

Mark Keith on Academic Success in Information Systems

by Tyler Curtis

In March of 2021, Abbie Anderson from the Marriott Student Review's Podcast team interviewed Dr. Mark Keith, an associate professor of Information Systems department in the Marriott School at BYU. In this episode (found under March 23, 2021) Dr. Keith and Abbie discuss Information Systems and the basics of the major, share tips on being successful in the Information Systems Program, and talk about Dr. Keith's beginnings Information Systems and how that led his decision enter the realm of academia.

About Information Systems

Upon being asked about his recent experiences with Information Systems, Dr. Keith replied, "I.S. is about solving unstructured problems with technology, specifically with business problems... these are thing you can't program to be automated...and what I like about I.S. is that the problems change and the solutions change, too, constantly, because technology changes. So I find myself constantly amazed at what's possible." He goes on to explain that what he enjoys about working with I.S. is discovering new technologies, far before the average consumer would, that solve problems he believed not possible.

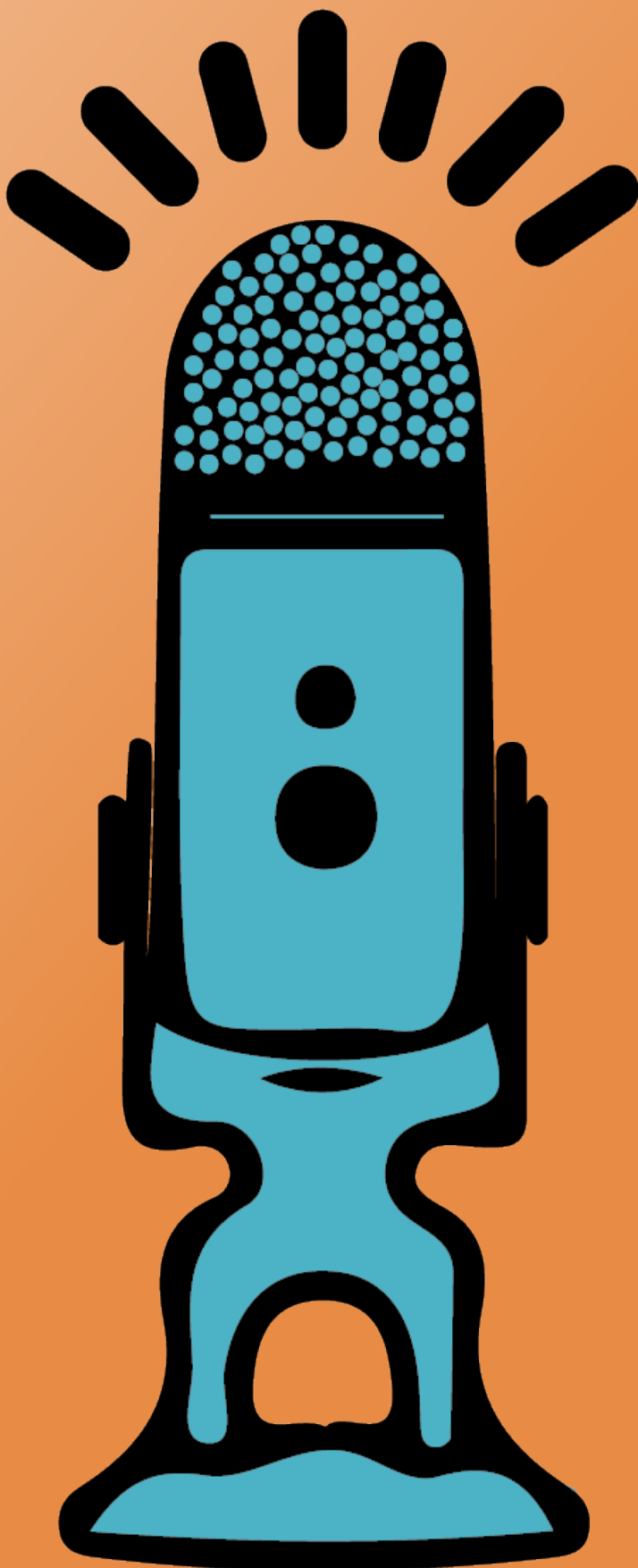
Dr. Keith's Path to Information Systems

Dr. Keith explained that his interest with I.S. all started on his mission, when he saw another missionary use "this new program called Excel,"

which he believed to be what Computer Scientists worked with. Upon completing his mission, however, his mission president encouraged him to pursue an MBA instead; his response: "Information Systems gave me the best of both worlds." Due to a tough job market in the early 2000s, Keith reluctantly decided to go on to pursue a Master's in Information Systems Management with the Marriott school. During his final year of his degree, he was invited to take a pre-PhD course, which he loved so much that he went to ASU to earn his PhD. Though he originally had not pursued this path, he explained that he loved how his path turned out, he loved his career, and wouldn't change a thing.

Successful Teamwork with Differing Personalities

Concerning the organization of the Information Systems program, Keith explained the process of designing the team aspect of the I.S. program. Upon acceptance into the program, students are placed into teams based on differing personalities. Originally, they had organized it in the reverse: placing individuals with similar personalities together. However, they discovered that doing so was only beneficial for the first semester, while learning new material. Once they discovered that the highest performing teams were composed of differing personalities, they made the switch. In addition to this, they found that teams composed of men and women consistently outperformed teams composed of just men.



Being Successful in the Program and a Lesson To Understand

Dr. Keith shared his knowledge and experience concerning the idea that confidence in yourself leads you to success. He shared a self-efficacy theory that suggested that “our confidence in our ability to solve a problem, often is a better indicator of our performance than our actual ability to solve a problem.” He explains that he has seen this in the I.S. program year after year—individuals who are very capable, but are not confident in themselves, and ultimately do not perform as well as less-capable students who are confident in themselves. He further drove home the point by saying, “What confidence does for us, is it causes us to persist,” further explaining that confident individuals approach problems proactively: if they don’t know something, they’ll search for it on Google, Stack Overflow, and actively find a way to solve it.

I highly recommend listening to the full episode to hear Dr. Keith explain these concepts in detail, and share more great advice. 🎧

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