

# DECISION LINE

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## 2007 Annual Meeting Award Winners



Flynn

**Dennis E. Grawoig**  
*Distinguished Service Award*  
 Barbara B. Flynn, Indiana University

**Instructional Innovation Award**  
 Grandon Gill, University of South Florida

**Elwood S. Buffa Doctoral Dissertation Competition**  
 John Gray, The Ohio State University  
 Degree-granting Institution: University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill  
 Co-Advisors: Aleda V. Roth, Clemson University; Wendell G. Gilland, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill

**Best Application Paper Award**  
 Charles R. Gowen III, Gregory N. Stock, Kathleen L. McFadden, Northern Illinois University

**Best Theoretical/Empirical Research Paper Award**  
 Young H. Chun, Louisiana State University

**Best Case Studies Competition Award**  
 Rebecca Grant, University of Victoria

**Best Student Paper Award**  
 Evelyne Vanpoucke, Ghent University

## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

### Renewing DSI: Simplicity Is a Virtue



**Kenneth E. Kendall, Rutgers University**  
 President, Decision Sciences Institute

*Simplicity, simplicity, simplicity! I say, let your affairs be as two or three, and not a hundred or a thousand; instead of a million count half a dozen, and keep your accounts on your thumb-nail. [Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862), U.S. philosopher, author, naturalist]*

Today many of our students simplify their lives by keeping all their accounts on a thumb-drive, but as you can see above, Henry David Thoreau suggested just using one's thumb-nail.

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Indeed, our lives have become more complex and, as a professor who teaches courses in the adoption of emerging information technologies, I can't help but think that I add to the complexity of some people's lives.

My nature is one in which I take to technology very easily. I had my first PC (minicomputer as it was called then) in 1980; I used email when all of the people I communicated with by email (actually, BITNET) would fit on a very small piece of paper; and I designed my own Web site in 1995. I find these technologies liberating, but others do not.

In the May 2007 issue of *Decision Line*, I explained how I introduced core values as we began the process of the renewal of the Institute. These core values are communication, feedback, simplicity, and courage. In this column I will address simplicity as a value in our renewal of the Institute.

### **Simplicity Can Be Incorporated into Systems Design**

In 1969, I became the lead systems designer for the first successful regional blood inventory management system that was eventually used throughout the world. Two other firms attempted to design systems, but their designs were overly complex by tracking each unit of

blood collected through to its final disposition.

In our design, we simplified the system by not worrying what happens to the blood after its expiration date. Other systems tried to force hospitals to return units of blood, we did not. I credit our success to simplicity of design, where other systems, steeped in complexity, failed.

### **Simplicity Can Be Built into Structure**

Since we are in the process of renewing DSI, I start each Board meeting by listing the four core values of my presidency. Last year the DSI Board discussed, but did not vote on, a proposal to have different types of DSI vice presidents, some having three-year terms, others having two-year terms. I found that to be unmanageable.

This year I asked the Board to look into other designs for roles of DSI officers and committee structures. We'll find out soon if we can simplify DSI's boards, committees, and meetings.

### **Simplicity Can Be Found in Rules**

In my quest for simplicity this year, I decided to simply follow Robert's Rules. Running meetings using Robert's Rules is useful because meetings are more orderly, a greater number of Board members get to contribute (Robert's Rules state that a member can only discuss the same question twice), and it is clear how votes are to be counted.

As I served on DSI committees over the years, I observed that ex-officio members were not voting. This was incorrect, so I sent along a set of rules to each committee explaining that ex-officio members have all of the rights of any elected or appointed members. Ex-officio in this instance simply means by virtue of the position within the organization (such as an officer, committee chair, past committee chair), the person is present on the committee.

One only has to observe DSI's Executive Committee which is made up of five ex-officio members and only one elected vice president. Obviously, ex-officio members on the Executive Com-

mittee vote. Robert's Rules can't be any clearer about this issue.

So the application of time-honored rules can achieve simplicity. Imagine what would occur if we had to debate how to handle each situation every time it arose.

### **Simplicity Can Improve Annual Meetings**

This year in Phoenix we held our first-ever Town Hall Meeting, where many members participated by offering suggestions for improvements that could be made to the Institute, including improving benefits of membership for all DSI members and improving the quality of the annual meeting.

Here is an example of simplicity in action. During the Town Hall meeting, many members wanted to improve the quality of the annual meeting. One simple but elegant suggestion came from DSI Past President and Fellow Rodger Collons, who suggested that when a member submits a paper, the member also should suggest the name of a reviewer whose research is along the same lines as the submission. Many journals already follow this practice. This idea would ensure that at least one reviewer possesses expertise in the research topic and improves the likelihood that useful suggestions would come from the review.

The 2008 Program Chair, Marc Schniederjans of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, who also attended the Town Hall meeting, immediately embraced Rodger's suggestions and has already incorporated this one into the 2008 Annual Meeting call for papers.

According to Paul Rand (1997), the American graphics designer known for designing corporate logos, "Simplicity is not the goal. It is the by-product of a good idea and modest expectations."<sup>2</sup> Therefore, I thank all of you who attended the first DSI Town Hall meeting and contributed your thoughtful suggestions. You will begin to notice that your suggestions will be considered and hopefully implemented by the officers and program chairs in the near future.



*At the 2007 Annual Meeting, DSI President Ken Kendall recognized Executive Director Carol Latta for her 30 years of service to the Institute.*

### Simplicity Requires Patience

When something doesn't work, we often try to find a reason and try to correct the problem. In an organization, that sometimes means modifying the structure or the rules. Often we make things more complex in trying to improve something. This is because it is difficult to see how simple, small changes can result in very positive improvements.

Edward Teller, the theoretical physicist, sometimes called "the father of the hydrogen bomb," stated that, "No endeavor that is worthwhile is simple in prospect; if it is right, it will be simple in retrospect."<sup>3</sup> When we continue to renew the Institute we must remember that while it may seem difficult and com-

plicated at first, our diligent work may eventually evolve into elegant and simple solutions.

This year's Information Technology Committee has accepted the challenge and has just finished an audit of the IT needs of the Institute. We have already taken the first step towards a coordinated and improved database and an improved IT system in general. Redesigning new IT systems will take time. Once again, this will require patience.

Finally, we recognize that, as American computer scientist Jim Horning has said, "Nothing is as simple as we hope it will be."<sup>4</sup>

### Endnotes

1. As quoted in *The Columbia Dictionary of Quotations* from *Walden*, "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For" (1854)
2. As quoted by "The Quotations Page."
3. From *The Pursuit of Simplicity*, Pepperdine University.
4. As quoted by "The Quotations Page."



## THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN Department of Industrial and Operations Engineering Faculty Positions

The Department of Industrial and Operations Engineering at the University of Michigan invites applications and nominations for faculty positions beginning September, 2008. We seek outstanding candidates for faculty positions in the following areas:

- Assistant/Associate/Full Professor in Health Systems Engineering. Expertise and primary research focus in healthcare systems including delivery, management and/or quality but exceptional candidates in all areas of health engineering, broadly construed, are encouraged to apply.
- Associate/Full Professor in Financial Engineering (FE). Expertise in financial, energy, or insurance markets, risk management, and/or engineering of financial systems is especially welcome but exceptional candidates in all areas of FE, broadly construed, are encouraged to apply.

Candidates must have a Ph.D. and must demonstrate a strong commitment to high-quality research and evidence of teaching potential. Experience related to manufacturing and/or service operations is desirable. Candidates for Associate or Full Professor should have a commensurate record of research publications and are expected to provide organizational and research leadership, develop sources of external funding, build relationships with industry, and interact substantively with faculty colleagues.

Candidates should provide (i) a current C.V., (ii) a list of references, and one page summary statements describing: (iii) career teaching plans; and (iv) research plans. The application review process will begin on December 1, 2007, but the positions will remain open and applications will continue to be reviewed until appointments are made.

We seek candidates who will provide inspiration and leadership in research and actively contribute to teaching. We are especially interested in candidates who can contribute, through their research, teaching and/or service, to the diversity and excellence of the academic community. The University of Michigan is responsive to the needs of dual career families.

Send inquiries and responses to:

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