The University of Texas at Austin (UT) is a large, research level I university. For the fall semester of 2009 the total UT enrollment increased to 51,032 students, an increase of 1,048 students (2.1%). At the same time the undergraduate enrollment increased by 2.2% to 38,168 (74.8% of the total student enrollment). Unquestionably, undergraduate education is important to the mission of the university. In September 2004, following two years of strategic planning, the UT Commission of 125 submitted a 25-year planning document to the president of the university. (See more information on the commission at www.utexas.edu/com125/.) Among the strategies proposed in the final report was the mandate to develop a new undergraduate core curriculum. Another response to the initiative was to form a School of Undergraduate Studies, created in 2006, to function at the official college-level unit. Fourteen of UT’s colleges offer 333 degree plans, 123 of which are bachelor’s degrees. In sum, the above initiatives underscore UT’s commitment to the education of undergraduate students.

So when did undergraduate library and information studies begin at the University of Texas at Austin? The first undergraduate service course focused on librarianship and information seeking was recorded in 1931, when the course, “School Library Work for Teacher Librarians” was added to the UT course inventory. Subsequently, the iSchool, formerly the Graduate School of Library and Information Science, offered multiple sections of a very popular, UT undergraduate staple, “Children’s Literature.” The large lecture-style class (100-300 students per section) has been taught since the 1970s and has drawn undergraduates from the entire spectrum of academic disciplines. More recently, in the late 1980s and early 1990s the school offered courses introducing students to “library and information use” strategies, as well as a course on “Internet resources and services.” While the “library use” class was discontinued due to under-enrollment, the Internet course (first offered in 1993) has evolved into another popular lower-division undergraduate course, now called “Information in Cyberspace.”

In 2002 the UT Office of the Provost formed the Bridging Disciplines Program (BDP), which offers concentrations that represent areas of innovative faculty research, teaching and collaboration at UT. A cross-college panel of faculty members guides each program concentration. (See more information at www.utexas.edu/ugs/BDP.) After completing 19 credit hours of coursework, research and internship experiences, students earn a certificate demonstrating a secondary area of specialization that complements the major. By studying an issue from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, they become more flexible, versatile thinkers, prepared for a professional world that values collaboration and innovation. Students in the BDP also gain access to unique research and internship experiences at UT and around the world, giving them hands-on experience applying what they have learned in the classroom.

From 2003-2006 I taught two lower-division undergraduate courses of the BDP program. In Technology and the Global Community, team taught with a colleague from the College of Engineering, guest faculty from around campus discussed how technology had changed their fields and the way
they conducted their research. The second class, Tech Tools for Academic Success, was a small seminar-style course for first-generation college students, all undergraduate women, from a range of study disciplines. The course encouraged students to bring their own experiences and backgrounds to explore a range of proprietary software applications, Internet tools and online information resources to refine technology skills that would contribute to both continued academic success during their academic studies, as well as hone skills for application in their postgraduate professional lives. Specifically, the class aimed to develop computer and network skills to contribute to each student’s high level of success through the use and understanding of technology tools and resources throughout their studies. The project received grant funding to provide a laptop to each of the 12-15 women who enrolled in the class.

In fall 2004, not long after the school changed its name from Graduate School of Library and Information Science to School of Information (iSchool), the faculty approved the development of a series of courses to enable undergraduates to build a minor in information studies. By spring 2005 six courses (both lower and upper division) were offered. The curriculum conceived by the iSchool’s curriculum committee (a committee comprising faculty and student representatives) included the following general course titles:

- Children’s Literature
- Introduction to Information Studies
- Information in Cyberspace
- Information and Culture
- Information and People
- Information and Technology

The titles of the last three courses intentionally lend themselves to a broad range of subjects enabling instructors to propose and develop different topics that align to individual research interests and expertise, as well as the flexibly to respond to new information and technology trends and topics.

**Undergraduate Courses Today**

Today the majority of the UT iSchool’s undergraduate courses are taught by PhD students who seek to develop teaching experience and to subsidize their studies with a modest salary and an in-state tuition waiver. To be appointed an assistant instructor, doctoral students must complete a course entitled, “Supervised Practice of Teaching.” The class can be repeated for credit with one section taught either as a seminar on higher education pedagogical theory and strategies or an individual study where the student reads about college level teaching, develops and offers one or two lectures, progressing to developing and teaching an entire course with supervision from an experienced faculty member.

Among the courses offered over the past few years are the following.

- **Introduction to Information Studies** (required for a minor in information studies). Overview of the information field as it relates to the technology-based world culture. Topics may include the idea of information, information in relation to technology and culture, information technology in education, information literacy and the “digital divide,” information and communication technology, information and gender, public information literacy, and information organization and preservation.

- **Information in Cyberspace.** Basic skills in using the Internet as a medium for information, research, communication and multi-media resources. Covers basic skills such as email, ftp, World Wide Web, file compression, use of search engines and web publishing; introduction to larger issues such as governance, ethics and freedom of expression. (Four to six sections of this web-based class are team taught.)

- **Working in Virtual Worlds: Using Second Life.** Examines information as a cultural phenomenon. Topics may include e-commerce, privacy and secrecy, censorship, information as a commodity, Internet culture, access to cultural heritage and control of the cultural record. May be repeated for credit when the topics vary.

- **We Like to Watch: Surveillance & Society.** Examines the role of surveillance practices and technologies in our everyday lives. Most of us think of surveillance as something the police or spies do, and so it is. But there’s a lot more to it than that. Marketing, social control, immigration, fashion, identity and voyeurism are just some of the things...
covered during the course. Through lectures, discussions of the literature and the exploration of surveillance themes in pop culture (movies, songs, etc.) the course seeks to expand the way that students look at the benefits and challenges of modern day surveillance systems. (See Lance Hayden’s article in this issue for more details on this course.)

- Security & Safety in Cyberspace. Focuses on information and data security, particularly within networked communications systems. As more and more of our lives are regulated, mediated or enhanced by computers running software that may or may not contain vulnerabilities that could compromise their functionality, it is increasingly important that citizens in a technology-saturated society understand how security works. Students get an introduction to the issues and explore ways in which they can protect themselves and help fight the problems that exist. (Lance Hayden’s article also provides more detail about this course.)

During academic years 2008-2010 School of Information tenured and tenure track faculty have taught two undergraduate signature classes offered from the School of Undergraduate Studies. In return the School of Information received some additional funding: part allocated for use by the instructor and part to support an adjunct faculty member to teach one of each instructors’ courses. Quoting UT President Bill Powers, “These [signature] courses are designed to expose freshmen to experienced faculty and provide them with a rigorous and engaging intellectual experience. They are an important element in UT’s undergraduate curriculum reform. To date the courses have not been considered as part of the iSchool’s undergraduate minor offerings.

Challenges

The UT iSchool’s undergraduate minor in information studies was proposed with the idea that the courses would be taught by full-time faculty, as well as qualified doctoral students. To date there has only been one occasion when a full-time, tenured faculty member taught a course in this suite of courses. The demands on full-time iSchool faculty to focus their teaching efforts on iSchool graduate students (master’s and doctoral) creates a logistical challenge to pull full-time faculty from graduate level courses. The second challenge to supporting the minor in information studies is funding. Initially, additional funding was received to expand the number of sections of Information and Cyberspace offered each semester. Since then there has been no additional funding to support the additional sections of other undergraduate courses. Salaries for assistant instructors to teach undergraduate courses are drawn from the same accounts that fund all instructional initiatives. Continuing to grow the undergraduate offerings is dependent upon the existence of unfilled full-time faculty lines. During the 2009-2010 academic year the iSchool’s undergraduate courses are generating approximately 48% of the school’s total semester credit hours for the year.

A fiscal note for those unfamiliar with public university funding in Texas: In fiscal year 2009-10 the state’s contribution to the UT budget represents 16% of UT’s overall budget. It is impossible to explicate the direct correlation of the state’s “formula for funding” to the iSchool’s annual budget for the purposes of this discussion. I can say, however, that in Texas there are three formula-funded areas: education and general space support; instruction and operations; and teaching experience supplement. All three formulas are driven totally or partly by weighted semester credit hours (SCH) taught. The weights are assigned according to the level of instruction (lower and upper division undergraduate and graduate-master’s and PhD). This complexity makes it difficult to see if efforts in expanding undergraduate course offerings have actually had positive financial ramifications on the UT School of Information’s funding.

A third challenge is the University of Texas Graduate School policy that only permits graduate students to teach lower-division undergraduate courses. Before the iSchool offered a suite of undergraduate courses, doctoral students seeking to prepare for a career in academia had no venue to gain solo, in-class teaching experience. The addition of lower division undergraduate courses to the iSchool course inventory provided an excellent opportunity for these students to propose and develop courses that fit within the three general course subject areas: information and culture; information and people; and information and technology.
A fourth challenge is a bureaucratic information management problem. Because the UT iSchool does not award an undergraduate degree, tracking students who have chosen to minor in information studies continues to be a challenge. Although the university has sophisticated data warehousing and statistical systems from which colleges and schools can extract enrollment and other statistical information, currently, there is no systematic way to collect this information. To date we estimate that since beginning the program in 2005, 16 students have completed a minor in information studies.

What Now?

According to a Pew Research Center report (http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1391/college-enrollment-all-time-high-community-college-surg) college enrollment continues on its two-decade upswing, with an all time high of 18-24 year olds registered in college (either two- or four-year) in fall of 2008. The report goes on to observe an increase of “4.9% per year beyond general inflation from 1999-2000 to 2009-10 at public four-year colleges and universities… A record 84.9% of 18- to 24-year-olds had completed high school as of October 2008, up from 75.5% in 1967 and 83.9% in 2007.” Dropout rates declined during the same period.

What does this increase mean? Universities such as UT-Austin will continue to feel the pressure of increased demand for undergraduate admissions. UT’s President Powers reports that 31,000 have applied for admission to UT for the 2010-2011 academic year, and only 14,000 will be admitted to yield a freshman class of 7,200. The demand for more seats in undergraduate classes is not going to decline. The question remains, “Will graduate programs such as the UT School of Information be able to sustain support for their popular undergraduate courses?” In light of current financial constraints facing Texas universities, we may have to wait and see if future funding will allow the iSchool to sustain or even grow the 1,600 seats it currently offers in undergraduate information studies classes.