

# Points of convergence

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In July 1999, the old School of Library, Information and Archive Studies (SILAS) at the University of New South Wales ceased to exist. An entirely new School in the Faculty of Commerce and Economics was established. The new School of Information Systems, Technology and Management (SISTM) represents all the 'information' disciplines within a converged and collaborative environment. This convergence provides a better working and learning environment for the emerging and changing information disciplines. The 'Information Management Group' within the new School ensures visibility for the former constituency of library and information studies, and also a point of identification for those wishing to follow studies in knowledge management, record-keeping and archive studies.

There are many benefits for students in the convergence with a host of courses available to them across the whole range of information disciplines, including new streams of specialisation, such as knowledge management. There is also potential for cross-fertilisation of ideas, for research and for new careers and professional linkages.

**Research themes and research interests**  
In this new School environment, the Information Management Group consolidated its research agenda to cover several broad themes and to attract new research candidates. The School has a proud history of graduates in coursework, research Masters and PhD candidates. The IM Group has managed to attract several important grants (including Faculty Special Grants and an ARC Small Grant) and consultancies.

The themes on which this research agenda hinge include: The Structure of Fields, Productivity and Growth; Emergence *versus* Convergence of Fields; Scientific Collaboration and its Effect, including Publication Careers of Groups (Oeuvres); Interdisciplinarity *versus* Disciplinarity; Migration of Researchers — to/from Fields; Information Retrieval Issues.

The specific areas of research interest cover the following methodological problems: Scientometric and Bibliometric Methodology; Classification and the Organisation of Information; Metrics of Use of the Internet and WWW; Methodology for Examining Process in Scholarly Communication, including the 3Rs of research practice 'Reading, wRiting & Referencing'; Methodology of Aboutness — Defining Subject Fields.

## Establishment of a research group

To foster collaboration on research projects, the Bibliometric and Informetric Research Group (BIRG) was established in 1998 (see <http://birg.web.unsw.edu.au/>). BIRG brings together academics whose expertise enables objective investigation of growth and impact or influence, productivity and performance in a range of research fields. The research agenda of BIRG and the IM Group assists the consolidation of expertise and supervision and promotes collaboration with others across disciplines and other institutions.

## The Vision Science Project

A large-scale project was established to provide a way of developing expertise and providing learning environments for our academics and their research students. The Vision Science Project allows for the development of individual studies, all of which are designed to answer specific problems and research questions by various methodological means using the fields and disciplines as the research focus. The domain of 'Vision Science' concerns the sensory function of sight and the health and function of the eye. This domain is a dynamically growing consortium of fields and it offers the opportunity to study a number of themes, including interdisciplinarity, convergence and emergence, and also migration issues among research scholars. This area has not been previously examined bibliometrically. It offers a broad range of allied fields in the sciences and social sciences in which to investigate issues in research practice and scientific collaborative activity.

The aims of the Vision Science Project are to explore and describe the intellectual structure and disciplinary composition, publications and citations of VS, to use the full range of bibliometric/informetric techniques, and to concurrently investigate processes of reading, seeking information, writing and citing (reference

practices) employed by researchers in this interdisciplinary domain.

## Other research projects

Work is ongoing into how the internet and the world wide web are organised — its categorisation practices and semantic structures. A recent doctoral thesis by Craig McDonald investigated the problems of 'analysing and co-ordinating the conceptual structures of the information professions'.

A number of collaborative projects are being undertaken in the area of definition of subject fields. Connie Wilson and several co-authors (C Pawley and P Willard) have been examining the transformation in library and information studies and its subject definition in Australia (conference paper given at the recent ALISE Conference in the US). Another examination is of the field boundaries and publication growth of 'information systems', a collaborative study by Connie Wilson (UNSW) and Bjorn Eric Munkvold, currently on sabbatical at UNSW from Agder University College, Norway.

This year, the IM Group and BIRG are hosting the *8th International Conference on Scientometrics and Informetrics*, which will be held at UNSW, 16–20 July 2001. See the ISSI-2001 Conference website at: <http://sistm.web.unsw.edu.au/conference/issi2001/>.

The points of convergence among the various information disciplines are many. The new environment at the School of Information Systems, Technology and Management, UNSW, has created new opportunities for learning and collaboration. There is a renewed impetus that has enlivened our teaching and research endeavours. ■



Dr Connie Wilson (left) and Dr Mari Davis of the School of Information Systems, Technology and Management, UNSW