu.au/
	University of South Australia, School of Information Science and Mathematical Sciences	www.unisa.edu.au/IT-Engineering-and-the-Environment/Information-Technology-and-Mathematical-Sciences/
China	Nanjing University, School of Information Management	http://114.212.160.20/eng/
	Sun Yat-Sen University, School of Information Management	http://im.sysu.edu.cn/
	Wuhan University, School of Information Management	http://sim.whu.edu.cn/en/
Japan	Tsukuba University, Graduate School of Library, Information, and Media Studies	www.tsukuba.ac.jp/english/organization/graduate/0307.html
Korea	Seoul National University, Graduate School of Convergence Science & Technology, Program in Digital Contents and Information Studies	http://gscst.snu.ac.kr/eng/m01/
	Sungkyunkwan University, LIS & Data Science	http://ischool.skku.edu/
	Yonsei University, Library and Information Science	http://lis.yonsei.ac.kr/lis/
Singapore	Information Systems	http://sis.smu.edu.sg/

Curricula

It is difficult to think of a disclaimer more fitting to the AP-iSchools programs than Michael Seadle's remark in his article in this issue of the *Bulletin*: "any characterization of the teaching of so diverse a group risks both overgeneralization and exclusion." As a result, this section will for the most part introduce the curriculum of SKKU iSchool – it being the institution most familiar to the author – in order to provide an admittedly finite example of what the Asia-Pacific region has to offer.

The SKKU iSchool consists of two bachelor's programs, one master's program and one doctoral program. One of the two bachelor's programs offers a broad range of courses more suitable for library-oriented careers, but is equally rewarding for those interested in the general issues of information and society. Students attending this program must complete 60 credit hours to earn a B.A. in library and information science. Many of our young scholars also pursue a second major in fields such as business, economics, English literature/linguistics or communication. Almost half of the courses in LIS are English-mediated.

The second bachelor's program is a B.Sc. in data science created with the support of a five-year government grant, the first of its kind in Korea. Students enrolled in the program are required to complete 36 credit hours in their choice of the following courses: intro to data science, social data analytics, big data analytics, research data analytics, health data analytics, machine learning, data mining, digital humanities, data visualization, data curation, programming in R, programming in Python and JavaScript, statistical modeling, statistical data mining, multivariate analytics and so forth. These courses primarily are taught in English. The SKKU iSchool admitted 32 students into its data science major in Spring 2015, 39 in Fall 2015 and 50 in Spring 2016. Data science is a second major for all of the accepted students, whose backgrounds span about 20 different departments and thus provide for a diverse and engaging classroom environment.

The master's program builds on the basic bachelor's by centering on content for research-oriented students. Apart from a mandatory course on methodology, all other courses can be taken according to the research interests of each student. The master's also requires candidates to write a

formal thesis and defend it before an evaluation committee of three faculty members. Defending the proposal and completing the final defense usually take one year, with students finishing their coursework prior to the thesis over approximately three semesters. SKKU also offers a single doctoral program that is completely research oriented. We admit about five students, allowing them to submit topics in any area within the boundaries of iField.

Other AP iSchools operate according to a similar framework but boast individually colorful programs. The China iSchools, for example, offer areas of concentration such as publishing, archiving and e-commerce in addition to their library and information science degrees at the bachelor and master as well as doctoral levels. Wuhan focuses on library science, information management and information systems, archival science, editing and publishing, e-commerce, management science and engineering, information resource management, project management and software engineering. Nanjing operates programs in information science, library science, archive science, editing and publishing and information resources management. Sun Yat-sen offers programs in library science, information science, archival science, information management and information systems, and information security.

University of Tsukuba in Japan combines library, museum, media and computer science, constituting the major school in Japan that appears to have an interdisciplinary research program. Its programs encompass information media and society, management of information and media, information media systems, information media development, information science, library and information science, knowledge and library science, media arts, science and technology and information science. Singapore's SMU specializes in information systems and has no ties to library education. It offers a PhD in information systems with both technology tracks and a management/economics track, a research master's in applied information systems, and a professional master's in IT in business with tracks in analytics, financial services and financial service analytics. Their BSc (IS) program focuses on preparing students to create innovative software applications in the context of users & experience and business domains & verticals. SNU provides focused programs in UX, music informatics, machine learning, learning informatics and social informatics. Melbourne

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has a strong computing component. The other two Australian iSchools are not active in the AP-iSchool chapter, a situation we hope will soon change.

Research

As with curricula, the breadth of research in the AP-iSchools is difficult to characterize without conducting a thorough survey. A few examples of research topics from SKKU include information behavior, metadata design and management, ontology design, semantic management of vocabularies, digital libraries, social data analytics, data visualization and health informatics. Wuhan iSchool has studied publishing, archiving, management science and engineering, and e-commerce in addition to more general LIS research areas – a trend that seems to hold true for the rest of the China iSchools as well. Tsukuba iSchool appears to have allotted more attention to the natural sciences and mathematics, humanities and social sciences, library and information science, information and communication technologies, and computer and information science. SMU has created a large-scale analytics ecosystem incorporating research, education, practice and outreach. In addition, the school also has large-scale R&D projects in the areas of urban management & sustainability, aging-in-place and healthcare management, and cybersecurity.

Cooperation

The AP-iSchools have a more formal structure than that of the European



iSchools, though we are well aware that the AP-iSchools are in need of innovative and practical methods of interaction that will further consolidate the chapter. The issues most prominent on our agenda are as follows: 1) effective ways to work with government offices; 2) effective ways to address IT in teaching; 3) effective ways to manage joint classes and research collaboration with other academic bodies; 4) cooperating to find solutions to common dilemmas in teaching and research; 5) establishing perspectives on eLearning including MOOC (Massive Open Online Courses); 6) exploring possible collaborations on academic research projects; and 7) discussion of faculty matters such as hiring practices.

Future

The number of AP-iSchools has grown rapidly in the last few years. The chapter currently has 11 members, which includes two permanent Caucus members (Wuhan and SMU) and one elected Caucus member (SKKU). As we do not yet have a common body that fosters collaborative research, our opportunities to work together closely remain limited. Traditionally, the AP-iSchools have maintained closer ties with their colleagues in North America and Europe. For example, SKKU has exchange programs with five North America iCaucus members and two EU iSchools. However, the AP-iSchool chapter is committed to meeting once a year to find new support networks and increase awareness of the iSchool brand in the Asia-Pacific region. ■