

An Interview with James Shackelford, ISHP Director

by Amandeep Bains

The following is an interview with James Shackelford, current director of the Integrated Studies Honors Program at the University of California, Davis. Dr. Shackelford reflectively describes his long-time association with IS while discussing improvements made within the program in recent years. His passion and commitment to IS was readily visible throughout the interview as he pointed out old pictures, and in a markedly sincere fashion, wished all current IS students the best of luck with their future endeavors.

What is your background? Where did you go to school, etc.?

I grew up in the state of Washington, and went to the University of Washington to get my undergraduate and master's degrees in engineering. I went to UC Berkeley to get my PhD, and after a couple of years of doing post-doctoral research in Eastern Canada, I came to UC Davis in 1973.

Why did you choose to come to Davis?

I think people typically choose an academic setting where there is opportunity—getting a job offer was an integral part of that. I also had a chance to come back to California and at the time, Davis was a dynamic and growing campus.

Was IS a university program when you joined UC Davis in 1973?

It was. IS started in 1969, which means that we're coming up on our 40th anniversary pretty soon, but I actually didn't learn more about IS until the 1980s. After being at Davis for ten years, I became the associate dean in the College of Engineering, where I met Nora McGuinness, the administrator of IS at the time. She specifically came to me when they were expanding the program, and I helped her lobby for the General Education (GE) status for the IST courses. In 2001, I got a call from IS vice-provost Pat Turner, who said that a review committee had recommended that a full-time faculty member become the new director as Nora was nearing retirement, and that the program should grow in size and in terms of its offerings—providing more beyond the freshman year. I looked into the program and decided to join.

Are there any special responsibilities that you have as Director?

It's general oversight. IS is a very small program with a very compact staff. It's ideal for an administrator. I don't have to deal with very many complications, since I have only one staff member. Jenny Moody does a terrific job, and I let her complete her many responsibilities as independently as possible, while I also put my 50% obligations into things for the department— some teaching, some research— so it's good to have the flexibility in choosing my time to work for various projects.

Have you personally taught a course in IS?

I have. I typically am the instructor for the fall seminar— the only time we really come together as an entire group academically. I usually don't schedule myself for one of the four-unit IST8 classes, but in case we have a last minute emergency, I am available. In the past, I have done a class on the basic history of the Manhattan project from World War II. It essentially was a topic in the social sciences with a technical aspect to it. I've also introduced public visualization as a course. The classes may look at how the world is viewed through a series of charts and graphs in the sciences, or depicted in other visual ways via the arts. Currently, I am team-teaching with a member from the bio-photonics center in a science course entitled shedding light on life, in which various light-based techniques are used to study living organisms.

How do you recruit other professors for IS?

It's actually a fairly easy selling job. They often hear about IS by word-of-mouth, and it's always an engaging experience to teach a small class of eager students.

Do you have an interesting anecdote about IS to share?

There's a fairly funny story from a few years ago. Miller Hall is usually a very safe and secure housing unit, but somehow a couple of young fellows, not in IS, got into the building on a Friday night. They were a little intoxicated, and they wandered around while people were humoring them and helping them find their way out. The boys started to notice that this wasn't a normal dorm, because people were doing homework and studying on a Friday night. As they walked out, their parting comment was, "So, are all you guys like Valedictorians?". Moral of the story: I think IS students can make a great positive impression under *any* circumstances.

Have you kept in touch with any of the past IS students?

I have. I see a lot of the students in their senior year, coming in for letters of recommendation to med-schools and such, and I've found that many students that go through the IS program, go out and do exceptionally well after completing their

undergraduate studies too.

How would you describe IS students?

They are all, by definition, very sharp. They're very comfortable to work with, have great senses of humor with all the nerd jokes, and are your all-American type of students—athletic, academic, and often bring a strong interest in music.

Is there a new housing opportunity for IS students past the first year?

Yes, hopefully by fall 2009 there will be some Honor's housing available in the new university-owned West Village apartment complex, which will be something like The Colleges on La Rue, but on a grander scale.