

Module 2: Introduction and Learning Objectives

Module 2: History of Information Science

Learning Objectives

1. Describe the key milestones in the evolution of Information Science, from Enlightenment philosophies to modern-day practices.
2. Identify early pioneers/historical figures in information science.
3. Examine how advancements in systems, the Internet, and digital tools have transformed the management and accessibility of information.



Weekly To Do List

1. Read the module overview below.
2. Watch the module lecture or review the transcript.
3. Complete the guided reading activity.
4. Complete the QQR activity.

Overview

This week, we delve into the history of **Information Science (IS)**, charting its development from philosophical beginnings to its emergence as a multidisciplinary and technologically integrated field. By examining key milestones and transformative events, we uncover how Information Science evolved into a dynamic discipline that bridges knowledge, systems, and human interaction.

Philosophical Roots and Early Foundations

The origins of Information Science are deeply rooted in the **philosophies of the Enlightenment**, a period that championed knowledge, education, and the accessibility of information as essential drivers of human progress. Thinkers of the Enlightenment believed in the transformative power of information, emphasizing its role in fostering democracy, innovation, and societal improvement.

Leaders such as **Thomas Jefferson** embodied this philosophy, recognizing the critical role of libraries and information systems in supporting democratic principles. Jefferson's vision underscored the necessity of accessible, organized repositories of knowledge for informed citizenry. This emphasis laid the groundwork for institutional developments in the 19th century that would shape the future of the field.

Key Milestones in the 19th Century

The 19th century witnessed significant advancements in the organization and dissemination of information:

- **Library of Congress (1800):** Established as a central repository for government and cultural documents, the Library of Congress became a model for large-scale information management and access.
- **American Library Association (ALA, 1850):** Founded to standardize library practices and promote professional collaboration, the ALA advanced the organization and retrieval of information on a national scale.
- **Public Library Movement (1850–1875):** Communities across the United States created over **2,240 public libraries**, reflecting the growing recognition of libraries as essential public resources for education and literacy.
- **Mevil Dewey's Contribution (1887):** Dewey founded the first academic library program at Columbia University, formalizing library education and laying the foundation for professional development in the field. His contributions also included the Dewey Decimal Classification System, which revolutionized library cataloging.

These milestones marked the shift from informal knowledge management to structured systems and practices, setting the stage for Information Science to develop as a distinct field.

Institutional Advancements in the 20th Century

As the complexity of information systems grew in the 20th century, institutions emerged to advance the theoretical and practical aspects of Library and Information Science (LIS):

- **Graduate Library School at the University of Chicago (1926):** Funded by the Carnegie Corporation, this institution introduced advanced research and the first doctoral program in LIS. It sought to develop a deeper theoretical understanding of information organization, retrieval, and user behavior.

- **Integration of Social and Behavioral Sciences:** Researchers began applying principles from psychology, sociology, and anthropology to study how users interact with information systems. This interdisciplinary approach provided insights into user needs, information-seeking behavior, and system design.

These advancements helped formalize the discipline, moving it beyond practical librarianship into a robust area of academic inquiry and innovation.

The Modern Evolution of Information Science

The mid-20th century marked a period of rapid transformation in Information Science, driven by technological advancements and increased research funding:

- **Federal Support (1960s):** Substantial federal investment in doctoral studies and research in LIS catalyzed the development of sophisticated information retrieval systems and methodologies.
- **The Internet Revolution (1980s–1990s):** The emergence of the Internet fundamentally reshaped the field, making digital systems and electronic information retrieval central to Information Science. Technologies like search engines, metadata standards, and databases revolutionized the accessibility and usability of information.
- **i-School Caucus (2005):** The establishment of the i-School Caucus signaled a significant shift in the discipline. Focused on the intersection of **technology, information, and people**, the "i-field" emerged as a distinct academic and professional area. It emphasizes:
 - Optimizing systems for efficient information organization and retrieval.
 - Studying human interaction with technology and information systems.
 - Bridging theoretical research and practical application to meet real-world needs.

The Impact of Historical Foundations on Modern Information Science

The historical trajectory of Information Science reveals its adaptability and relevance across eras. Its evolution reflects:

- **The integration of disciplines:** Philosophy, librarianship, technology, and behavioral sciences have converged to shape IS into a multidisciplinary field.
- **The role of technology:** Advances in computing and the Internet have transformed the scope and scale of information organization and retrieval.
- **The commitment to accessibility:** From public libraries to digital repositories, the field continues to prioritize equitable access to knowledge as a cornerstone of its mission.

Through this module, you'll gain a deeper understanding of the milestones, theories, and innovations that have defined Information Science. By examining its rich history, we can appreciate how the discipline has adapted to changing technologies, societal needs, and intellectual frameworks, paving the way for its continued evolution as a vital and impactful field.