



The Gary Chapman International School  
on Digital Transformation

## **The ISDT Experience and History**

The Gary Chapman International School on Digital Transformation

July, 2011

**UT Austin | Portugal**

INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATORY FOR EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES, CoLAB

## What is ISDT?

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The Gary Chapman International School on Digital Transformation is an immersive, residential school that brings together emerging and established scholars, entrepreneurs, social activists, and other professionals to explore ideas about cutting-edge technologies useful for civil society. ISDT students come from a variety of backgrounds. Many are advanced graduate students but journalists, NGO workers, designers, and professors also attend. The ISDT faculty includes recognized experts and activists working in a variety of endeavors all over the globe.

The purpose of ISDT has been two-fold. First, the program introduces students from Portugal and abroad to ideas and projects that illustrate how digital technologies are transforming societies. Secondly, the School creates and fosters an international network of scholars, researchers, practitioners and innovators who are working with citizens everywhere to employ digital technologies for positive social change.

Gary Chapman, the motivating force behind the School, cited two inspirations for ISDT: the 44-year-old International School on Disarmament and Resolution of Conflicts, or ISODARCO, which is held every year in Italy and which he attended for many years; and the world's largest digital media conference, held in Austin, South-By-Southwest Interactive. ISDT is an attempt to combine the residential experience of ISODARCO with some of the subject matter of SXSW Interactive, bringing together advanced students and young professionals in digital media with experienced scholars and practitioners for a week of interaction which grows into a lifelong network.



Porto, Portugal

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ISDT builds on a common model of collaboration between researchers, scholars and social entrepreneurs in the nonprofit sector.

It is the “permeability” of these different roles that leads to innovation and creativity in digital media, as well as some important social phenomena. The School is a place to explore this process with its best practitioners and with young leaders. ISDT is also a method, so to speak. Everyone who attends is regarded as a peer, to encourage productive conversations, instead of as speakers and audience. Open time is built into the schedule to encourage informal and spontaneous conversations, workshops, and discussion groups, allowing the faculty and students to collectively shape the agenda each year based upon their areas of expertise and interests.

The program is socially intensive; everyone shares breakfasts and dinners in order to promote conversations, the candid sharing of ideas, in an atmosphere of collegiality.

Many participants organize additional outings during the afternoons and late evenings. ISDT is meant to be fun, too—a memorable experience—one that makes it stand out from conventional academic meetings. The combination of innovation, inspiration, interactivity and fun is what makes ISDT unique.

## The Program

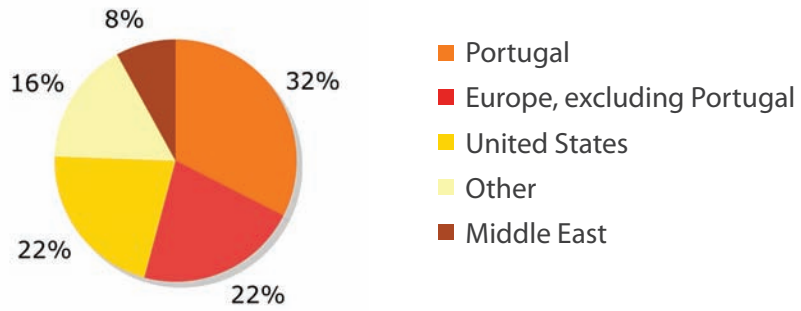
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The International School on Digital Transformation was launched as part of the UT Austin | Portugal Program in July 2009 at the University of Porto. The first session hosted 22 faculty presenters and 51 students who applied from all over the world and represented 14 countries, including 17 students from Portugal. A year later, the second session drew about 40 students and speakers from a variety of countries, including 16 from Portugal, to discuss social and political changes related to digital communication systems. Now in its third year, ISDT 2011 will host over 35 students and 17 faculty members from Asia, Europe, Africa and the Middle East, and the Americas.

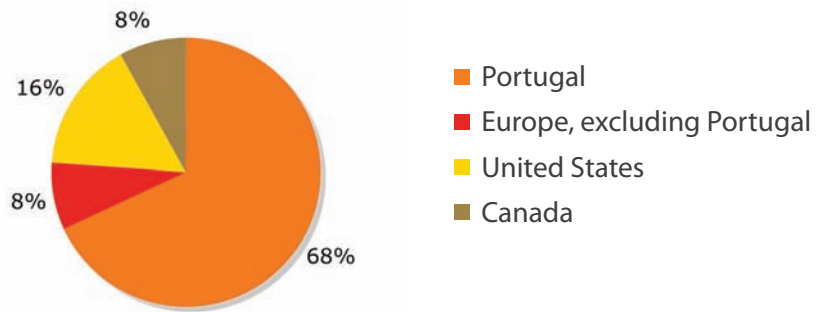
We believe ISDT and Portugal nourish each other. ISDT helps create a core group of young leaders, many based in Portugal, who are part of an international network of innovators. Experience shows that such people represent critical elements of creativity and progress in digital technologies. ISDT heightens the visibility of Portugal as a site of digital transformation and creativity. It is a way for Portuguese innovators to share their own work with people from around the world.

The core constituencies of ISDT are changing the world with ideas such as open source, free culture, transparency, crowd-sourcing, civic engagement, community informatics, and a host of other, related digital media concepts. These ideas are the “drivers” in creative centers like Texas, Brazil, Barcelona, Silicon Valley and elsewhere. At the same time, Portugal has turned out to be an ideal location for the school. The city of Porto is rich in culture and history and is world-renowned for its architectural and natural beauty. Additionally, it is the home of a highly respected university, where local researchers and practitioners are doing valuable, innovative work that can be shared with others at the school.

### ISDT Participants by Region 2011



### ISDT Participants by Region 2010



## ISDT Faculty

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**Sunil Abraham**

Centre for Internet and Society, Bangalore

**Ademar Aguiar**

INESC Porto

**Graham Attwell**

Pontypdysgu

**Patricia Aufderheide**

School of Communication, American University, Washington, D.C.

**Rui Barros**

INESC Porto

**Warigia Bowman**

University of Mississippi

**Andy Carvin**

National Public Radio, US

**Fiorella De Cendio**

University of Milano Department of Informatics and Communication,  
Italy

**Gary Chapman**

UT Austin, LBJ School of Public Affairs

**Cristina Costa**

University of Salford

**Sara de Freitas**

Serious Games Institute at the University of Coventry

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**Martha Fuentes-Bautista**

University of Massachusetts at Amherst

**Diego Gómez**

Hiperbarrio Colombia

**Eric Gundersen**

Development Seed, US

**Michael Gurstein**

Centre for Community Informatics Research, Development and Training,  
Canada

**Derek Lackaff**

Elon University

**Ming-Chun Lee**

UT Austin School of Architecture

**Smári McCarthy**

International Modern Media Institute, Iceland

**Tanya Notley**

Tactical Technology Collective, London, UK

**Tapan Parikh**

University of California at Berkeley

**Tiago Peixoto**

European University Institute, Florence, Italy

**Marlon Parker**

Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa





**Alison Powell**

Oxford Internet Institute, Oxford, UK

**Nicholas Reville**

Participatory Culture Foundation

**Scott S. Robinson**

Universidad Metropolitana, Iztapalapa Campus, Mexico City

**Pedro Markun**

Jornal de Debates, Brazil

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**Jorge Martins Rosa**

Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Lisbon, Portugal

**Christian Sandvig**

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

**Doug Schuler**

Public Sphere Project, Evergreen State College, Seattle, Washington

**Leslie Regan Shade**

Concordia University, Quebec, Canada

**Micah Sifry**

Personal Democracy Forum

**Daniela Silva**

Esfera, Brazil

**Laura Stein**

The University of Texas at Austin

**Siva Vaidhyanathan**

Media Studies and Law, University of Virginia

**Katrin Verclas**

Mobilactive.org

**Karin Wilkins**

UT Austin, College of Communications

**Jillian York**

Electronic Frontier Foundation, US

## ISDT Topics

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The diverse backgrounds of the ISDT speakers provide the freshest and most varied perspectives on digital media and civil society as they analyze current events and issues and critically examine evolving theoretical paradigms and opportunities for adapting technological capabilities to new circumstances.

The School's topics are diverse. Some of the principal themes include:

*Democratic transformations of society through digital media*

*Innovations in transparency and political participation using new online tools*

*Grassroots civic activities using digital technologies*

*Prospects for digital communication in developing regions*

*Economically and politically galvanizing historically underserved areas*

*Developing "open cities" and municipal participation through technological interventions*

*Information access and open civic discourse*

*Evolving Internet content regulation and the public's right to information Factors influencing the growth of online civic engagement*

## Affinity Sessions at ISDT

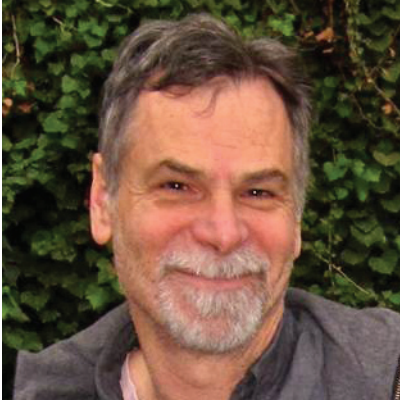
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Participant-driven workshops and affinity sessions emerged as among the most important elements of ISDT. Students and faculty propose and join informal meetings around topics that have currency and that touch chords within the group. These opportunities offer a space for participants to network and form relationships that persist after the session is over, to enhance their project-building skills, to broaden their research abilities, and they allow people to actively collaborate and develop projects during the School. In many cases these meetings have produced ongoing working relationships among students and faculty. Nurturing a persistent network of emerging and established experts in digital media and civil society is one primary goal of the School. Some affinity sessions produced work on the following topics.

- Digital Policy Literacy
- Locative Media & Mobile Technologies
- Community Informatics
- Notions of Civil Society, Citizens, Civics
- LCD Hackerspace Visit
- Social Interactive Systems
- Students for Free Culture Portugal
- Community-driven Innovation and Sustainable Models
- Economic Systems and Development
- Assessment of Campaigns and Projects
- Campaigning and Creative Thinking
- Creative Commons and Copyright
- Digital Revolution and Kids' Educational Challenges
- Free Software for Non-geeks
- Politics and the State of Africa
- Mapping Tools
- Developing a Media Strategy for Advocacy
- Mobile Technology for Economic Opportunity
- Open Data
- Participatory Design Strategies
- Utopia, Democracy, Digitality

## Featured ISDT Topics

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### **Doug Schuler**

*Reinventing Social Thought  
and Action with Civic Intelligence:  
What type of digital transformation?*

Schuler introduces the concept of “civic intelligence” as a way to talk about desirable social digital transformation. He argues for a vision that blends activism with research, addressing (1) civic intelligence as an appropriate paradigm, (2) some examples of civic intelligence at work, and (3) the notion of a civic intelligence thought experiment.

Civic intelligence recalls familiar concepts like social capital and organizational capacity. Referring to examples including Wikileaks and the protest against the US invasion of Iraq, Schuler asks, “How can we recognize and measure civic intelligence?” One way is to examine citizen engagement and approaches to shared challenges. But building civic intelligence is never a one-time affair: it is a continuous process of adaptive learning and meta-cognition.



## **Katrin Verclas**

### *Mobile Phones and Social Development*

Verclas calls for more high quality research on the use of mobile phones for social change and advocacy. She suggests that researchers and activists must move beyond technologically deterministic stances that either greet mobile phones as a panacea for social problems or condemn them as ineffective tools for development. Instead, the use of mobile phones within underserved populations must be realistically evaluated for their ability to “make life better.”

Verclas provides several examples including cases in Africa, Europe, and the Middle East, and suggests that while it is universally agreed that mobile connectivity is important, the influence of corporate interests has inhibited use in economically underdeveloped areas. In doing so, Verclas calls for a greater focus on open source technologies and bottom-up innovation, as well as more research on patterns of ownership, usage, user needs, and impact.



## **Nick Reville**

### *Social Change Infrastructure: Building Values Into the Way our World Works*

Reville's work is grounded in a vision for an online social/cultural commons that is not managed by corporate interests. As Executive Director of the Participatory Culture Foundation, he oversees the development of the open source media player Miro, and he is also involved in the development of OpenCongress, a tool to encourage political participation and government transparency. Drawing upon examples such as Facebook and content delivery tools like Kindle and iTunes, Reville explores the implications of concentrated corporate power in the online world, stressing the need to define the debate surrounding public and private interests and build a new, sustainable online social infrastructure based on open, rather than closed, systems.



**Micah Sifry**  
*The Useful Myth  
of the Obama Campaign*

Sifry, a writer, strategist, and co-founder of Personal Democracy Forum, examines the intersection of new technologies and participatory democracy. He explores the “useful myths” of the Obama campaign, arguing that it was a sophisticated 21st century marketing machine, rather than an organic, bottom-up expression of the people. In dissecting the Obama campaign, he notes that while it included the efforts of masses of volunteers, Obama’s organization did not give them a voice. The market-based nature of the Obama campaign anticipates future election efforts rather than taking advantage of the unprecedented opportunities for political participation offered by the Web 2.0 paradigm. Can campaigns sustain real participation? Can we make e-governance work?



## Ongoing Projects and Collaborations

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The lasting relationships ISDT aimed to nurture have indeed flourished. Former attendees keep in touch, seek one another's advice, and collaborate on research and activist projects.



Laura Stein



Tanya Notley

## Human Rights

Laura Stein and Tanya Notley worked with a group of graduate students at UT Austin, including two ISDT alumni, to conduct evaluation research on how human rights groups in Mexico, Brazil, Cyprus and elsewhere have used the Tactical Technology training materials, "10 Tactics for Turning Information into Action." Some of this research has appeared on the Tactical Technology website. Stein and Notley are working on an academic article about the opportunities and challenges groups face using information and communication technology in human rights advocacy and have shared their work at international conferences.



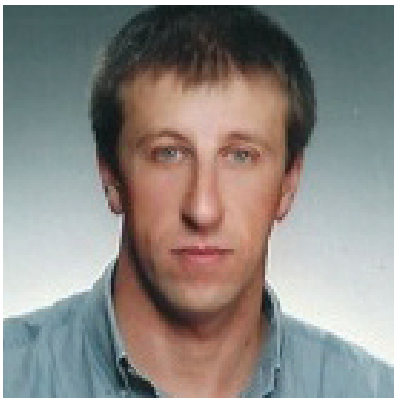
Eric Gunderson

## International Development

Carina Lopes and Olaf Veerman initiated “Good Craft,” a start-up that develops technological solutions for international development organizations using Open Source technology, aiming to contribute to a higher degree of accountability and openness while empowering local communities. In 2011 they developed a project focused on mapping violence in Caracas. Eric Gunderson of Development Seed, a 2010 faculty member, has advised them on their projects, and additional plans with other geographic foci are in the planning stages.



Fiorella de Cindio



Ademar Aguiar



Tiago Peixoto

## Cultivating Relationships

Fiorella de Cindio has worked with various ISDT faculty members in the past two years. In 2011 she gave a talk at Doug Schuler's institution, Evergreen State College of Washington in the US. Her talk, "After the Protests: Lessons From the Italian Laboratory" drew on her experience with online technologies and civic activism in Italy, while reflecting on recent events in Egypt and Tunisia. Taking a practical stance, she discusses deliberative tools and environments that may help citizens to consolidate their presence and influence in the political arena, and proposes design guidelines to help establish these online environments. Additionally, De Cindio has hosted ISDT faculty members Ademar Aguiar and Tiago Peixoto in talks and workshops at the University of Milan, and plans further collaborative work.



Marlon Parker

## Advocacy

Frederico Gustavo Magalhães Pereira has worked with another ISDT alumnus, Tiago Gama Rocha, to plan a mobile help line modeled on the South African advocacy projects known as R Labs presented by Marlon Parker in 2010.

In 2010, ISDT alumna Ana Barata attended the Leeds University Institute of Social Communications PhD conference, at the invitation of former ISDT participant Kheira Belkacem. Her presentation was titled "Online digital art platforms as places of social awareness and political intervention".

## What People Say about ISDT

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Participants from the International School on Digital Transformation 2009 and 2010 sessions praise the program for its collegial atmosphere, describing how the informal tone allowed them to quickly forge lasting relationships with fellow researchers and activists with a range of work experience. A survey of 2009 alumni in the spring of 2010 demonstrated that the program brings lasting benefits to its participants, and that it can serve as an incubator for future collaborations. Respondents reported that the participatory nature of the program allowed them to get advice from senior scholars, identify prospective doctoral advisers, and form new research networks that have persisted. One student stated,

“Participating in the ISDT09 was a very useful and inspiring experience which allowed me to get in touch and share ideas with a community of very challenging, thought-provoking individuals with different points of view... It was certainly a long-lasting experience of ‘civic intelligence’ that has not only broadened my scientific knowledge but also deepened my emotional intelligence and multicultural background.”

Another participant commented that relationships formed at the ISDT 2009 session led to work with an international community advocacy group focusing on new media use and reform in Venezuela, and that the program led to contacts and resources supporting her teaching activities.



Responses from 2010 ISDT participants were similarly positive and showed particular enthusiasm for new aspects of the program, such as the impromptu affinity sessions and workshops. According to this year's survey responses, ISDT's greatest strengths lie in the creative, driven people the program attracts and the interactions that occur as these people come together in a socially relaxed yet intensive environment, creating fertile ground for new ideas and collaborations. Comments from 2010 participants describe the program as excelling in "the quality and diversity of the people involved" and express appreciation at the "freedom of students to network and exchange ideas." The program's intensive schedule gave participants the opportunity to connect in a variety of ways – over dinner, coffee, in formal sessions, and in the random conversations that occur throughout the week. One participant noted, "Networking during the nights out were very productive, it was fresher and relaxing."

In these ways, ISDT represents an emerging model of conferencing, one that effectively cultivates international and cross-disciplinary collaboration among researchers and activists at a variety of career stages, brought together in their commitment to find new ways for digital media to enhance civil society. In our evaluation surveys, we find that over 90% of respondents agree that the program expands their professional networks; 80% agree that ISDT provided them with an experience they would be unable to find elsewhere; and 60% report that as a result of ISDT, they were working with new collaborators.

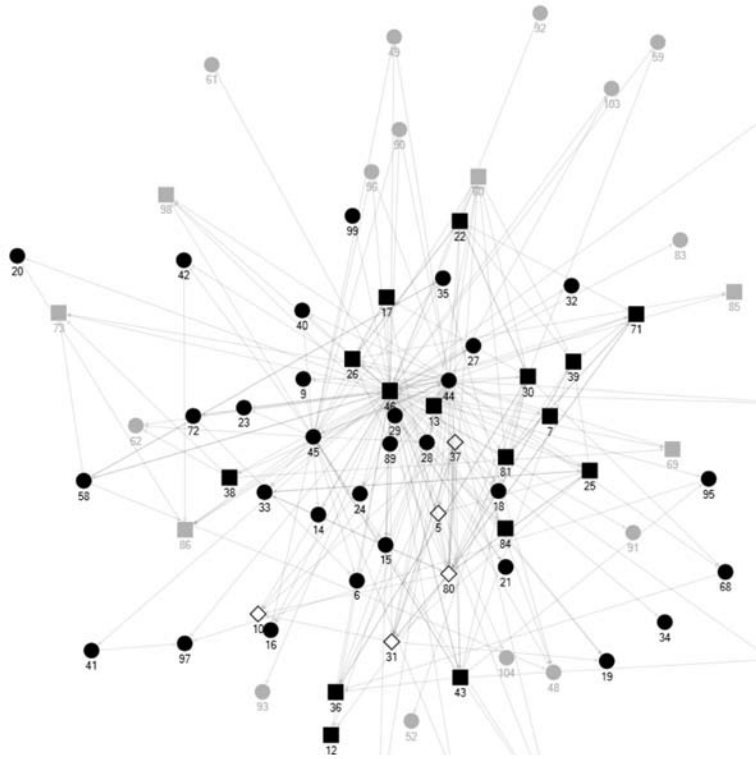
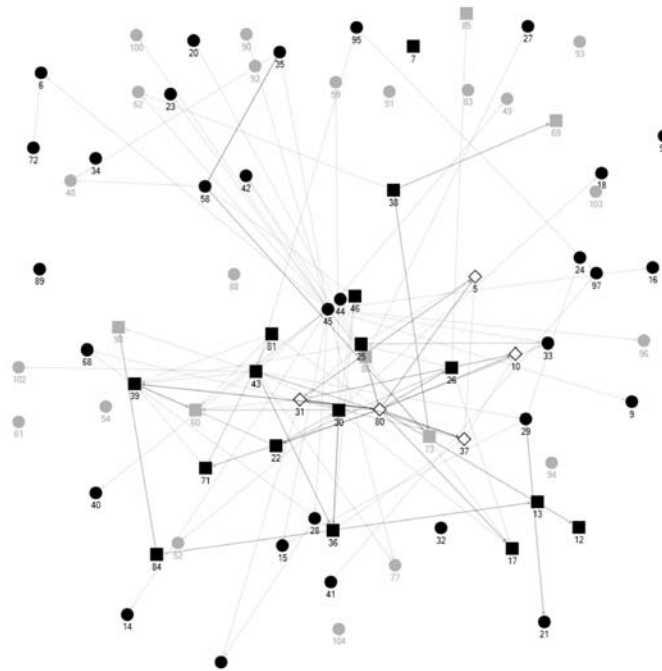


Figure 1. Passive awareness (Facebook status updates, Twitter tweets, etc.)<sup>1</sup>

A research team that included Professors Sharon Strover and Artur Alves, research associate Derek Lackaff, and research assistant Chris McConnell undertook a study to see what kinds of social ties emerged from ISDT 2009. Several months after the school, the team administered a survey to each of the participants, asking them to identify which of their fellow participants they met and with whom they maintain contact. The survey also asked them to identify how they maintained their relationship, whether through internet media such as email and social-networking services or conventional means such as the telephone and face-to-face contact.

<sup>1</sup> Students are represented as circles, presenters are represented as squares, and organizers are shown as diamonds. Each line represents a social connection and the arrow indicates directionality; inbound arrows represent that another participant identified that participant as a contact.



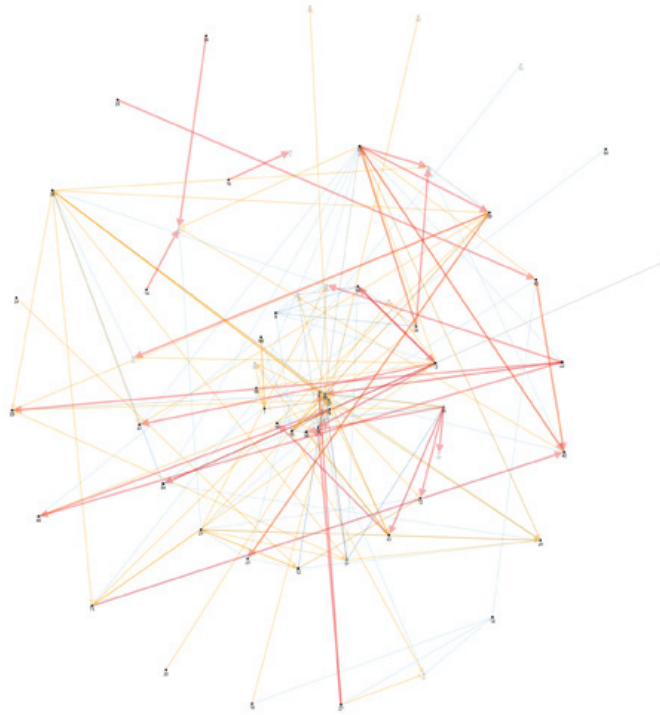


**Figure 2.** Active awareness (phoning, talking, etc.)

The results of the research suggested ISDT 2009 was quite successful in fostering lasting connections between participants. Out of 77 total participants, 51 responded to the survey, and each of them indicated they had developed some kind of new or enhanced connection as a result of the program.

Network diagrams of social connections among participants at the 2009 school show continuing connections with other participants through social media such as Facebook and Twitter.

The density of the graph suggests that the 2009 school nurtured many multifaceted online relationships and groups. The next figure illustrates that more active interaction— emailing, phoning, conversations— was common among participants.



**Figure 3.** Research (active projects in red, planned projects in orange)<sup>2</sup>

The final figure illustrates the significant research and project collaborations that grew out of ISDT relationships. A total of 112 research relationships were identified among 49 ISDT participants from the first year of ISDT, with 35 of these relationships supporting current and active research projects. A further 74 relationships were supporting other types of active projects.

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<sup>2</sup> The color of the arrows indicates planned (orange) and active (red) research work between ISDT attendees, as well as “other projects” (blue).



The overall ISDT experience appears to have a positive impact on generating research, and not only among people such as faculty members who are used to undertaking research. Rather, the network analysis suggests that project planning and actual projects also occur among students, and among faculty working with students. Findings like these suggest the efficacy of a face-to-face component working in conjunction with mediated components. In essence, the social capital of the participants expanded after ISDT, and spawned many research-oriented relationships.

## The Future

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The Gary Chapman International School on Digital Transformation began as an experiment within the context of the collaboration between the University of Texas and Portugal. Our goal was to create a venue that would stimulate more young people within Portugal and other countries to seek ways to use the exciting and powerful digital tools coming online for positive social change. We see so many ways that online environments and the connections and possibilities spawned by the Internet can be helpful to all members of society, and we believe we have gathered an inspired and inspiring group of people who not only carry this message but actually act on it. We hope to continue the Gary Chapman School for as long as its mission makes sense.

The positive outcomes to date suggest that ISDT's model is a successful one. We are actively exploring adapting ISDT to other constituencies and other places. Bringing people together, creating trusted networks of expertise, sharing best practices, and developing grounded social models for positive changes - these goals are espoused by many organizations. Our future mission will be to experiment with the ISDT recipe in other continents, always with people excited about learning and sharing. This will be a lasting contribution of our broader project with Portugal to other countries and other populations.

## Remembering ISDT founder Gary Chapman

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Gary Chapman, Founding Director of the International School on Digital Transformation and long-time faculty member at the LBJ School of Public Affairs at the University of Texas at Austin, died Tuesday, December 14, 2010. He was kayaking in Guatemala with friends when he suffered a massive heart attack.

At a memorial service for him on January 8, 2011 in Austin, several of his good friends and longtime colleagues shared their memories of Gary's passion, his engagement with students and friends, and his commitment to social justice. From his early years in the military through his time working with Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility and then teaching his classes at UT and elsewhere, Gary was a constant advocate for using new digital tools to improve society, and particularly for helping people whose voices often go unheard. Gary was an internationally recognized expert on Internet policy, telecommunications and technology policy, and his role with the UT Austin|Portugal program included the founding of the International School on Digital Transformation, where he and his wife Carol made several lasting friendships during the course of their work in Portugal. His friends and his wife Carol remember and celebrate his integrity, honesty, and passion for cultivating a better and more humane world.

Gary was a natural leader and a quiet, persuasive visionary - a model of the power of humility, one of the warmest, most giving instructors and a wonderful research partner. He has inspired many, many students as well as colleagues all over the globe, urging all of us to use new tools to improve society and create a just and more democratic world. We hope that naming ISDT in his honor is one small way to keep his vision alive.



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