

Remarks on the occasion of iSchool/Berkeley Graduation 070512

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Thank you, Ano, for inviting me to speak today.

Years ago when Berkeley decided to transform its library school to the School of Information, there was a storm of anxiety and resentment in the library community. The research products of the new school's faculty over the years are ample evidence that the change has been beneficial. The public press articles and op ed pieces, particularly by Hal Varian, your first dean, have contributed to the public debate on many important issues. Dean Saxenian's three books on some of the ingredients in the "secret sauce" that make Silicon Valley an outstanding center of innovation, entrepreneurship, and excellence in so many high tech fields are other indicators and excellent examples of the effective and widely cited scholarship of this school and its faculty.

We live in a time and in a country where the innovative production, distribution, and use of information has produced new businesses, broadened public access to information by many orders of magnitude, and thereby improved the lives of citizens of all ages and endeavors.

This also a time when the current president of our nation and his administration have found new, offensive, and dangerous ways to mis-use information. Until lately, many journalists were persuaded by mis-placed patriotic feelings to give too much latitude to this administration in its unnecessary and devastating war against Iraq and its faltering responses to global terrorism. We have, in addition, other examples of the mis-use of information in the bond and equity markets, in the

lobbying industry that calls the tunes for our elected representatives, and in product safety reports. We read in the news media every day of information scandals and scandals involving the mis-use of information.

We live in a time when blogging and wikipedias, instant messaging and self-publishing, network posing and public posting of images give a great many people the opportunity to distribute for essentially no cost their ideas, their expressions & their opinions. That same conger of ways to express opinions publicly, one voice at a time, provide new possibilities to object to the excesses of a "know-it-all" government, or at least one that operates on that pretence. We also live in a time in which those adept at communication, featuring especially the arts of listening, then truly considering the best ideas and thoughts of others, are generating better government and better civic environments. I think especially of Governor Schwarzenegger in this regard.

We live in a time when a right provided for by the U.S. Constitution, one of heavy import for people in the information trades, has been so distorted by the Congress and then left in place by the Supreme Court that it is inconceivable to imagine it as "constitutional". How do the "strict constructionists", who interpret the founding documents of our country through the lens of the Samuel Johnson 1755 Dictionary of the English Language adjust their optics to account for such distortion? Here is how the intentions of the founding fathers expressed their directions on intellectual property rights:

[The Congress shall have power] "To promote the progress of science and useful arts, by securing for limited times to authors and inventors the exclusive right to their respective writings and discoveries,"

How possibly did our legislators accept the influence of the entertainment industry and ignore the interests of the citizenry in turning that constitutional clarity into laws that since 1976 provide copyright extending for the life of the author plus seventy years. How possibly does that new law, confirmed in the Supreme Court case of *Eldred vs. Ashcroft* decided in 2002, link logically to the Constitution?

It seems that Congress has provided the circus owners with the means to provide entertainment, but ignored the important element of bread that sustains life, generates new life, and advances the general welfare of all citizens. There are a few voices calling for change, but we need more. And we need to fix the process that resulted in such imbalance of benefits. My own preference is to harmonize the period of copyright protection with the period of patent protection. And let's get the lobbyists entirely out of Congress.

We live in a time when Yahoo, Google and others are attempting to construct new means to provide intellectual access to the ideas in books and other texts, precisely the sort of transformative use of protected expressions you would think the Founding Fathers and their successors might support, applaud even. Publishers who long ago walked away from any commercial interest in copyrighted texts by letting them go out of print, now suddenly desire to earn new income from Internet indexing projects when formerly they never thought of trying to collect income for cataloging and indexing. Publishers have sued Google and inveighed in public and private ways against evil librarians, who from their perspective are stealing. Yet it is the libraries who have acquired and saved copies of works that were published for commercial reasons, but then became orphans by the neglect of publishers. A judgment against the Google Book Search project might also put in jeopardy the many different companies who index the contents of the public web. So far, there has been too little public engagement in this great debate. There has been sword

rattling, suits have been leveled, and some lobbying of Congress has occurred. The prospects for public good are in the balance. Google, with its library partners, including the University of California and Stanford, is providing compelling new ways to make the creative work of authors, the careful improvement of editors, and the investments of publishers more accessible. In revealing by indexing words in the contents of millions of books now on library shelves and represented only by a few thousand characters in each catalog record, Google is supporting teaching, learning, and research for everyone, especially assisting those disadvantaged by not living near a major library.

Certain publishers have realized that they have a public good to provide, one that costs them little or nothing. Some members of the academic publishing sector are making articles available for free a year after publication and after making almost all the income they might ever expect from their labors and those of the authors they serve. While Open Access purists attempt to overturn all the apple carts in the academic journal publishing arena, they confuse scholarly societies engaged in not-for-profit, self-publishing enterprises with exploitative for-profit companies. This is a mistake.

We also see attempts by U.S. federal agencies to take over publishing of articles emanating from research they have funded. Some believe that the results of publicly funded research should be made freely available to the public. There may be a case for this, but if there is the public should understand that the results made available under this doctrine might not be adequately refereed, fact checked, and presented. Further, the proposals of certain agencies of the federal government to take over scientific publishing would leave us vulnerable to the prejudices and the uninformed opinions of ideologues on matters where the free exercise of scientific method and open public debate ought to be definitive. Who among us wish to be

subject to a government publishing regime that refuses to provide information about all the options for family planning or one that denies opportunities for research using materials that already have been demonstrated to be valuable in developing some kinds of therapies, thinking of the stem cell policies of our current government.

This is a time as well when creative, hard-working entrepreneurs, talented information managers, and savvy business persons can create companies that provide excellent services to their customers, act as new sorts of intermediaries for large and small businesses, and return a deserved and tidy profit. These are “learning” companies that are entirely based on the power of databases, Web-based technologies, and the long reach of the Internet. These companies start by linking products to search engines which in turn provide consumers with easily made choices. They mature by better understanding both suppliers and customers. They become successful when they can analyze behaviors, rationalize aspects of those behaviors, and then maximize benefits to both suppliers and customers. At the core of these companies we find excellent extraction, analysis, and exploitation of information that becomes both available and exploitable because of information technologies applied by good information professionals. There is much more of this sort of business development to be done, but the number of successful companies in so many different aspects of global commerce in dominating positions means that finding niches in which to perform and succeed is for the moment a challenging proposition. Challenging or not, brilliant, incisive minds will turn up the nuggets of possibilities.

You, of course, possess those bright, incisive minds.

OK, enough of my ranting on issues of public policy, public possibilities for good, and so forth. Let me talk about elements of your careers as information professionals.

The School of Information's offerings have prepared you to begin and in some cases to expand careers of substance in the various elements of the information industries. Your dean identifies as inherent to the School's mission some "I" words:

Information

Individual Initiative

Imagination

Interpretation

Innovation

As you enter the work force or continue your studies, I would like to persuade you to add a couple of other words to the repertory of notions embodied in the original five. And I have a comment on Innovation

The words I would add are

Mastery

and

Leadership.

First a little stage setting is necessary.

Take a look at the faculty of the School of Information. All of them are accomplished, significantly, prize-winningly so. All of them are fully engaged as

academics, but as well as consultants, authors, industrial figures, and public intellectuals. All are correctly and widely regarded as experts. What a privilege it has been for you to have become tyros under their tutelage.

Here are my thoughts on mastery.

As tyros, that is, you who have mastered the rudiments of information studies, you now have the responsibilities not just to fledge, but to soar, not just to undertake the next step, but to carve out a career, to become masters of your profession.

However, you enter into an industry or a calling that appears to be one of constant change, where not just the canvas, but also the palate, the brushes, the paint, and the aesthetics of the management and presentation of information are in constant motion. So the challenge of gaining true mastery and constantly gaining it will be with you for your lifetime.

From my distant background as a musician, mastery refers to the highest level of performance skill a musician has with an instrument, including of course, one's own voice. The master performer is completely intuitive in using the instrument to produce music and is distinguished from other masters on the same instrument only by qualities of sound or by the interpretation of composers' intentions. A master almost never makes a mistake and when she does, she learns instantly from it. So, there is an implication of one-on-one engagement, musician to instrument for instance, in this perspective. Mastery is more difficult when many musicians are led by a conductor to collectively interpret a composer's intentions. And so it is in many other fields where specialists are called upon to work together, simultaneously or successively, to achieve some larger purpose.

Most of you are receiving master's degrees, signifying a level of expertise and breadth of understanding that each of you would apply in a professional position to the achievement of a goal in presenting, interpreting, extracting, analyzing, interacting with, or affecting policy about [pause] information. Demonstrating mastery in one or more of the techniques needed to achieve a mission in the management of information is an early challenge for you. Mastery of a field or aspects of it is essential to success.

What about innovation?

With the orbit of information communications and technology changing so rapidly and with seemingly limitless prospects of time and invention, how does innovation proceed? The trick, I think, of innovation involves, ah ha!, mastery.

Once one masters enough tools and masters one or more information environments, then one's imagination might take flight. Or a group's collective imagination may take flight. Active intellects in our fields will always imagine the possibilities of a new insight, a new algorithm, a new model, a new workflow, some new technology made for another spot in our universe. Active intellects also perform cost benefit analyses to reduce the possibilities to probabilities. On the other hand, innovation for its own sake, particularly without mastery or with some substitute, such as the cynical use of surveying and ethnographic techniques, too frequently results in superficial and derivative work dressed in merely attractive garb. Real innovation occurs when real masters create. They enjoy conspiracy with other masters and creativity happens in collaborative modes too. Be wary, then, of false and shallow innovation, of innovation for its own sake.

Leadership.

Leadership happens at many levels in modern companies, modern enterprises, and universities. However, there is no getting around the fact that formally appointed leaders get easy and effective access to assets and thereby have more opportunities to invest those assets in innovation than do leaders further down in any hierarchy. It is therefore a good thing to be ambitious to advance to a position of formal leadership. Advancing often depends upon demonstrating mastery and accomplishing useful innovation. Here are some other traits I have observed in successful leaders, beyond mastery of one or more skills and beyond accomplishment of innovation:

Leaders have practiced repertoires of responses to difficult situations.

Leaders take bold, yet thoughtful initiatives.

Leaders have moral, ethical, and physical courage.

Leaders are tactful in dealing with superiors and subordinates.

Leaders act as mentors and promoters of their colleagues and successors.

Leaders exhibit ingenuity, the cousin of the innovative capacities.

Leaders think quickly, distill important ideas with ease, and express complex ideas in graceful, persuasive, and often metaphorical ways.

Leaders know their fields very well and have developed an accurate strategic intuition.

Working with great leaders is often exhilarating and rarely boring. Sometimes working with great leaders can be challenging and frustrating. Patience is advised.

You have been trained by masters, innovators, and leaders here at the School of Information. You will work for masters, innovators, and leaders early in your professional careers. You will learn from them as you have from your faculty and from one another. Aspire to succeed them. Aspire to true leadership.

I look forward to learning of your successes as you apply your talents and your education in mastering the information trades and their complexities. The information innovations you bring to the world will be applied to good and profitable purposes, I hope.

I pray that all of you have learned from the giants on whose shoulders you are standing and who you will replace. May you bring ever better, ever more humane leadership to this troubled, perhaps imploding world.

In this post-industrial, information-based age, I encourage you to make use of your talents to improve our society.

Best luck.

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