

Remarks at the 2007 Fellow Award Luncheon  
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It is a pleasure to welcome everyone to the 2007 Fellow Award luncheon. I would like to thank everyone for coming to honor this year's inductees. I would also like to thank the members of my Fellow selection committee for the care and dedication they demonstrated in the evaluation of the nominations. I would especially like to thank Betsy Fruhling and the staff in the Informs office for handling all aspects of the production of the award, from managing the nominations to organizing this wonderful luncheon, all of which was handled with efficiency and grace.

This year brings us to the end of the five-year phase-in period for the Fellow award, which also makes it a good time to stop, look around and see if we if we can improve the process in any way.

Serving on the Fellows selection committee has been a special experience for me. I was a member of Mark Daskin's committee in 2001, (along with Brenda Dietrich, Tom Cook, Karla Hoffman and Tim Lowe) which created the Fellow award. When we introduced the award, we created a set of core principles to guide its implementation, but we left a number of important issues to be designed by the first round of Fellows themselves. Our feeling was that there was more than enough talent in this original group of Fellows to design the important policies and procedures required to implement the original design. Serving on the committee allowed me to see how the Fellow award had evolved from our original design.

Our expectations were not just met, but exceeded. Of particular importance was the criteria used for selecting the Fellows. Mark's committee designed five key dimensions which we wanted to recognize: research, practice, management, education and service. The choice of these dimensions is particularly important, because it establishes the principle that Informs is a diverse, multidimensional society that recognizes different types of achievements. If I

would compare Informs to art, I would say that we are not described by the simple elegance of a Mondrian [right], but rather the richness of a Monet [below].

The original proposal required that all five dimensions be considered, but the performance in at least one of the dimensions must be truly outstanding. The Fellows

selection committee designed an evaluation system where each candidate is rated excellent, very good, good and so on in each category. Detailed

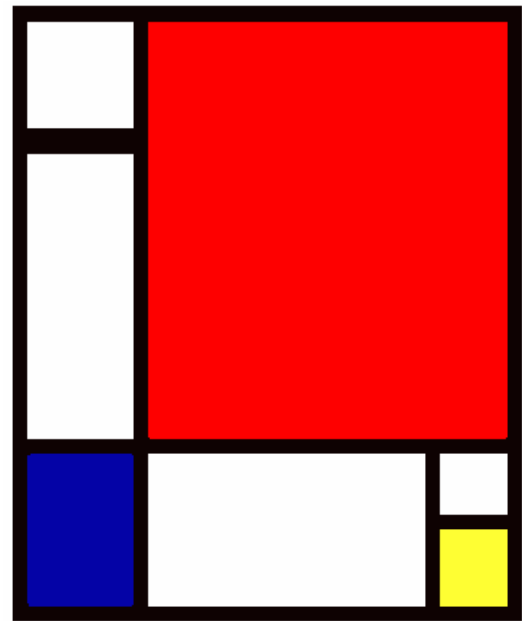
descriptions were provided of what constitutes an “excellent” for each category. These descriptions all

insist on national, and for research, international,

recognition as someone who has contributed in a significant way in one of the five

dimensions. In each case, the award insists on contributions throughout the nominee’s

career. In the three years I have served on this committee, I could hear in the deliberations of the various panels a genuine desire to find evidence of real impact.



The original Fellows proposal identified type I errors (turning down strong people) and type II errors (admitting weaker people), and emphasized the importance of minimizing type II errors to maintain the credibility of the award. It also encouraged procedures to minimize the subjectivity of the selection process. In a quantitative profession such as ours, this argues for some sort of measure that allows us to evaluate the candidates. Total number of papers? Number of employees managed? Number of software packages sold? I have had a number of discussions of different metrics with various colleagues, and inevitably the topic of citation indices will come up. From these conversations I have learned... if you would like to have a polite conversation with an academic colleague, never discuss citations. After hearing the 17 reasons why citations should not be used as a metric, I realized that the problem is not with citations per se, but with quantitative measures themselves. It is not that these measures do not have value, it is that in isolation, each measure suffers from the flaw that more means better. Are low citations an indication that the work was ignored, or that it was only appreciated by the elite of our community? Do we respect rock music over classical? Should Informs value Microsoft Excel over Cplex? Should we respect a textbook over a research monograph? Ultimately, all of these are important, but in different ways. The simple reality is that we do not know how to measure excellence, but we know it when we see it.

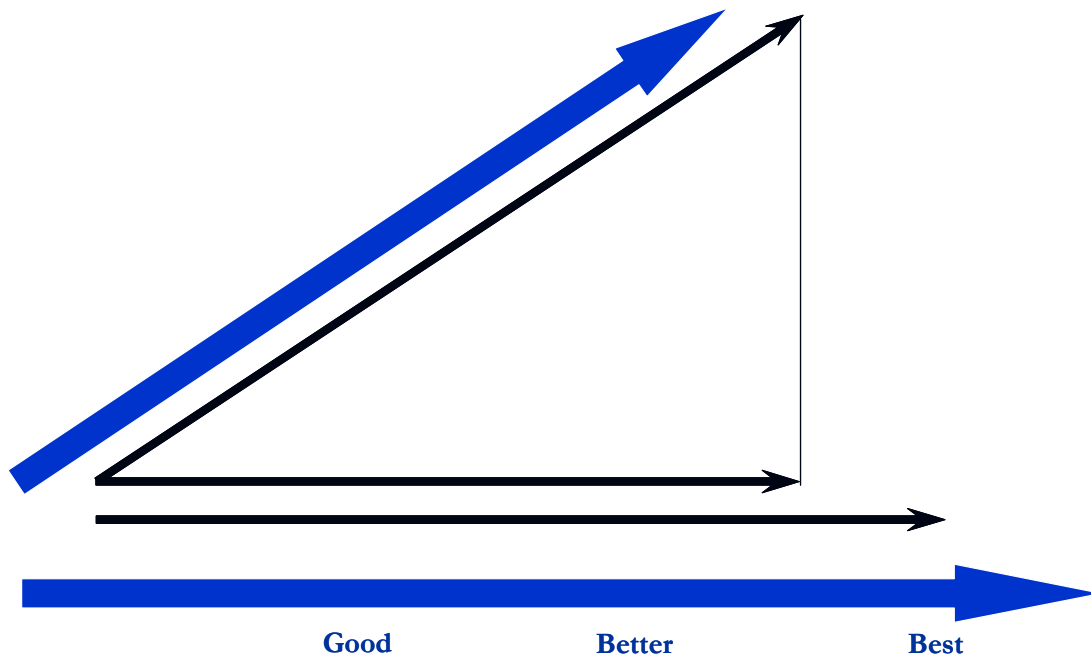
The selection process, then, is necessarily subjective, although it is clearly guided by the basic principles laid out in the original proposal. The selection committee is formed of 12 people, divided into three panels. Four new people are selected each year by a vote of the Fellows among candidates who were willing to volunteer. This is not a perfect process, but Mark Daskin reminded me a few weeks ago of Winston Churchill's famous quote:

*It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried.*

From my experience, everyone on the panel takes this responsibility very seriously. When I thought about discussions of type I and type II errors, I found myself thinking: how is it possible to make a type II error? It is only possible to receive a positive vote if a group of people, usually the panel doing the initial evaluation, is impressed with the strength of a case. This does not mean that every Fellow looks outstanding to everyone else. We each bring our own pair of rose-colored glasses to the table, and sometimes it requires the collective wisdom

of the committee, supported by the nominating material, to put together the case required for election.

Type I errors, however, are another matter. One candidate may look stronger than another, but perhaps we are just looking at the second candidate from the wrong perspective (see figure below). There is no question that we have turned down very good people. It is simply the case that a panel, and sometimes the committee as a whole, was simply unable to make a case to the satisfaction of the people on the committee. I say this without apology, because for every candidate, we did our best.



When we finalized our decisions, I gave Betsy Fruhling the enjoyable task of notifying the winners. I took it upon myself to personally send out the regrets. The opening line of my letter read:

*The deliberations of the Fellows Selection Committee have finally drawn to a close. I am sorry that we were unable to select [the candidate] for the Fellow Award this year.*

It was important to me that I accept, on behalf of the committee, the responsibility that the failure might rest with the committee. All the nominees are good people. It is entirely possible that a different committee would have made a different decision, and if you meet a disappointed candidate or nominator, please use the opportunity to explain the challenge of evaluating candidates from different perspectives.

I wanted to describe this process so that everyone understands it. And I now challenge all of you to do more than just be a Fellow. I would like to ask that you be an Ambassador of the Fellow award. Do not hesitate to explain the incredible care that goes into these evaluations, while at the same time acknowledging that we are not always able to recognize the diversity of achievements that make up our society.

I would also like to let everyone know of changes that we are making. The first, thanks to Vicky Sauter, is that the website now lets us search the list of fellows alphabetically. This will make it much easier to find out if someone is a fellow. I will also be working with Vicky to restore maintain the historical record by providing short summaries of your achievements, as was done for the 2003 class. Please be on the lookout for a request to provide this information.

Finally, I am putting into place a Fellow Executive Advisory Committee, formed of the five former general chairs. The executive advisory committee will provide advice and guidance to the current general chair, and will advise the Informs Board of Directors regarding changes to the Policy and Procedures manual for the award. One of the first tasks that I will undertake with this committee, a process that I have already started with Saul Gass, is to design a questionnaire to get a sense of the makeup of the current set of fellows as a way of assessing how well we are capturing the achievements of Informs. When you receive this questionnaire later this year, please respond as quickly as possible.

So now I would like to turn to this year's awardees. I would like to first offer my congratulations, but I would also like to provide an insight into why we are granting this award. Of course we want to recognize a substantial career of accomplishments. Each of you, through a combination of talent, creativity and hard work, have had an impact on your profession and society, and for this, all of us are grateful. But we are going to ask even more of you. We are going to ask that you share the glow of your accomplishments with Informs, since the achievements of our Fellows represent the most visible achievements of our society. By recognizing these achievements, we bring honor to the entire profession.