

by Franci Rogers

Introducing Hankamer's First PhD Program!

CONNECTING PEOPLES BUSINESS AND TECHNOLOGY

With new technology, like iPhones and Facebook, emerging at an overwhelming pace, and businesses

scrambling to learn how these technologies can enhance their bottom lines, people with degrees in Information Systems (IS) are in high demand.

As the need for qualified IS professionals increases, so does the demand for IS education. Responding to that need, Baylor University's Hankamer School of Business created its first PhD program, the PhD in Information Systems.

"Information systems is the study of how information technology impacts individuals, organizations and society," said TIMOTHY KAYWORTH, chair of the Information Systems department. "We don't study technology, per se. We don't take apart a computer to see how it works. It's really about examining how information technology can be used as a tool to improve the way people work and how such technology can be most effectively deployed to enhance the performance of all different types of organizations."

The application of IS is all around us, every day, Kayworth said.

"For example, we want to see how Twitter influences the way individuals and organizations operate, make decisions, etc.," he said. "We study why some technologies such as Blackboard are adopted so rapidly across universities while other types of technologies aren't. It's the study of how technology can make lives better, improve the way people learn, and even how it can be used to combat e-crime activity."

Baylor's PhD in Information Systems is training the next generation of IS researchers, scholars and teachers to analyze and understand the multi-faceted impact of information and communications technologies on individuals, organizations and society.

Because the program takes a broad perspective, students are also required to take courses outside of the business school, in departments like sociology or philosophy. In addition to the 15 hours of Information Systems PhD seminars, six hours of research apprenticeship and 12 hours of dissertation credit, students are expected to complete 21 elective hours in one or more of the support disciplines.

"Information systems is very cross-disciplinary," Kayworth said. "As a discipline, it is relatively new. We have very few of our own native theories, so Baylor's PhD in Baylor's PhD in Baylor Systems Information Systems is training the next generation of IS researchers, scholars and teachers to analyze and understand the multi-faceted and communication information technologies on and information societions we draw heavily from other disciplines and apply their theories to our discipline. That's especially important for these candidates, as future educators, to be able to do."

Baylor's program, which officially began in the fall of 2008, now has three full-time and one part-time PhD candidates. The majority of those graduating from the program will seek tenure track positions in academia. Others will continue to work in the field, where businesses are now searching more often for people with terminal degrees.

For ESTER GONZALEZ, the timing of the new program couldn't have been better. Gonzalez had been an instructor at a community college in Uvalde, Texas, when she fell in love with teaching. She knew she wanted to continue her education in order to be able to teach at the university level. So, she made the decision to enroll in Baylor's Master of Science in Information Systems program two years ago. She commuted from Uvalde to Waco, a nine-hour round-trip drive, to take classes. Gonzalez lived in Waco Mondays through Thursdays, and made the trip back to Uvalde for weekends, plus her children's birthdays, soccer games and other special events.

"They were crazy drives, but I couldn't imagine myself not being there," Gonzalez said. "And I knew Baylor was the right choice for my education."

Her initial plan was to earn her master's degree, and then work on her PhD at some point in the future.

"Just as I was finishing my master's degree, I got word about the Baylor PhD program," she said. "I didn't know that doors would open for me so soon, but I knew that God was opening that door at the right time."

Gonzalez, who found herself a newly single parent of four children, made the choice to move her family from Uvalde to Waco. Her oldest son, Manuel, enrolled at Baylor as a freshman last fall.

"My kids have been so supportive,"

she said. "There was a point when I considered putting my education on hold, but they all wanted me to keep going. They really encouraged me. And they're glad I don't have that long commute anymore!"

Gonzalez also felt support from the faculty at Baylor.

"The amount of guidance I have been given [by the faculty] is wonderful," Gonzalez said. "They have all been very embracing and welcoming since I started the master's program."

The faculty is one reason that Gonzalez did not hesitate to enroll in a PhD program that was just beginning.

"I knew from my master's level classes that the quality of the education would be the same as a more established program," she said. "The coursework was very demanding and thorough, and I knew that although we would be exposed to different aspects, the quality would continue in the new PhD program." There was never a question of quality for TIM CULVER, either. Having received his undergraduate degree from Baylor in 1984, he knew the value of a Baylor education. The only hesitation from Culver was that he has a job he loves and didn't want to leave in order to enroll in the PhD program.

After graduating from Baylor, Culver went on to earn an MS in Engineering and an MBA from Southern Methodist University in Dallas. He is currently an executive director at AT&T and has taught at the University of Texas at Dallas as an adjunct faculty member.

"There's a place for someone with an information systems PhD to both work in the corporate world and teach," Culver said. "I'd like to find a balance."

When he learned of Baylor's new PhD program, he approached both Baylor and his employer about attending as a part-time student, and enrolled last fall.

"I attend classes remotely, via computer conferencing, and it has worked very well," said Culver, who has met his fellow classmates in person only once. "My management team [at AT&T] has been very supportive. It has not been an issue on either side."

And Culver has been pleased with how well the Baylor faculty has been able to work with each student to allow them to emphasize their own strengths.

"Baylor has a good program," he said. "The professors are geared toward working with your area of interest and figuring out what's right for you as a student. I feel like they're interested in me, and they appreciate the 25 years of practical experience I have."

That flexibility, according to DOROTHY LEIDNER, director of the PhD program, is one of the program's inherent designs.

"Traditionally, PhDs are very individual programs," she said. "It can be a very lonely undertaking, as students don't work in teams or on group projects. But it doesn't have to be that way. We are finding ways for students to work cooperatively."

One main way to achieve that, said Leidner, is to bring full- and part-time students together. Once the PhD program is fully developed, Leidner hopes to have approximately 10 full-time students and up to 10 part-time students.

"Our vision is to try to hook up the full-time, local students with the part-time students who are in industry, perhaps even internationally, to work together," she said. "This might be gathering data for dissertations, or time spent in the field. The benefits are a higher knowledge of the industry environment and access to data; and the part-time student may be able to use some of the methodology for their own, separate thesis."

Currently, Leidner is working with applicants from the U.S. military and as far away as Ghana.

"They're beamed into the classroom, and the classroom is beamed to their laptop, which makes the possibilities endless," she said. "It opens the doors to a very diverse, very well-rounded group of PhD candidates, and that is right on track for where we want our program to be."

www.baylor.edu/business/mis