iSchools: Convergence and Characteristics

A. Library Science to Information Science

The domain of library and information science (LIS) has evolved from a library-centric field to an information-centric one over the last sixty years. Since the beginning of the information revolution and the emergence of the information society as envisaged by sociologist Daniel Bell in his classic book "The Coming of Post-Industrial Society" (1973), library schools shifted gears. Most library schools around the world changed their nomenclature to Library and Information Science in the mid-1970s.

B. Convergence of Information Science and Technology

The emergence of the Internet in the mid-1990s is a watershed moment for society at large but especially for disciplines such as LIS, which were centered on information, and the primary function was to facilitate access and preserve information for posterity. The challenges of the coming of the Post-Internet Society engendered debate and focused group meetings regarding the response of the LIS educators across the world. An informal group of deans of LIS Schools (initially called Gang of Four) grew out of informal conversations at the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) meeting. The Gang expanded during the 1990s, and the group's agenda became more focused on building a sense of identity and community among the "information schools," or "iSchools." The group spawned the iSchool movement in the US in the first decade of the 21st century leading to the formation of the iSchools Organization (https://ischools.org) in 2005 dedicated to advancing the information field in the 21st century. The iCommunity is a steadily growing Collective of Information Schools with 120 members who are spread across the world--North America (55), Europe (34), and Asia-Pacific (31) regions.

C. iSchools: Nature and Character

The origins and character of the iSchools worldwide differ—many old LIS schools metamorphosed to iSchools, some Computer Science schools, and communication studies and psychology departments also joined the bandwagon. iSchools promote an interdisciplinary approach to understanding the opportunities and challenges of information management, with a core commitment to concepts like universal access and user-centered organization of information. The field is concerned with design and preservation questions across information spaces, from digital and virtual spaces such as online communities, social networking, the World Wide Web, and

databases to physical spaces such as libraries, museums, collections, and other repositories.

The iSchool movement is characterized by the following:

1. Expansion and broadening the domain of LIS by harnessing the power of data/information through technologies
2. Integration of some of the schools/departments in related domains across the spectrum—from communication studies to cultural studies to the computer sciences, but with the interweaving thread of 'information.'
3. Academia's collective response to the impact of the Internet and efforts to develop educational programs to confront the concomitant challenges.
4. Branding the unique identity of the iField and the iSchools as defined by its shared fundamental interest in the relationships between 'information, people, and technology.
5. Maximize the visibility and influence of iSchools by promoting the information field as an interdisciplinary domain for creating innovative systems and designing information solutions that benefit individuals, organizations, and society.

D. iSchools: Program Offerings

In addition to traditional LIS programs, degree programs at iSchools include course offerings in areas such as:

- Information architecture, design, policy, and economics
- Information/knowledge management
- Human-computer interaction, including user experience design and usability
- Preservation and conservation
- Applied Data Sciences
- Sociology of information

o Furthermore, domain-specific courses such as health informatics are a dominant and popular course in iSchools worldwide.
o Many iSchools also offer programs combining the three traditional memory institutions—Libraries, Archives, and Museums (LAMs)

New Education Policy 2020—with its emphasis on flexible and transdisciplinary curriculum (especially integrating the arts/science/engineering/commerce streams), which is a long-overdue change in the right direction, offers an opportunity for universities in India to initiate and pioneer the iSchools at this juncture.