IS Department Seminar
Shapeshifters and Bridge Builders: Human-Centered Computing Challenges in the Nonprofit Sector

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ABSTRACT
The nonprofit sector is a unique and compelling context for studying and designing computer and information systems. Not only do nonprofit organizations operate under significant resource and expertise constraints that fundamentally influence technology use, they also chronically underutilize technology when they don’t see a direct connection between that technology and their mission. My research has identified numerous disconnects between existing technologies and the practices of people working on behalf of nonprofits as well as between those technologies and philosophies of the role of voluntary organizations in society. These disconnects present numerous opportunities for novel system design.

In this talk, I will present results from a qualitative study of the work practices and technology use of nonprofit volunteer coordinators and discuss some of the research challenges and design opportunities in this context. I’ll focus on two classes of technology:
(1) Databases and personal information management tools. I will discuss the ways that volunteer coordinators continually craft and reconfigure assemblages of databases and personal information management tools in a never-ending attempt to satisfice their information management needs when those needs are constantly shifting.
(2) Social computing technologies. I will discuss the ways that volunteer coordinators struggle to build bridges between their organizations and members of the public via social software, particularly when that software fails to support their underlying values and philosophies of volunteerism.

BIO
Amy Voida is a lecturer in the Department of Communication at Cornell University. She conducts research in the areas of human-computer interaction, computer-supported cooperative work, and ubiquitous computing, with a focus on the use of information and communication technologies in the nonprofit sector. Amy holds a Ph.D. in Human-Centered Computing from the Georgia Institute of Technology, a M.S. in Human-Computer Interaction from the Georgia Institute of Technology, and a B.A.E. in Elementary Education from Arizona State University. Her research has been supported by the Center for Organizational Research at the University of California, Irvine and by the National Science Foundation.