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Editorial: There Are Promises to Keep and Miles to Go Before I Leave …

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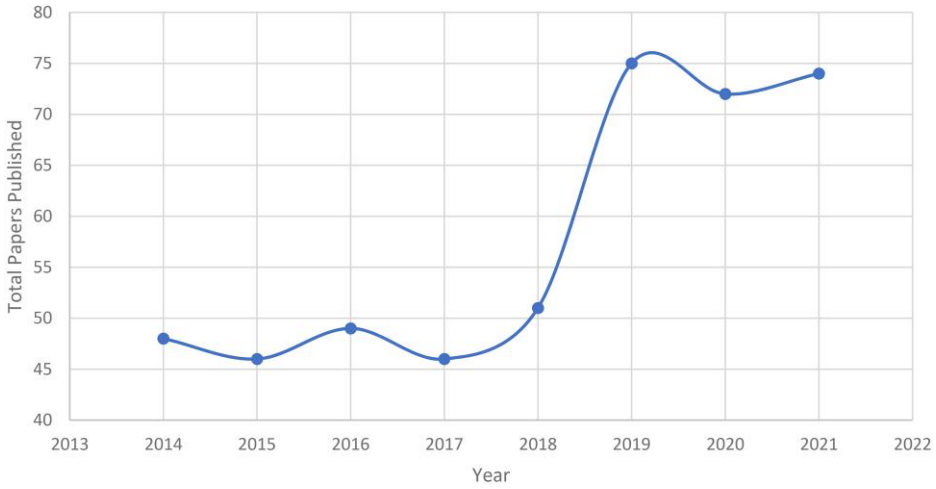
Goodbyes Are Hard

It is hard to believe that six years have passed by, and it is time to say goodbye to *Information Systems Research* as its editor-in-chief: a privilege that I did not even dream about when I graduated from the PhD program at University of Texas at Austin in 1996. You see, I was an odd-ball, and perhaps still am, that did not fit in a mold of information systems (IS) research. In fact, my first paper submitted to *MIS Quarterly* got desk rejected by the editor-in-chief, saying that *MIS Quarterly* does not publish any work that has optimization models; although, that was just theoretical framing and not what the paper was about. The first submission to *Information Systems Research* did a little better: It got rejected after four rounds of grueling reviews with different reviewers in each round. An appeal to the chief-editor who looked at the history of the paper and arguments on both sides ultimately allowed the paper to get published based on editorial discretion because, in each round, a subset of reviewers accepted the paper, just to be replaced in subsequent rounds. I am forever grateful for that decision by Izak Benbasat; perhaps without that decision, I would not have continued in academia (given that I had lucrative offers from industry) or become *Information Systems Research*'s editor-in-chief. I narrate this instance because this editorial discretion and activism inspired me and became part of my own evolution as a reviewer, associate editor, senior editor, and, eventually, editor-in-chief. It has been a great privilege to be associated with this esteemed publication, and I give my thanks and gratitude to all the authors who submitted their best research to the journal, increasing the submission to the journal by 175% over the last six years, and the countless reviewers who are the most unrecognized assets of the journal, serving it anonymously and without any rewards. I also need to thank and express my heartfelt gratitude to *Information Systems Research*'s fabulous board members of the past and present who provide their services selflessly. Last, but not least, I am enormously thankful to the unheralded INFORMS publication staff of past and present, that is, Frances Moskwa, Sandor Roberts, Beatrice Allen, Matthew Walls, and many others who do not interact with me on a regular basis but provided valuable services such as marketing articles published in *Information Systems Research*.

Let me set aside the emotional drift and come to what I wanted to share in this editorial. Many of you have noted that I did not write any editorials since 2018, whereas many other editors write editorials on a regular basis. I have to admit that I did not write the editorials quite deliberately. There are several reasons, chief among them being my personal conviction that the scholars in the field should decide where the field and therefore the journal goes. As an editor, I have always seen my job as being the facilitator of publication of good ideas and resulting research. My December 2018 editorial (Gupta 2018) provided a set of concrete suggestions for authors and reviewers that should help. However, honestly, I do not know how many scholars read it and how useful that was: another reason not to pontificate via editorials.

When thinking about this editorial, I thought it was worth repeating a core idea that would increase the impact and diversity of research but also address some questions and criticism pertaining to *Information Systems Research* and, finally, provide some transparency in processes followed in selection of editors, awards, and so on. Accordingly, next few sections, as eclectic as

Figure 1. (Color online) Total Number of Papers Published in ISR in the Last Eight Years



they are, address some of these issues by looking at *Information Systems Research*'s impact, *Information Systems Research* performance metrics, diversity issues related to *Information Systems Research*, *Information Systems Research* processes, and some suggestion for the future *Information Systems Research* editor-in-chief, whose identity at the time of writing this editorial I do not know.

Over the years, many of the authors who aspire to publish in *Information Systems Research* have asked a lot of questions. Somehow, a question that constantly being asked alludes to the belief that *Information Systems Research* has some sort of quota or size restriction, and many papers get rejected because they may exceed that quota. Let me again assure everyone that there is no restriction on how many papers get accepted in *Information Systems Research*. No paper is ever rejected because of a quota, and *Information Systems Research* has not, thus far, actively tried to manage its acceptance rate. As a result, the journal has published more papers recently compared with the past as seen in Figure 1.[1] INFORMS considers *Information Systems Research* a premium research outlet and hence has committed to providing reasonable increases in journal size as needed. It is clear from the figure that *Information Systems Research* has been accepting and publishing more papers over the last six years, and I am personally very thankful to the senior and associate editors who have responded to my calls for more open-minded evaluation of papers and weighing the quality of ideas explicitly in the review process instead of just focusing on methodological improvement (Gupta 2018).

Information Systems Research over the Last Six Years

My view on management information systems research has always been that our research poses new questions about old beliefs (theories) due to changes in the business and social environment due to technological advances in information systems/information technology. In other words, our research often addresses questions related to how new value is created with new tools that create and gather new information and potentially new knowledge at individual, organizational, and social levels. The information systems research community looks at different facets of value based on their own reference disciplines. For example, although organizational researchers may be interested in value created through new organizational processes, the behavioral researchers may be interested in how the new technologies generate value from the perspective of human cognition and how referent theories of psychology and cognitive science should be interpreted and modified when disturbed with new informational wave. Similarly, although information system economists are interested in monetary value/welfare generated for individuals, organizations, or society, the design science researchers are interested in developing better and more efficient solutions to business problems to enhance value both from the perspective of economic efficiency and human efficacy.

I have an unrelenting belief in the information systems research community, and I have unabashedly campaigned for it at every stage that I have found whether internal or external. As a junior scholar, I was always mystified why many of our senior scholars were so defensive about information systems research. In several forums, I argued that we are the central nervous system of any modern business organization, and therefore no research topic is beyond the scope of information systems research. I never subscribed to the view that "others" might start doing research in those areas and therefore we should not. To me, we forgot about the vitality of information systems/information technology

construct in various problem domains and focused only on centrality of information systems/information technology construct. This had a two-pronged adverse effect: (i) Some of the most innovative researchers were perhaps turned away from information systems research, but perhaps even worse, (ii) the thinking moved us away from other disciplines in business research, and other business disciplines did not necessarily understand what information systems research was about. I believe that at least one of the values that management information systems provides as a research domain is to pose new questions about old beliefs due to technological advances in information systems/information technology. We do that because management information systems researchers are the first one to embrace technology as a vital business component.

In my view, as I took over the charge of the journal, there were two dimensions of challenges and opportunities: (i) journal operations and process and (ii) intellectual challenges and opportunities. In terms of journal operations and process, the last two chief-editors of *Information Systems Research* (Vallabh Sambamurthy and Ritu Agarwal) had done a remarkable job of making journal accessible to a wider array or researchers, ensuring breadth of expertise in editorial board to represent the field, and figuring out innovative approaches to generate resources for the journal when it needed it. As a result, *Information Systems Research,* which used to publish less than 5 papers an issue on average (when Vallabh Sambamurthy became editor-in-chief in 2005), now publishes nearly 20 articles per issue (Figure 1). The number of submissions and acceptances have nearly doubled as well (Figure 2). More importantly, the breadth of topics and methodology has blossomed, and a paper looking at the diversity of research published in *Information Systems Research* (Tarafdar et al. 2022) in this issue of *Information Systems Research* highlights this.

The challenge, however, is that the field has not necessarily grown in the same proportion in timely manner; instead, the growth has happened in spurts with a much higher rate of growth in recent years. As a result, although the submissions to the journal have grown exponentially, the resources to handle these papers (i.e., individuals providing editorial services for the journal) do not exist with appropriate level of experience. Whereas there is no magic bullet to solve this structural problem, one thing that I tried to do was choose senior editors that are more involved with the process and encouraged them to facilitate a better dialogue between associate and senior editors even before the paper goes out for review. I also encouraged senior editors to take a more proactive role and exercise editorial prerogative in making terminal decisions even if review teams were not reaching convergence.

The second challenge that exists in perhaps every major journal is that there are no quick ways of clarifying doubts and concerns for reviewers and authors (when revising the papers). An informal set of communications

Figure 2. (Color online) Submissions and Acceptances at ISR

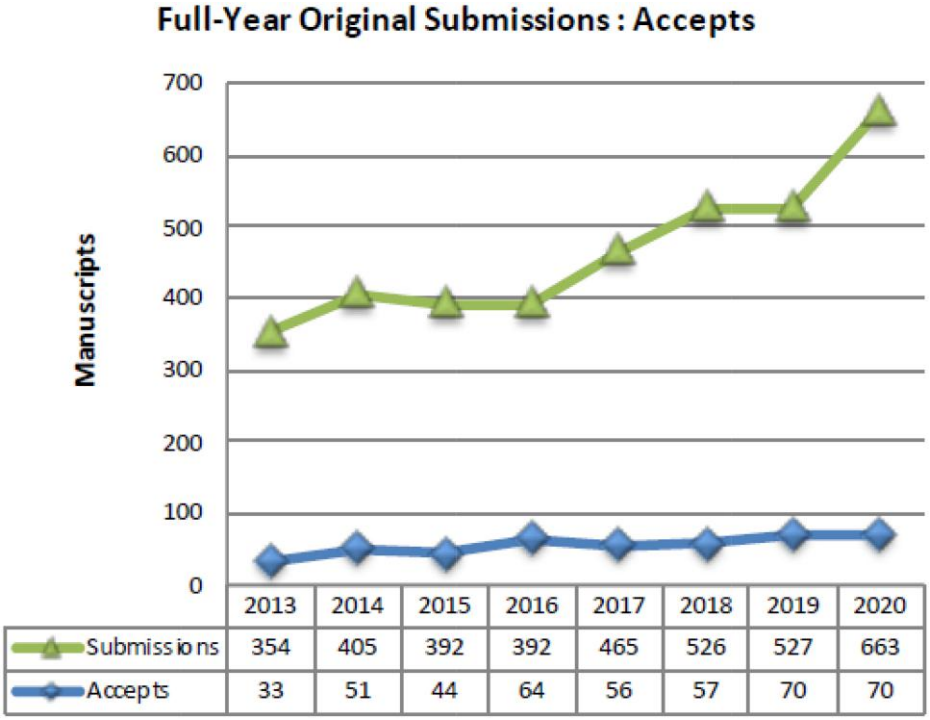
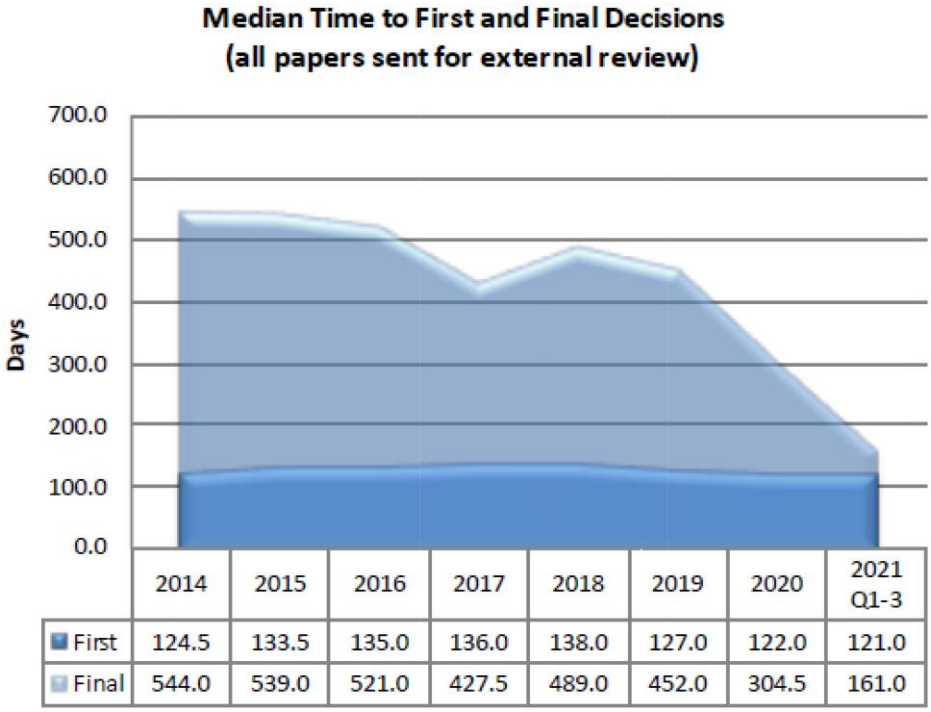


Figure 3. (Color online) First Round and Final Decision Timelines at ISR



	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021 Q1-3
First	124.5	133.5	135.0	136.0	138.0	127.0	122.0	121.0
Final	544.0	539.0	521.0	427.5	489.0	452.0	304.5	161.0

can potentially expedite the overall review time substantially. Finally, the review times of major journals are always of concern, especially in fast-moving areas such as technology research. *Information Systems Research* has improved its review times substantially (Figure 3), but there is clearly room for improvement. It is my belief that given the size of the field and the amount of research produced, it will be difficult to improve the overall review time substantially for all papers. I believed that better communication between senior editors and associate editors and between associate editors and reviewers can improve that time substantially, and I had that on top of my agenda.[2] I am very proud that we reduced the overall time for terminal decisions to approximately 300 days from more than 450 days or so in 2020. There are indications that we made further inroads into this number in 2021. This was possible, although the first-round review times remain stubborn at around 120 days, because of editorial leadership and making faster decisions in the subsequent rounds.

On the intellectual side, the inherent nature of the discipline constantly keeps throwing new challenges and providing new opportunities in our field. Essentially, the interdisciplinary nature of information systems research and turbo-charged rate of change in technology and its informational needs and production fuel the new challenges and opportunities. These technological changes get adopted in our society and business faster than we understand how they are affecting us, our work, and our society. I am encouraged that a talented set of young researchers doing very interesting work has come through *Information Systems Research* (Tarafdar et al. 2022). Although information systems research has traditionally focused on micro issues within organizations with limited work and understanding of industry level work, the availability of rich multiechelon data streams at multiple layers of problem structure is providing the opportunity to address problems of higher complexity and wickedness. Especially heartening is information systems research and education on policy analysis: The multiechelon environments that exist in complex environments create huge challenges in nontraditional technology-oriented policy development and analysis because there is virtually no historical insights available. For example, most Internet-related policies are based on our understanding of telegraph policies: a completely inadequate framework given the capabilities of data networks. As Tarafdar et al. (2022) show (figure 15), the policy-related contributions in *Information Systems Research* have almost doubled from around 20 in the period from 2015 to 2017 to 39 during the period from 2018 to 2020. It is my belief that *Information Systems Research* should publish more papers that inform policy and societal issues.

Diversity of the *Information Systems Research* Board and Board Selection Process

Recently, a lot of focus has been placed on trying to assess diversity of boards in terms of representation of women, racial and ethnic background, and research

traditions. Such an examination is warranted because we have not had such an examination of the editorial boards and whether we chose our boards with an explicit bias or not, implicit bias can never be ruled out as all of us are susceptible to it. Furthermore, a large proportion of the field feels that premier journals such as *Information Systems Research* are beyond their reach and if one does not see representation from the community one aligns with, it gives rise to questions.

From my own personal experience as editor-in-chief, I feel that, although male colleagues often reach out, directly or indirectly, to be considered as a potential board member, female colleagues rarely do. Despite attempting to reach out to many female colleagues, the relative representation of women on the *Information Systems Research* board has not reached a level that I can be proud of, especially at the associate editor level.

One of the challenges in maintaining a board such as *Information Systems Research* is the requirement that the board members have demonstrated a publication record in *Information Systems Research* so that they understand the rigorous requirements of the journal and can ensure the quality standards of *Information Systems Research*. Although this may seem like a catch-22 situation, I am much more hopeful given the success of many of our female colleagues in terms of publication success in *Information Systems Research* and given the recent increase in the inflow of women in Management Information Systems PhD programs. I feel confident that gender balance will be achieved in next decade or so: the time it takes to get on to the board of journals such as *Information Systems Research* from the beginning of a career in academics.

In general, an editor-in-chief has to think about the following when thinking about representation on a board:

1. How should we, as scientists, reconcile various notions of diversity with equality of opportunity and value of merit in scientific activities? Can inequality in scientific achievement be attributed to discrimination or due to a lack of equal treatment alone?

2. What standards or benchmarks should be used to assess the extent of diversity on editorial boards?

3. What is the mission of the journal, distribution of some demographic characteristic in some population, characteristics of papers submitted to journal, and so on.

4. How are editorial appointments currently made? To what extent are they based on prior record of publications and reviewing activities, some systematic discrimination, or simply tastes and preferences of a particular editor-in-chief?

5. Should there be a quota for diversity of any kind on editorial boards and in other scholarly activities? How should responsible editors prioritize different notions of diversity (e.g., ideas, perspectives, theories, methods, ancestry, gender, or region)?

Although it has not been shared in the past, I would like to share the process I followed in identifying individuals and considering them for the board positions. Typically, *Information Systems Research* associate editors are chosen from the individuals that have had some engagement with the journal as reviewers in the past. I ask senior editors and associate editors to nominate individuals based on their past experiences with these individuals. I discourage nominations purely based on prior engagements such as advisor-student relationships or coauthoring relationships; however, invariably I do receive some nominations that do not follow that guidance. I look at these nominations and, as a primary criterion, look at the individuals' past review performance with a graph similar to the once depicted in Figure 4. The graph in Figure 4 looks at the number of manuscripts and the response times of the reviewers. The right top quadrant identifies individuals who have served the journal

Figure 4. (Color online) Assessing Reviewers Service to the Journal

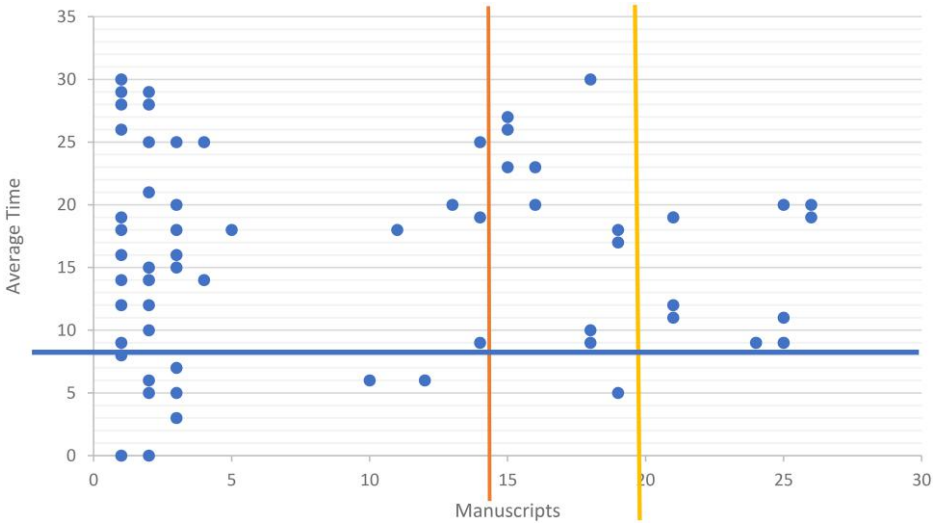


Table 1. Comparison of Diversity of the *Information Systems Research* Board Between 2016 and 2022

Males	Females	Region 1	Region 2	Region 3	Males	Females	Region 1	Region 2	Region 3
Senior editors (2016)					Associate editors (2016)				
14	3	14	1	2	26	7	24	3	6
82%	18%	82%	6%	12%	79%	21%	73%	9%	18%
Senior editors (2022)					Associate editors (2022)				
19	6	14	1	6	35	10	31	8	6
76%	24%	56%	4%	24%	78%	22%	69%	18%	13%

admirably. I try to get 15–20 individuals in this quadrant to fill four to six positions on the board. After identifying the individuals, I look at details such as their publication records, current academic position, and so on (associate editors should be at least associate professors and have tenure). I then read the reviews written by the qualified set to assess the quality of reviews because we want *Information Systems Research* associate editors to be competent and developmental. Invariably, this set lacks the diversity on some dimensions (gender, region, methodology). I must admit and note that, because I have no information on the racial identity of an individual and I do not want to presume it by their names and/or appearance, I have not considered that in the past. Admittedly, it is an analytical approach, but I am most comfortable with an approach that is primarily analytical (with additional criteria) rather than a purely subjective one: one that I will find it difficult to defend except for claiming a higher moral ground.

I follow a similar process for identifying senior editors from the group of current associate editors. I follow a version of this approach for choosing individuals for awards for *Information Systems Research* best reviewers and *Information Systems Research* best associate editors.

In terms of diversity considerations, I have generally not indulged in race-based considerations as I did not find a possible way of doing so effectively; my focus was more on finding better regional representation on the senior editor board so that, in the long run, we get better diversity of the board by natural engagement of authors and reviewers. I also actively tried to address the perceived gender imbalance on the board as there is a larger infusion of women in the field, and they need to look up to individuals at senior levels to be more engaged with the journal. For example, when I solicited editorial board nominations, less than 15% of the nominations were for women, and many of those nominations nominated the same individual; therefore, unique nominations were less than 10%. Also, as I mentioned earlier, I have not had many female colleagues approach me directly to appoint them on the board; on the other hand, several male colleagues have approached me directly. Table 1 shows how the board has evolved since 2016 in terms of gender balance and in terms of region 1, region 2, and region 3 representation.

In terms of gender representation, it is clear that female representation at the senior editor level has significantly increased and, despite my efforts, has remain rather static at the associate editor level. My hope is that an increased number of senior editors will continue to identify more women for the associate editor role. Also, the representation of region 3 senior editors has increased, although again there are fewer associate editors (percentagewise) from region 3. The board is somewhat dynamic and has small numbers, and a few senior editors and associate editors moving from a region does significantly affect these percentages. Clearly, although there are a few successes, continuous monitoring and work are needed while maintaining high standards and engagement with *Information Systems Research* as a requirement for appointment to the board.

In terms of methodological diversity of the board, the represented editors from the technical side has increased, but all other areas remain proportionally similar to 2016. The reason for this has to do with the nature of submissions to *Information Systems Research*. I monitor the submissions carefully and try to manage the load on senior editors to a reasonable level and not have a significant difference in loads to be fair to various senior editors. In other words, the board's expansion in a certain methodological area is dependent on the input or submissions to the journal. The methodological alignment at the senior editor level for 2022 is depicted in Table 2.

Although the number of senior editors has increased substantially in proportion to the number of papers submitted to *Information Systems Research*, the proportion of senior editors handling econometric papers has gone down slightly, and the proportion of senior editors handling technical/machine learning research has

Table 2. Methodological Diversity of the *Information Systems Research* Senior Editor Board

Research area	Number of editors	Percentage of editors
Technical/algorithmic/machine learning	3	12%
Econometrics	8	32%
Behavioral/organization/individual	9	36%
Mathematical modeling	5	20%

increased a bit; other areas have similar proportions of senior editors.

In my view, *Information Systems Research* has often been unfairly criticized for not having a fair methodological representation in the board. In reality, the balance of the *Information Systems Research* board is much better aligned with its submissions compared with other journals, where the editorial boards are positively closed to certain areas of research with no or a very small representation for algorithmic researchers or analytical researchers. However, I would admit that *Information Systems Research* perhaps is not the first choice for researchers from organizational/behavioral streams as is clear from cover letters that often refer to editors from other journals. The fact that *Information Systems Research* is unable to publish many such papers has more to do with the quality of papers submitted in these streams (as third or fourth preferences) rather than any bias, because the papers are handled by experts in those areas whose credentials can hardly be questioned.

Signing Off

Perhaps similar to other editor-in-chiefs in the past, I feel honored and extremely proud to be affiliated with this esteemed journal as its steward for the last six years. Although I wanted to accomplish more goals during my tenure, the pandemic during the last three years did make it challenging both at a personal and professional level to go beyond ensuring that the journal keeps flourishing in its current state. I did not demand more from the board and reviewers as I did before the pandemic, and yet, they responded admirably with the increased volume of manuscripts during the pandemic; our achievements in publishing significantly more papers in *Information Systems Research* without sacrificing quality and impact is a testament to the hard work that the board members have put in during these trying times. I am enormously grateful to the board for their support and responsiveness.

As I mentioned earlier, I have purposefully stayed away from pontificating through editorials, and it is hardly the time to start doing so now. I also am a firm believer in the wisdom of crowds and therefore have none to share. Instead, here is my wish list that I feel will improve the access to the journal, provide better author experience, and publish more impactful research.

(1) Reviewers and editors should resist providing blanket statements to reject papers without evidence or providing rationale (e.g., lack of contribution, lack or generalizability, lack of theoretical contribution, etc.). Although the statements may be true, unless the authors are provided a rationale, reviewers and editors are making a subjective decision and not a scientific one. My own papers have been rejected using these rather innocuous statements, which in my opinion were completely wrong but not having a rationale does not provide an opportunity to have a merit-based debate. It is simply unprofessional to provide such opinions without providing evidence or supporting arguments.

a. Incidentally, I would suggest to authors, although this is infuriating, do not write a scathing critique of such a review process. Providing a systematic dissection of the presented argument is a far better approach, although not always successful.

(2) I hope that we focus much more on quality of ideas (with sufficient rigor) in publishing work rather than take several years to improve the quality of methodology and rigor in a given paper. Good ideas that are presented in a timely manner have far larger impact than the same ideas presented several years later (Gupta 2018).

(3) The constructiveness of *Information Systems Research* reviews has improved a lot from the days when I first started submitting papers to the journal. However, this has also resulted in a host of editors giving authors reject and resubmit decisions. I think reject and resubmit decisions should be reserved for papers with very high-quality ideas with certain time limits on resubmission of the article. Far too many papers do not survive resubmits, and some papers are resubmitted after several years when the ideas presented in the paper are already stale or better treated elsewhere.

(4) Senior editors should actively support clarification questions from authors between review rounds; such communication cuts down on the number of review cycles and provides faster convergence of papers.

At the time of the writing of this editorial, I still do not know the identity of the next editor-in-chief of *Information Systems Research*. Whoever the person is, I hope that the board and the field gives her/him the same support that I have received from the field. The journal is in great shape, and I have no doubt that it will continue to be a beacon in the field.

Endnotes

[1] In 2012, there were 74 papers published as then editor-in-chief, Ritu Agarwal, got additional funding to clear the backlog of papers and convinced INFORMS to publish an additional issue. Thanks, in large part, to Ritu's efforts, *Information Systems Research* no longer has to struggle with the issue of publication size.

[2] COVID-19 made this effort challenging as the submissions to the journal kept climbing, but the editors and reviewers struggled with management of their time as the pandemic created health and family challenges for a large portions of editorial teams, including me.

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