www.ischool.drexel.edu

iSchool at Drexel
Upcoming Events

Winter Term classes begin January 9

Spring Term classes begin April 3

Blue & Gold Days Alumni Weekend May 5-7

Commencement June 17

Summer Term classes begin June 26

Prof. Susan Wiedenbeck outlines online trust

Alumna Debiola English keeps spirit in the community

Dr. Lew Hassell (right) and Ph.D. student George Abraham assess the hidden risk to our power grid and other infrastructure
More than ever before, the world is surrounded by a complex, constantly changing and virtually infinite web of information—an Infosphere that touches every part of our daily lives. The Internet, the most visible aspect of the Infosphere, is a portal into this world. At the iSchool, understanding and utilizing the potential of the Infosphere is what drives us.

We believe in this mission, and we want others to understand and believe in it too. Symbols are one way of conveying this message. They use an image to represent sometimes abstract goals and ideals. The iSchool at Drexel has created such a symbol. It is a visual metaphor of the Infosphere and our relationship to it. Like all symbols its origins have specific meanings, and we hope these meanings will grow and expand as we do.

The dominant images, a Möbius strip and the infinity sign, are used to represent the nature and life of information in the Infosphere. The complexity of the Möbius strip—one’s inability to differentiate its facets, to trace where one side leaves off and the other begins—coupled with the concept of a boundless continuum, are meant to parallel the complex and eternal existence of information, as one idea or thought feeds into another in a unified and timeless web. The bands encircling the larger image are a representation of those who use information—people—able to move fluidly around the Infosphere and understand it. Harnessing it in this way, users are able to view the Infosphere through a vast array of lenses, focusing on the aspects most useful to them. This is where the iSchool sees itself, helping people develop the knowledge and tools necessary to utilize the Infosphere’s enormous potential.

We hope that this concept of the Infosphere speaks to you as it does to us. If nothing else, we hope that it sparks a conversation, a starting point for your own thinking. From such a modest seed are information and knowledge born.
courage even when we have few models to guide our thinking. In doing so, our faculty is breaking new ground and showing our students what it means to be an innovator as opposed to a duplicator.

Our faculty’s task is made easier by the caliber of our students. I believe our student body is as talented as you’ll find anywhere. Diverse in both their backgrounds and studies, they are all curious about technology and creative in using it to design information systems that meet the needs of people, organizations, and society. We strive to support our students, and that we personally care about their education and careers is reflected in the attention and respect we pay them.

Our search for motivated and talented students is unlimited, and in the years to come we will move into international prominence through our use of distance learning. The potential of the knowledge we teach does not end at the borders of the United States. The challenges of worldwide reach are far outweighed by new opportunities to understand diverse cultures and languages as we continue to explore our triad: people, information, and technology. In this way, how (and whom) the iSchool teaches becomes a laboratory for understanding what we teach.

As the iSchool’s educational reach spreads, we hope that its values spread with it. We’re educating students to make a difference in society through the application of information technology to their individual communities. As the world becomes more dependent on technology, we need to be concerned about bridging the information divide and using it to improve the quality of everyone’s lives in the spirit of Jeffersonian democracy. iSchool alumni are a unique benefit to the world in this respect, bringing with them both knowledge and values, and their work deserves recognition.

Bridge represents a part of our efforts at the College of Information Science and Technology to tell our exciting story. We’ve complemented our outreach with a new look, including distinctive symbols and emblems, and a new url: www.ischool.drexel.edu.

I believe that our new face will help to communicate a message about our passion for people, information and technology. It will remind the world of our commitment and drive to help society utilize the infosphere. I hope that you like our new image as much as I do.

I also hope that you find something in Bridge to inform, entertain, and perhaps even surprise you. It is a unique view into the iSchool community, and I would like to welcome you as a friend.

We appreciate your feedback; please feel free to email us at bridge@ischool.drexel.edu.

Visit us online at our new url: www.ischool.drexel.edu

information science is positioned to be a vehicle for many of the biggest advances of our age.>
“Don’t write checks with your mouth.”
—Taj Mahal, American blues artist

With e-commerce expanding by double-digit percentages every year, you might say millions of us now write checks with a mouse—and surveys show we’re generally uneasy about it. So how can organizations build online trust?

Social interaction, widely viewed as the key to human progress, depends overwhelmingly on trust. The 19th-century moralist George MacDonald understood its importance, writing “to be trusted is a greater compliment than to be loved.”

But how does a website, with no feelings, values or eyes to make reassuring contact, earn trust? That’s the 64-bit question.

With colleagues at Creighton University, iSchool at Drexel Professor Susan Wiedenbeck, Ph.D., has created a new tool to help study this vexing issue. Their model enables investigators to quantify and evaluate the factors comprising online trust.

Informed by what researchers call valuesensitive design, Wiedenbeck’s model balances factors such as credibility, ease of use and the user’s perception of the risk in a given transaction. Enhancing, inhibiting or complicating each other, these factors influence a user’s decision about whether to trust a site.

**Virtue of reality**

Numerous studies indicate that ease of use significantly affects users’ confidence in a site. Is it easy to navigate? Well organized? Do the links work?

Wiedenbeck agrees that good design implies that the site represents a reliable company.

But she asserts that another factor enters the equation before a user reaches the home page. “The most significant criterion,” she contends, “is the site sponsors’ credibility. Trust in a website proceeds from the trust that users have accumulated through previous experience with a company—on or offline.”

A study by the Ponemon Institute and TRUSTe confirms the view. Some 6300 consumers were asked to name the five companies they deemed most reliable with regard to critical concerns such as online confidentiality. More than half...
of the top ten—American Express, Procter & Gamble, Hewlett Packard, IBM, the U.S. Postal Service and Citibank—established reputations first in the brick-and-mortar world.

“That’s not to say Web design is immaterial,” continues Wiedenbeck, “but that it’s only one of the elements in the evaluative matrix.”

Using structural equation modeling (SEM), Wiedenbeck and her associates developed a recursive structure that weighs and counterbalances credibility, risk and other trust factors.

The research team refined their model through numerous tests. The Internet’s ubiquity enabled them to evaluate precepts, data points and algorithms without leaving the campus.

In one test, Creighton students were asked to set up accounts with actual online firms such as WebMD and Yahoo! Finance. Follow-up surveys ascertained their perceptions of the experience, and researchers applied the results to improve the model’s ability to explain and predict behavior.

**Trusting progress**

“What’s exciting is seeing those instinctive and learned mental algorithms grapple with the novelty of a medium like the Internet—one that combines spontaneity with precalculation, visual cues with experience, fear of the unknown with unprecedented power.

“We’re learning to adapt our trust antennae to this transformative medium. A lot is riding on our capacity to develop new applications of old skills, and, of course, business is profoundly interested in identifying and deploying factors that engender online trust.”

Wiedenbeck hopes the model she helped develop will illuminate broader indicators of online trust for informational and commercial websites, enhancing the Internet’s utility for us all.

So how does an authority on online trust allot her online trust?

“I’m like anyone else,” Wiedenbeck smiles. “Consciously or otherwise, everybody adjusts their behavior according to ongoing risk-benefit calculations.”

How the social glue that nurtured us throughout history will adapt to a world where face-to-face is supplanted by point-and-click is an open question. And with everything from credit card purchases to medical records zipping through an invisible, vulnerable ether, Wiedenbeck considers it a vital one.

“With so much critical information passing through the Internet and so much potential for serious harm, we need to understand what online trust is about. Regardless of where we live or what we do, we all have a stake in this.”

Above: Dr. Susan Wiedenbeck adds structure to our nascent understanding of Internet trust.
For Carolyn Wood, the iSchool at Drexel had all the answers—she just didn’t have to go there to get them.

“The flexibility of online iSchool classes has made it possible for me to work full-time at a library and pursue my education,” Carolyn said in a recent email. “I will finish my M.S.(L.I.S.) degree with several years of successful work experience in my field!”

Keys to achieving peak earning potential in most fields, advanced degrees enable ambitious people to energize or redirect a career. But those degrees were once beyond reach for those living in rural areas, working full-time or supporting a family. Distance learning has changed that.

Gone are the days of infomercial-touted correspondence courses and mail-order degrees. Today’s distance learners watch streamed lectures, “meet” with classmates in online discussions and debate their professors via blazing Internet connections. Professors deploy a number of tools to strike a balance between asynchronous participation (the work students do on their own time) and live interaction with teachers and classmates.

Debuting in 1995, Drexel’s online Master’s of Information Systems jostled for elbow room with the staggering 25,000 websites crowding cyberspace that year. Today, the iSchool offers all of its three graduate degree programs completely online, enrolling 279 students full- or part-time.

There’s little doubt this number will grow. Online students take the same classes (modified for the new medium) with the same professors as on-campus students. And they’re always welcome to augment their cyberstudy with on-campus classes.

The rigor of an iSchool online education surprises some. One distance learner notes “The online learning experience is a lot more challenging than I expected, which is a good thing!”

In fact, students consistently report that online courses are as challenging as their face-to-face counterparts, and many contend that they have more one-on-one time with their professors than they did in a traditional class.

Online student Ann Coster remarks that she’s seen other, more intangible benefits. “I can participate any time of the day or night, with any music playing in the background, with any flavored coffee next to me, from any country in the world.”

“And I get to interact with a great variety of people who are doing all of the above.” Ann should know: her music, coffee and ambition bring her to the iSchool from her home in Egypt.
Recognizing that the role of information technology in our society is growing, the iSchool at Drexel has created a new undergraduate degree program to better prepare its students as leaders in the cutting-edge world. Students began attending the Bachelor of Science in Information Technology (B.S.I.T.) in fall 2005.

The program is designed to provide students with the multidisciplinary knowledge base for which the iSchool is known, allied with an in-depth and specific understanding of the myriad industry-level technologies they’ll encounter in their careers.

The B.S.I.T. program was created partly in response to students’ desire for a hands-on, application-oriented element to their education that gives them a leg up in an increasingly competitive job market.

Students spoke and the College listened. Almost half of the B.S.I.T. program’s required credits address specific, technology-oriented classes. Database management systems and network or server technology courses teach the systems and equipment that are used in today’s businesses.

But what is study without practice? To facilitate the new degree—and to provide all iSchool students a space to apply the technologies they discuss in class—the iSchool at Drexel has created a state-of-the-art lab. Experimenting with the lab’s network of desktop PCs, IBM Blade Servers and CISCO switchers and routers, students learn to master the same equipment that powers the world’s leading organizations. How’s that for a resume builder?
The cost of cyber attacks continues to grow. BusinessWeek Online’s Technology editor Alex Salkever estimates 2003’s two biggest worms caused as much as $1 billion in damage. CBSNews.com reports that last year’s Sasser worm “delayed . . . airline [flights], shut down government agencies [and] wreaked havoc on hundreds of thousands of computers.”

“It isn’t much of a stretch to think of terrorists using these same tactics,” warned Salkever.

The iSchool’s Lewis Hassell, Ph.D., answers that conjecture with one word: “Exactly.”

Exploring the personalities of hackers and terrorists, Hassell and doctoral student George Abraham reveal affinities that should trouble the sleep of security professionals—and the rest of us.

“A lot of the literature on cyberterrorism was written in the last century,” complains Hassell. “Not only does it tend to attribute terrorists’ motivation to mental illness—as with Unabomber Theodore Kaczynski—but it underestimates the animus motivating terrorist groups.

“Reports state that ‘terrorists have limits . . . there are some things even they won’t do,’” he says. “On September 11, 2001 we all learned how naïve that view is.”

Hackers and haters

Hassell asserts that cyberterror has remained only a potential threat because “while hackers and terrorists share an antipathy to mainstream society, they seldom espouse the same goals.”

To forestall the likelihood of an alliance between these outcast groups, Hassell and Abraham have launched a study profiling each cohort. They hope to create a clearer picture of the potential cyberterrorist.

“Hackers tend to be motivated not by zeal but by ego,” observes Hassell. “If you can bring a major corporation to its knees, or just prove that you could, that’s a powerful ego trip. They may be outcasts, but they’re not interested in mass slaughter.”

By contrast, terrorism is often wrought by fanatical adherents of any number of millenarian ideologies. Pinning down their profile is much harder than identifying likely hackers.


“When someone leaves a poor nation for a Western education, he may encounter racism in the host country. When he returns home, his former friends may reject him as tainted by the infidel West. He finds himself stripped...
of identity, and an organization like al Qaeda steps in and says ‘here’s your identity, you’re a soldier in the jihad.’”

**The mole model**

Hassell and Abraham posit three basic models for hacker-terrorist collaboration: the mercenary hacker hired by terrorists; the terrorist who learns enough code to wreak havoc; and the most likely scenario, the insider blackmailed, co-opted or bought by a terror group.

The first model seems unlikely: mental illness undermines the loyalty and discretion terrorist cells demand, and the “classic” hacker tends to eschew political ideology or group membership.

Judging the second scenario more likely, Hassell believes terror groups may seek to master basic hacks—an easy task given the availability online of hacker tool kits.

“Anybody can sign up for an anti-hacking course, which is designed to teach presumably ‘good guy’ students how to head off hacking using the same techniques as the ‘bad guys.’”

But it’s the third model that most worries the researchers. “Utilities and emergency systems are all heavily computer dependent. An inside job could greatly aggravate the damage caused by a simultaneous ‘conventional’ attack.

“An inside job is not as unlikely as you might think. You’d be amazed at how much of our ‘security infrastructure’ remains perfunctory and primitive. A lot of companies outsource pre-hire background checks the way they buy pencils: low bid wins.”

Abraham nods. “They contract with ‘security firms’ who check Social Security numbers or run a garden variety drug test. A job applicant secretly affiliated with a radical religious group is unlikely to be a drug user. And faking a Social Security number is so easy that a lot of common criminals do it.”

“You don’t have to be really skilled to bring down the power grid of the Northeast, or to cause trouble in a nuclear power station,” says Hassell. “An insider can do real damage with very crude hacking techniques.

“Security has to become part of our psyche—as natural as logging out when you leave an e-com website. It needs to be ingrained. Unfortunately that’s not happening.

“Information on the potential collaboration between hackers and terrorists is scarce and spotty,” he concludes. “We’re trying to fill that knowledge gap before it leads to something unthinkable.”

Is cyberterror a chimera or a crime waiting to happen? Dr. Lew Hassell probes the psyches of hackers and terrorists for clues.
What do children and teens really need and want to know? How do they look for information? What do they do with information after they find it, and what is a library’s role in helping them to find it? For that matter, what is a library’s role in the lives of young people generally?

These are some of the questions that drive the Youth Services Specialization offered within the Master of Science in Library and Information Science degree program at Drexel’s iSchool. Its goal is to educate students to work in school or public libraries with children and young adults ranging in age from birth to 18 years.

While the idea of a library program focused on serving youth is nothing new, this one stands alone. The specialization, designed and taught by Dr. Jacqueline C. Mancall, Dr. Denise Agosto and Dr. Sandra Hughes-Hassell, combines cutting-edge technology, educational and cognitive psychology and traditional aspects of library education, such as collection development and cataloging.

The unique value of the Youth Services Specialization stems partly from the faculty’s active work in everything from basic research to the development of important practitioner tools.

A model of urban teenagers’ information-seeking behavior in everyday life has won wide recognition for its creators, Drs. Hughes-Hassell and Agosto. Drs. Mancall and Hughes-Hassell published *Collection Management for Youth: Meeting the Needs of Learners* with the American Library Association (2005), a guide for youth librarians in developing collections of print and electronic resources that meet the needs of today’s young learners.

Underscoring the importance of this work, the federal government’s Institute of Museum and Library Services has awarded more than an innovative approach prepares Youth Services graduates to reach out across the
$500,000 in grants to the iSchool’s Youth Services faculty to study school and public librarianship.

The program’s emphasis on emerging technologies breaks new ground. iSchool Youth Services graduates deploy the most current information and media to reach young people in school and public libraries.

Gretchen Ipock, a recent graduate of the iSchool’s Youth Services Specialization, has devised several initiatives to connect with teens. The young adult librarian at Sellers Library in Upper Darby, Pennsylvania, Gretchen launched a teen blog, promoting it with catchy flyers. She reports that the flyers have been overtaken by that peerless promotional tool, word of mouth.

“The blog has become something that the teens all use, and they encourage those who don’t use it to start.

“If they’ve read a good book, or if they’re really excited about an upcoming event, they’ll post it and then talk about it. Over time, they’ve actually begun using the technology in the way it’s supposed to be used, and they’re doing it themselves, without my help.”

Many of the program’s graduates become school library media specialists, working in elementary-, middle-, and high-school settings. The Youth Services Specialization is designed to prepare its students to be leaders in this challenging and dynamic role, positioned at the nexus of the rapidly changing education and information environments.

The coursework of the program prepares graduates to use technology effectively with students and also to collaborate with teachers to enhance learning.

Recent iSchool graduate Erika Thickman Miller of Plymouth Whitemarsh High School in Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania, gives the program high marks.

“I’m very excited to be able to put into practice my learning from Drexel. I’ve been able to plan collaboratively with teachers so our students now graduate capable of using high-quality resources to support their work.

“I also continue to receive support from the faculty at Drexel, and from my colleagues in other school libraries.”

With the knowledge they gain in the program, a passion for the job and a little improvisation, graduates of the iSchool’s Youth Services Specialization are keeping libraries lively and relevant for today’s post-wired generation.
Mike Andescavage

He began his career at the iSchool in 2000, when he attended the Pennsylvania Governor’s School for Information Technology. It was this experience that helped him decide to come to the iSchool.

“I had been looking into Drexel because of the Co-op system, and then I attended the Governor’s School and liked what I saw—that’s pretty much how I ended up here.”

Although he confesses to some initial trepidation regarding coming to the big city of Philadelphia—“I come from a little town called Lewisberry, with cows in the backyard, you know?”—the experience helped prepare him for the life of a college student.

“When I came here as a freshman, I had already lived in a dorm away from my parents in a college-like environment. I didn’t need to spend the first weeks adjusting; I was more concerned with other things.”

Other things, in Mike’s case, included student government. Mike got involved quickly, and starting as a Senator for the iSchool, served in various government roles until he was finally convinced to make a run for the Presidency.

Turns out he won—making him the first student from the College of Information Science and Technology to be President of the USGA (at least as far back as the records show).

Mike doesn’t hesitate to say that it is this attitude of involvement that he tries to impart to new students.

“Just get involved in things; you have no idea where those friendships will take you or the opportunities they’ll provide, or the good things you’ll get to do.”

He is similarly unswerving in his support of the education he has received.

“The combination of theory and the hands-on experience of the Co-op is something you can’t get anywhere else. If I had gone to a four-year school and received no working experience, who knows where I’d be when I graduated.”
Latanya Jenkins likes to travel. She once took a solo trip to Zihuatanejo, Mexico for a couple of days to enjoy the Pacific beaches as a reward for working hard in school. To reward herself for all the work she’s done since then, she may need to buy a house there.

In addition to spending forty hours a week at her clerk position in Temple University’s Health Sciences Center Library, Latanya is enrolled full-time in the Library and Information Science Master’s online program at the iSchool, does volunteer work for events at the Convention Center and for the National Federation of Abstracting and Indexing Services, and manages to find time to attend various seminars and workshops. How does she do it?

“A lack of sleep. Sometimes I get up at 3 in the morning to start studying and then don’t go to bed until late.”

Unsure as to the direction she should take in life after college but knowing she wanted to help people, Latanya took a job as a clerk at Temple’s Health Sciences Center Library. It was a chance encounter there that put her on the path to the library sciences.

An off-duty nurse came to the library seeking information on her daughter’s medical condition, and Latanya—the only person available at the time—was unable to help her. The experience gave Latanya an idea.

“I didn’t think I was put on this earth to just be there, having to hand off these duties to other people. I love sharing information, and I thought library science would be a great opportunity to help people and the community.”

Latanya enrolled full-time in the iSchool’s L.I.S. master’s degree program. Seeking funding, she applied for the Association of Research Libraries’ (ARL) Initiative to Recruit a Diverse Workforce. The initiative seeks to increase diversity in research libraries by offering graduate education stipends of $10,000. In addition to the money, the initiative provides students with a personal mentor and leadership training. In exchange, students commit to working for two years in an ARL-member library. Latanya was selected as a participant in the initiative and will receive the $10,000 stipend.

“I couldn’t believe it. I walked around for a week just stunned.”

Where Latanya works after graduating is not overly important to her, though she notes that Temple’s library is an ARL member.

“I would just like to serve a group of people, helping them to get the information they need. That’s my goal.”
Debiola laughs. “I had no idea that just by living my life I was inspiring someone to do more.” This story, in various ways, has continued unabated throughout Debiola’s life.

A two-time graduate of the iSchool, Debiola English is a testament to the ripple effects of service, support and hard work. The values she learned from her parents Debiola now passes back to the community hoping those who benefit will pass them along again.

“I want to be one of those people who can empower others to achieve the goals they never thought possible.”

Earning a B.S. in Information Systems from the iSchool in 1995, Debiola joined PriceWaterhouseCooper as an information systems consultant.

But with something missing from her life, she found a way to combine her technological savvy with her passion for service.

Recalling a Summer Science Institute that stirred her own interest in IT, Debiola and several other Drexel grads launched the Millennium Technology
teacher and early childhood education specialist. In 2001, Debiola kept her promise and Precious Beginnings opened in south Philadelphia. “It felt wonderful to fulfill the promise I made to my sister so many years ago.”

The symmetry of Debiola’s service is no accident. She believes that a person with the interest and desire to apply for her scholarship is the fruit of long-term support and guidance—in the family, in school and from the community. Helping an entire community achieve this level of support is Debiola’s larger vision.

While continuing to work as a consultant to IBM, Debiola plans to build those close-held ideals into a venture that represents a significant leap in scale. Opening in 2007, the Global Learning Center will serve inner-city residents as a community-based source for career counseling, computer training and information systems consulting.

Characteristically, this vision reflects a holistic philosophy. “There has to be a multilayered approach if everyone is to benefit from the GLC,” Debiola explains. Though the Global Learning Center is a new venture, in its design are the artifacts of a life devoted to making a difference. Precious Beginnings is there, sparking young imaginations. The Center’s computer training camp bears a striking resemblance to the Millennium Technology Project.

In the Center’s vision are Debiola’s parents, her sisters, a summer science institute, and her own education. Perhaps somewhere is also a girl who, inspired by a life lived to its fullest, is determined to master the violin.

If you want to learn more about the Global Learning Center, please visit www.excelwithglc.com. If you have questions about creating or contributing to an iSchool scholarship program, please contact Mary Ann Conway at MaryAnn.Conway@drexel.edu.

Left: Debiola English, B.S.I.S. ’95 and M.S.I.S. ’01
Above right: Dianne English McNeal assists a young learner at Precious Beginnings

ENGLISH
an iSchool alumna nurtures dreams by living her own LESSONS

“I was often the only female minority student in the room, and I want to make sure that doesn’t remain the case. I also wanted to recognize my parents’ unconditional love and sacrifice.”

Love and sacrifice run in the English family. When a 17-year-old Dianne English confided to her sister her dream to open a preschool, Debiola—all of a year older—promised to buy her the building.

Fulfilling her part of the deal, Dianne is now an elementary teacher and early childhood education specialist. In 2001, Debiola kept her promise and Precious Beginnings opened in south Philadelphia. “It felt wonderful to fulfill the promise I made to my sister so many years ago.”

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The phrase “If the students weren’t here, we wouldn’t be here” may rank with other tree-branch-clutching-kitten clichés, but it is with complete earnestness that Lynne Hickle, Assistant Dean of Student Services at Drexel’s iSchool, has tacked the slogan to her wall.

Student satisfaction at the iSchool ranks consistently among the highest at Drexel University. This is largely due to the staff’s efforts—led by Lynne’s example—to communicate with students and take their concerns seriously. She serves as the lead policy administrator for graduate and undergraduate admissions, registration, scheduling, and advising, not to mention College punching bag for general complaints, peeves, and venting.

While some may see her open-door policy as begging to be taken advantage of, Lynne disagrees. “In my experience, students don’t ask for unreasonable things. If you take the time to treat them like adults and explain the reasons for a policy, they understand and accept them. And if I can’t explain a policy, then maybe it should be changed.”

Assuming her role in 2001, Lynne worked to refashion Student Services’ prescriptive philosophy to a developmental one, allowing students to build an understanding of where their education should go—with guidance and limits—instead of simply handing out a checklist of required courses.

With this approach in mind, change was fast in coming. Lynne instituted open-ended advising walk-in hours and created student surveys eliciting feedback on the iSchool experience.

These simple initiatives produced enormous results. The number of student advising consultations increased dramatically, and the surveys informed an agenda for the College to improve its service.

The improvements haven’t stopped. Student input contributed to initiatives such as the new B.S.I.T. degree (see article, page 5), a forthcoming transfer student peer-mentor program, and expanded graduate advising.

The problem now is that Lynne is running out of things to improve. “In the past three years, the number of complaints has decreased dramatically, and their nature has shifted to things that I can’t directly control, like financial aid or the student portal. I do sit on those committees though, so there’s hope.”

She encourages students to keep the ideas coming. “I like to be challenged and I’m willing to try just about anything as long as it’s good for the student and the College.”

Lynne Hickle works to keep students in their place—first place

Richard Loser B.S.I.S. ’09 compares course options with Assistant Dean Lynne Hickle
Four years ago, if you had asked someone at Drexel’s iSchool about the doctoral program, the most likely response would have been, “What doctoral program?”

In fact, Ph.D. students have been studying here since 1974. Not that anyone would have known: only a handful of students, part-time and unsupported by grants, populated the program.

Today, things are different. The iSchool is home to more than 60 doctoral students, many fully or partially supported by research grants. What changed?

Dr. Michael Atwood, Director of the iSchool’s Ph.D. program, cites strategic planning. “We realized that research assistants and research go together . . . it’s difficult to have one without the other.” From its own budget, the iSchool began funding Ph.D. students.

When a faculty member is awarded a grant, research assistants are assigned and their funding is transferred. Releasing money to augment Ph.D. studies, this targeted funding has eliminated the delay that existed when faculty could begin their search for research assistants only after a proposal was accepted.

The resulting influx of Ph.D. students has enabled the iSchool to make significant contributions to the literature in many areas. iSchool researchers are exploring Hispanic and multicultural issues, digital libraries, memetics and decision processes in information organizations, information visualization, knowledge domain visualization, multi-user virtual environments, human-computer interaction and a host of other cutting-edge subjects.
Joan began the M.S.(L.I.S.) program in fall 2004. We caught up with her in the iSchool courtyard one unseasonably warm November day.

**Coolest thing about the iSchool at Drexel?**
The new technology of the iScreen in the Rush Lobby.

**Coolest iSchool at Drexel class?**
Children’s Resources . . . we get to read and evaluate children’s books.

**Coolest children’s book?**
*Island of the Blue Dolphins* by Scott O’Dell.

**Coolest iSchool at Drexel professor?**
Dr. Denise Agosto . . . she’s full of energy! She’s fun and has great stories.

**Coolest thing about the Rush Building?**
Free printouts from the Computing Resource Center.

**Coolest iSchool at Drexel event?**
Ice cream social and the American Library Association happy hours!

**Coolest thing about the M.S.(L.I.S.) program?**
The classes teach how to do something, not how to read a book.
More than ever before, the world is surrounded by a complex, constantly changing and virtually infinite web of information—an Infosphere that touches every part of our daily lives. The Internet, the most visible aspect of the Infosphere, is a portal into this world. At the iSchool, understanding and utilizing the potential of the Infosphere is what drives us. We believe in this mission, and we want others to understand and believe in it too. Symbols are one way of conveying this message. They use an image to represent sometimes abstract goals and ideals. The iSchool at Drexel has created such a symbol. It is a visual metaphor of the Infosphere and our relationship to it. Like all symbols its origins have specific meanings, and we hope these meanings will grow and expand as we do.

The dominant images, a Möbius strip and the infinity sign, are used to represent the nature and life of information in the Infosphere. The complexity of the Möbius strip—one’s inability to differentiate its facets, to trace where one side leaves off and the other begins—coupled with the concept of a boundless continuum, are meant to parallel the complex and eternal existence of information, as one idea or thought feeds into another in a unified and timeless web. The bands encircling the larger image are a representation of those who use information—people—able to move fluidly around the Infosphere and understand it. Harnessing it in this way, users are able to view the Infosphere through a vast array of lenses, focusing on the aspects most useful to them. This is where the iSchool sees itself, helping people develop the knowledge and tools necessary to utilize the Infosphere’s enormous potential.

We hope that this concept of the Infosphere speaks to you as it does to us. If nothing else, we hope that it sparks a conversation, a starting point for your own thinking. From such a modest seed are information and knowledge born.
Winter Term classes begin January 9
Spring Term classes begin April 3
Blue & Gold Days Alumni Weekend May 5-7
Commencement June 17
Summer Term classes begin June 26