

Pioneer Woman

BY / JUSTIN WALKER

When Dorothy Leidner arrived at Baylor in the fall of 2002, she had hopes of starting a PhD program in Information Systems (IS) to assist with the University's shift to a research-oriented institution.

"I came in with the hope I would develop a PhD program because, in my thoughts, you really cannot become more research oriented without having those programs in place," she said.

Thus, Leidner had several goals in mind. First, she would have to establish a need for a PhD program within the Hankamer School of Business (HSB), as there were no doctoral programs in the Business School at the time. Second, Leidner wanted to increase the emphasis on research in the department and gather more support for the program through lectures and advising.

Leidner felt the program was something necessary for Baylor. Over the next five years, she continuously submitted proposals until she received approval in February 2008. Leidner immediately moved into recruiting mode to ensure there would be enrolled students for the fall 2008 term.

"There was a lot of stress and a lot of challenges making sure we would have students coming in," she said. "We had to have some students to make this program happen, but I felt that if we let them in, we have to really work hard to get them through the program."

Twenty years ago, Dorothy Leidner marked out uncharted terrain for a new PhD program

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As the students arrived, Leidner devoted a lot of her time and energy to their success. She spent hours providing feedback on dissertations and projects. Leidner was a key contributor to creating a positive, research-minded culture within the department. These changes led to students excelling and the hiring and promotion of professors who wanted to conduct research and be more involved in the program.

Over the years, Baylor's name continued to grow within the IS circles. Students began submitting research to conferences, where they would network with discipline experts. This helped increase awareness of the program, eventually leading to high rankings and interest from top-level students.

"In the last few years, you see the Baylor name a lot more," she said. "More people are saying, 'I really want to go there.'"



Leidner no longer leads the IS PhD program, but the mark she left is evident in the growing number of PhD opportunities within HSB. Today, she puts most of her attention toward her research, studying the impact of new technologies on individuals, teams, organizations and society at large. Leidner's research efforts have resulted in her being the most academically-cited professor in the Business School.

In December 2021, Leidner received the LEO Award from the Association for Information Systems, a lifetime achievement award recognizing an inspiring individual to colleagues and students within the IS field. Leidner joked that the award was an informal suggestion that the recipient should retire, but she feels reinvigorated by the honor.

"When the LEO first came out, I thought I would never qualify for one of those," she said. "It all came together at a point in my career where I thought it was time to slow down. But it has given me a second wind and I feel there is still a little bit left to go." 