

It is said we live in an *information* age. A number of academic disciplines are referred to, and refer to themselves, as “information sciences.” Biology, for example, is heavily motivated by the genetic code, “code” being an important information science word.

So here’s a question. Consider a seminar of the best information scientists in the University. Does accounting deserve a seat at the table?

Accounting *does* come equipped with some unique scientific tools. For example, the double entry system, itself, is a linear *code*. (There’s that word again.) Indeed, having been in existence for over 5 centuries, the double entry system has a claim to being the oldest, largest, and most famous linear code.

Suppose one starts with the accounting code structure, and develops information theorems. That puts one right in the middle of information issues. One problem, for example, is the achievability of error free transmission through a noisy channel (using a code). This one was resolved theoretically in a surprising way by Claude Shannon, often referred to as the father of the information age.

Another issue is the flip side of error free transmission: that is, how to restrict any information at all from traveling through the channel. That means secret *codes*, and that word appears again. Accountants are routinely charged with safeguarding information. For example, keeping track of the academy award ballots.

A modest case for accounting as a participant, in good standing, at the information science table is attempted in a (12 chapter) manuscript entitled Accounting: An Information Science. I hasten to add that I am not trying to sell anything here. The manuscript is available to anyone who is interested free of charge. It’s on my web site.

A striking property is how powerful the sharing of information is. In quantum physics Nature shares information using a mysterious process called entanglement: Nature’s own double entry system. The University, at its best, embodies the very best of information sharing. And I have been more than fortunate to have had access to some really excellent scholarly thinking. The debts I owe, intellectual and otherwise, are profound. There are sadly too many scholars for me to thank here. I apologize publicly, and will do my best to apologize privately as well.

I make an exception. The intellectual contributions of Joel Demski to accounting and information are unmatched. But the body of work is not as important as the example of what it means to be a true citizen of the University. There is nothing more central than getting the best possible ideas in front of the classroom. And the responsibility for doing so resides solely with faculty scholars.

I am truly humbled to be included (with my friend Wayne) on the list of recipients of this award. The first recipient in 1973, Chuck Horngren, is no longer with us. When I think of Chuck, I think of collegiality. It really is quite amazing what can be accomplished when we don’t worry about who gets the credit.