School of Information UIF Review
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The University of Washington's School of Information is the descendant of the former School of Library and Information Science. The iSchool is the culmination of a transformation envisioned in the 1997 "*Futures*" report and supported by the University Initiatives Fund. The changes have been rapid and profound, creating from the former library-centric unit a modern school positioned to lead in the Information Age. The effort has been a clear and unambiguous success, an outstanding example of the enhancements to UW made possible by the University Initiatives Fund. The UIF program and the Provost's Office deserve praise for providing sufficient resources and administrative support to make the iSchool transformation a reality.

The most dominant characteristic of the iSchool is an amazing *esprit de corps*. Mike Eisenberg, the faculty, the staff, the graduate and undergraduate students, the iSchool's friends on campus, the library community and area business leaders are enthusiastic and excited about the enterprise. This "buzz" has been essential to motivating and sustaining the team during the long hours of hard work that have been required for the rapid change. Though Mike Eisenberg's leadership has unquestionably been critical to much of the tangible progress, his collegial and inclusive style seems to be the source of the iSchool's sense of a shared mission. The iSchool is a team, where mutual respect reigns and where everyone's contributions to the enterprise are appreciated.

The tangible accomplishments of the iSchool are many, including the initiation of the Informatics bachelor's degree, the initiation of a doctoral program in Information Science, the creation of a mid-career professional program for librarians and significant modernization of the MS in Library and Information Science. A significant number of new faculty have been hired, and students have been recruited and admitted for all of the programs. These are significant accomplishments that have been achieved with amazing speed. The emphasis through all of these endeavors, according to everyone's testimony, has been on quality. Examples that support this claim include: A willingness to allow faculty positions to go unfilled when the right candidate could not be found or attracted, and the substantial student interest in the degree programs.

At the same time that the iSchool has been emphasizing the move into the Information Age, it has evolved a new relationship with traditional libraries. On campus, a close substantive relationship exits between the libraries and the iSchool. UW librarians are teaching as well as taking iSchool classes. In the larger community, Mike Eisenberg and his colleagues have helped the Seattle Public Schools enhance school librarians' knowledge and skills in the Rapid Library Transformation Initiative through funding from the Gates Foundation. Such outreach is a significant contribution to the community.

The committee wishes to emphasize its perception that the iSchool's construction of an undergraduate curriculum is likely to benefit the University in several ways. First, the undergraduate courses teach essential skills for life-long learning across disciplines and through periods of rapid technological change. Second, the School's offerings, at every degree level, seem likely to facilitate increased interdisciplinary collaboration among students and faculty alike by lowering the obstacles posed by discipline-specific research methodology. Third, the undergraduate program, in particular, may be well-positioned to support the University's efforts to increase the diversity of the undergraduate population and to improve the odds that students from diverse cultural traditions and economic backgrounds will all have the practical skills and theoretical insight to engage meaningfully in University education.

Our evaluation of the iSchool is overwhelmingly positive. Though we are impressed with the amount of progress made and its speed, we would like to take this opportunity to suggest several areas in which the iSchool could be strengthened.

The students and faculty with whom we talked seemed to clearly understand and to be strongly motivated by the iSchool's mission and direction. However, we had difficulty getting the School's vision clearly articulated to us, especially in terms meaningful to an audience outside the field of library and information studies. We think it would be helpful for the iSchool to develop a more precise and concise framing of its vision. This School, like other LIS schools, has had to grapple with its identity vis-à-vis libraries and the larger information world. It is important, however, that this School articulate its own vision.

This would be helpful in at least three ways. The first would be in guiding the School's own choices and priorities. This is perhaps not as critical during times of rapid expansion as when expansion slows, as it must, and hard choices must be made. The second use would be in guiding the actions of the School's participants, such as faculty choices about research topics and course design. The third and probably most important would be in explaining the School to the university community, potential students, employers, and funders.

The Committee is impressed with the School's rapid recruitment of energetic, dedicated and enthusiastic assistant professors. We were equally impressed by how each assistant professor we talked to praised the support and collegiality of tenured faculty at the iSchool.   While we appreciate the need to hire relatively large numbers of faculty in this time of rapid program development, we would urge the iSchool's faculty to engage in careful and frank discussions of how the relatively few tenured faculty can best mentor the untenured faculty to ensure their development as first-rate scholars and teachers. We are cognizant of the very substantial time commitments that must be devoted to hiring and curriculum development. We would also urge that the faculty focus some concerted attention in the near future to articulating tenure standards for this evolving, interdisciplinary field.

The first PhD class of five students entered in Fall, 2000. We think that the PhD program will be a significant contribution to the university, the information community, and to the School's teaching and research. Bringing up a new PhD program is difficult, and the first students necessarily suffer from the lack of institutional history, faculty experience, and more senior PhD students.   The School is expanding in several directions at once, reducing its ability to focus on any one area. We do have concerns, however, arising from our meeting with several PhD students, that the students and perhaps the program are unfocused. The PhD program would benefit from the improved articulation of the School's vision that we recommend.

As part of its change in focus from libraries as an institution to information more broadly conceived, the iSchool has begun to make connections with other kinds of information- and especially IT-focused organizations in the Pacific Northwest.   We commend this, and recommend that the iSchool pursue these connections even more aggressively. The IT world needs people with the School's graduates' expertise.   Such connections would also benefit the School's research and teaching, as well as providing potential sources of funding, of more diverse graduate students, and of employment for its graduates.

In summary, the iSchool has more than fulfilled the expectations of the UIF. They have been extraordinarily successful, achieving much in a brief time. The committee wishes the iSchool continued success.