This issue of the International Journal of Electronic Government (IJEGR) marks the completion of its first year in publication. The response to the call for papers for each issue this year supports our belief that there is a need for a scholarly outlet for research in this burgeoning field. In this issue, two of our authors examine where this field of research stands today. It seems fitting to do so at this point in time. The subject of electronic government is no longer nascent nor is it emerging. It has clearly arrived. Electronic government was put on the political agenda of the United States federal government back in 1993, with the development of the Clinton-Gore strategic plan for new information technologies. Using the Internet to make government more accessible was a critical component to the Clinton administration’s Reinventing Government program (Clinton & Gore, 1993). On April 6, 1999, the National Science Foundation (NSF) launched the digital government research program, creating not only a necessary source of funding for this research but, more important, offering the imprimatur of the NSF as validation of electronic government as a field of study. Similar activities have been occurring in other countries.

So, where are we now, 12 years into the development of this arena? Two new studies, one from Åke Grönlund at Örebro University and the other from Kim Viborg Andersen and Helle Zinner Henriksen at the Copenhagen Business School, offer responses. Equally important, they suggest where we should be directing our future research, as we build and test theory in the electronic government domain.

Using a general maturity model, Grönlund asks, “What is the eGov research field currently like in terms of what constitutes a scientific field?” To answer this, he examined the published research papers (n = 170) from three of the predominant conferences on electronic government held in 2003 — ECEG, HICSS, and DEXA EGov. Grönlund’s rigorous methodology and research model were applied to the conference papers and led to the conclusion that electronic government is immature when assessed as a scientific field. Why is this? When examined across the three conferences, the data indicate that the majority of these papers consist of descriptive material with little focus on theory development or theory testing.

Andersen and Henriksen took a look at peer-reviewed journal articles (n = 110)
published over a recent five-year period. They found that two-thirds of the results in these research papers were substantiated by application of a methodology and collection of data. A characteristic of the reviewed research was the focus on the interactions and capabilities of the electronic government programs. Notably lacking was an attention to the underlying policy drivers and the use of core public administration theory to inform the findings. Andersen and Henriksen conclude that, to date, the development of a clear research paradigm for electronic government has yet to emerge.

The results of these two studies create a fertile field for debate. One argues that we have yet to establish a scientific basis for the study of electronic government. If we are to survive as a valid scientific field of research, we must begin to move in that direction. The other argues that the scientific groundwork is being laid, albeit without a strong foundation in the crucial domain of government. Yet both offer strong recommendations to those engaged in electronic government research. Theory generation and theory testing remain largely ignored. A fruitful blending of the social sciences with computer science would encourage the examination of both the e and the government in a way that might offer new insights and knowledge.

We move on from this important debate to research by Christopher G. Reddick at The University of Texas, San Antonio. Reddick examines some of the intriguing how questions of electronic government. The characteristics of municipal adoption of electronic government in Ontario, Canada, provides the setting for his research. His findings offer some important questions that public administrators will need to address, if they are to continue moving toward electronic information and service delivery models of practice. If, indeed, the implementation and use of electronic government programs lead to even greater interaction with citizens rather than less, we would predict from information technology efficiencies, then, that administrators and policy makers are left with a conundrum — how to make available even more resources to meet citizens’ needs, given these times of decreasing resources.

Finally, we introduce a new feature in this issue of IJEGR — a book review section. The growing abundance of reading material related to electronic government surpasses the ability of any one person to assess the quality and relevance of each new publication. While we can only respond to this in a minimal way, we will offer what we hope to be objective reviews of some of new books in our arena. Our reviewers come from our editorial board as well as from the academic and practitioner community at large. We start off with a review of a seminal book on information technology governance by Peter Weill and Jeanne W. Ross, IT Governance: How Top Performers Manage IT Decision Rights for Superior Results (2004), which presents a useful model for understanding information technology governance, the specification of decision rights, and accountability to encourage desirable behavior in the use of information technology. This is clearly applicable when looking at decisions about electronic government. The book is reviewed by Lester P. Diamond of the U.S. Governmental Accounting Office.
REFERENCES


Patricia Diamond Fletcher is an associate professor of public policy and director of the Electronic Government Certificate Program at UMBC. She has done extensive research in the area of information resources management, including information policy and electronic government in federal, state and local governments in the U.S. She received a doctorate in information science from Syracuse University.

THANK YOU TO REVIEWERS

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