# Differences between IS, CS, and IT

## Information Systems

Information systems (IS) is concerned with the information that computer systems can provide to aid a company, non-profit or governmental organization in defining and achieving its goals. It is also concerned with the processes that an enterprise can implement and improve using information technology. IS professionals must understand both technical and organizational factors, and must be able to help an organization determine how information and technology-enabled business processes can provide a foundation for superior organizational performance. They serve as a bridge between the technical and management communities within an organization.

What information does the enterprise need? How is that information generated? Is it delivered to the people who need it? Is it presented to them in ways that permit them to use it readily? Is the organization structured to be able to use technology effectively? Are the business processes of the organization well designed? Do they use the opportunities created by information technology fully? Does the organization use the communication and collaboration capabilities of information technologies appropriately? Is the organization capable of adapting quickly enough to changing external circumstances? These are the important issues that businesses rely on IS people to address.

A majority of IS programs are located in business schools; however, they may have different names such as management information systems, computer information systems, or business information systems. All IS degrees combine business and computing topics, but the emphasis between technical and organizational issues varies among programs. For example, programs differ substantially in the amount of programming required.

Traditionally, many graduates of IS programs have functioned in roles that are similar to the roles for which IT programs explicitly prepare their students. Information systems graduates continue to fill these roles, but the new programs in information technology offer an alternative path to these positions.

Occupations in this field include:

- Project Managers
- Chief Information Officers (CIO)
- Technical Writers
- System Analysts
- Data Communication Analysts

## Computer Science

Computer science (CS) spans the range from theory through programming to cutting-edge development of computing solutions. Computer science offers a foundation that permits graduates to adapt to new technologies and new ideas. The work of computer scientists falls into three categories: a) designing and building software; b) developing effective ways to solve computing problems, such as storing information in databases, sending data over networks or providing new approaches to security problems; and c) devising new and better ways of using computers and addressing particular challenges in areas such as robotics, computer vision, or digital forensics (although these specializations are not available in all computer science programs). Most computer science programs require some mathematical background.

Let us consider what is involved in a career path in each area.

- Career Path 1: Designing and implementing software. This refers to the work of software development which has grown to include aspects of web development, interface design, security issues, mobile computing, and so on. This is the career path that the majority of computer science graduates follow. While a bachelor's degree is generally sufficient for entry into this kind of career, many software professionals return to school to obtain a terminal master's degree. (Rarely is a doctorate involved.) Career opportunities occur in a wide variety of settings including large or small software companies, large or small computer services companies, and large organizations of all kinds (industry, government, banking, healthcare, etc.). Degree programs in software engineering also educate students for this career path.

- Career Path 2: Devising new ways to use computers. This refers to innovation in the application of computer technology. A career path in this area can involve advanced graduate work, followed by a position in a research university or industrial research and development laboratory; it can involve entrepreneurial activity such as was evident during the dot-com boom of the 1990s; or it can involve a combination of the two.

- Career Path 3: Developing effective ways to solve computing problems. This refers to the application or development of computer science theory and knowledge of algorithms to ensure the best possible solutions for computationally intensive problems. As a practical matter, a career path in the development of new computer science theory typically requires graduate work to the Ph.D. level, followed by a position in a research university or an industrial research and development laboratory.

- Career Path 4: Planning and managing organizational technology infrastructure. This is the type of work for which the new information technology (IT) programs explicitly aim to educate students.

Career paths 2 and 3 are undeniably in the domain of computer science graduates. Career paths 1 and 4 have spawned the new majors in software engineering and information technology,

respectively, and information systems graduates often follow Career path 1, too. Computer scientists continue to fill these positions, but programs in software engineering, information technology, and information systems offer alternative paths to these careers.

Occupations in this field include:

- Computer Programmer
- Java Developer
- Database Administrator
- Software Engineer
- Network Engineer

## Information Technology

Information technology (IT) is a label that has two meanings. In common usage, the term "information technology" is often used to refer to all of computing. As a name of an undergraduate degree program, it refers to the preparation of students to meet the computer technology needs of business, government, healthcare, schools, and other kinds of organizations.

IT professionals possess the right combination of knowledge and practical, hands-on expertise to take care of both an organization's information technology infrastructure and the people who use it. They assume responsibility for selecting hardware and software products appropriate for an organization. They integrate those products with organizational needs and infrastructure, and install, customize and maintain those applications, thereby providing a secure and effective environment that supports the activities of the organization's computer users. In IT, programming often involves writing short programs that typically connect existing components (scripting).

Planning and managing an organization's IT infrastructure is a difficult and complex job that requires a solid foundation in applied computing as well as management and people skills. Those in the IT discipline require special skills – in understanding, for example, how networked systems are composed and structured, and what their strengths and weaknesses are. There are important software systems concerns such as reliability, security, usability, and effectiveness and efficiency for their intended purpose; all of these concerns are vital. These topics are difficult and intellectually demanding.

Occupations in the field include:

- Network Administrator
- Information Technology Manager

- Computer Support Specialist
- Data Security Administrator
- Computer Technician

Information was obtain from the Association for Computing Machinery Web site.

For more on the Web page content from Weiqi Li visit his Web site at:
http://spruce.flint.umich.edu/~weli/courses/bus181/notes/chap1.html