Keynote Panel:
Digital Government Research in the Academy

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Categories and Subject Descriptors

A.1 [**General**]: Introduction and Survey

General Terms

Management, Human Factors.

Keywords

Digital government, interdisciplinary research.

1. OVERVIEW of the PANEL

Digital government research spans disciplinary fields that are exceptionally diverse. Although digital government research emerged primarily from efforts to engage computer scientists in research that would improve the functions of government, digital government research today addresses a far broader set of issues including the adoption and use of technology, impacts of technology on government processes, and information and computer science challenges motivated in specific domains (e.g., health or environmental management).

Digital government represents perhaps an extreme in interdisciplinary research: the linking of computer sciences with social and policy sciences. In reality, however, most digital government research is discipline based. For example, computer scientists may develop new tools for managing or processing or transmitting data; policy scientists may analyze how organizations adapt to new data access structures or how new data

access may influence public participation or political decision-making. Why is so little interdisciplinary research emerging in digital government? Are the differences between the fields simply too great, or are there institutional barriers that discourage truly innovative interdisciplinary research?

The purpose of this panel is to explore digital government research in the context of interdisciplinary research. Despite frequently stated goals of promoting interdisciplinary research, of promoting problem-oriented research, etc. on the part of university leaders, there are questions about the extent to which interdisciplinary research is valued and encouraged in the academy. This panel will examine the following issues.

- Faculty careers are driven by promotion and tenure decisions which are largely discipline-based. How is interdisciplinary research assessed in the tenure and promotion process? Is the promotion/tenure review process lagging behind changes in research and knowledge acquisition?

- Research quality assessment is based largely on peer review. Who are the peers for digital government research? How can digital government research be evaluated? Should a digital government researcher be expected to publish in disciplinary venues, publish in emerging digital government research venues, or both? Clearly digital government research can lead to disciplinary breakthroughs, but is that required?

- Interdisciplinary digital government research requires computer scientists to develop an understanding and associated expertise in application domains and, often, social science. Social science digital government researchers are asked to do the same. This requires a significant learning investment. Is it worth it? Is the future of digital government research interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, or collaborative?

- To what extent is interdisciplinary work fostered in the academy? What are the tools for promoting

interdisciplinary research: joint appointments? university seed research funds?

- There are many examples of fields that developed from the merging of disciplines, for example urban planning (public administration, architecture) or regional science (geography, economics). At what point does a field get recognized as legitimate? What roles do professional societies, scholarly journals, etc. play in establishing a new field?

- Digital government has the additional complexity of an applied component. Research is aimed at real world problem solving. Yet within the academy basic, theoretical research is typically more highly valued. Is there a place for applied research in the academy? Are the changes occurring within NSF (to more applied orientation) an indicator of changing values within the academy?

2. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS