

## 1st Visible Path Award Winner

### Nathaniel Bulkley

The International Network for Social Network Analysis (INSNA) awarded its first annual Visible Path Graduate Student Award for new research on social networks and professional performance today.

The winner, Nathaniel Bulkley, a doctoral student working with Assistant Professor Marshall Van Alstyne at the University of Michigan School of Information, conducted surveys and studied six months of email data and accounting records from an executive recruiting firm representative of professional services firms organized around client practices. An interesting finding was that characteristics of the recruiter's internal networks were statistically significant predictors of performance, but the size of their private rolodexes were not.

Bulkley's winning paper, "An Empirical Analysis of Strategies and Efficiencies in Social Networks" can be downloaded from <http://www-personal.umich.edu/~natb/>

The abstract of his paper is:

*This research examines hypotheses about the efficient and strategic uses of social networks by a specific group of white collar workers. We examine existing theory that relates network structure to performance and put forward two new hypotheses. The first addition merges explore/exploit theory with social networks, proposing that optimal network characteristics evolve over the course of a career from those favoring exploration to those favoring exploitation of knowledge and relationships. The second concerns efficient movement of information through a network, proposing that frequent short communication outperforms infrequent lengthy communication. Using a unique data set containing email patterns and accounting records for several dozen executive recruiters, we find statistically significant differences related to network (1) structure (2) flow and (3) age. Consistent with existing theory, more central position is associated with higher output. Consistent with the two proposed theories, exploration strategies among early career recruiters and exploitation strategies among senior recruiters are both positively associated with performance, while more frequent shorter messages are associated with higher output. Results of this research have the potential to create a more complete understanding of different types of efficiency associated with social networks.*

In brief, Bulkley's email analysis found relationships between centrality and performance, while also showing how aspects of how social networks are used relate to performance. Shorter, more frequent responses were associated with higher performance and professional's network use evolved over the course of a career from an emphasis on accumulating to exercising social capital.

Bulkley's findings suggest professional service firms may be able to develop more efficient and effective communications strategies through the use of relational measures derived from electronic data sources.

A recent BusinessWeek story (Feb. 13) highlighted the growing popularity of dashboards that incorporate real-time data. Will future dashboards emphasize real-time relational measures?

*International Sunbelt Social Network Conference XXVI Vancouver, BC*

Bulkley's research was featured at at INSNA's Sunbelt conference in Vancouver:  
<http://www.insna.org/2006/sunbelt2006.html>

The presentation of the award and Buckley's talk was Friday, April 28, 5:00 - 6:00 PM

Early last year, INSNA announced the newly-created Visible Path Graduate Student Award at the Sunbelt XXV International Social Network Conference in Redondo Beach, California. INSNA gives the annual award, which carries a \$5,000 prize plus paid expenses to the Sunbelt conference, to a graduate student in recognition of research on how social networks are used to improve individual and inter-organizational performance.

The Visible Path Graduate Student Award recognizes a graduate student's research on how social networks improve professional performance. The award is given annually to a graduate student in recognition of research at the interface between inter-organizational science and social network analysis. The award recognizes research on organizational science, in which social networks are used to improve individual and inter-organizational performance. For example, research focusing on how people in organizations, especially corporations, use their own social networks to accelerate strategic processes with people outside their organization would be eligible.

"Social network analysis touches many disciplines — anthropology, sociology, psychology, political science, economics and communications science for starters — yet there are few awards that are specifically designed to support basic social network research," said Bill Richards, INSNA president and professor of communications at Simon Fraser University. "This award seeks to encourage research for benefit of everyone who is interested in the juncture of social network analysis and organizational performance."

The award taps into broadening awareness of social network analysis sparked by articles, popular business books and new companies selling web services and software that capitalize on social networks.

"The timing is right for graduate students looking to uncover social network insights that can advance an increasingly popular discipline with growing opportunities for application" said Stanley Wasserman, professor of sociology, psychology, and statistics at Indiana University and chief scientist for Visible Path Corp. in New York."

To apply for this year's award, students should submit a paper (written in English) to the committee before 1 September 2006. The paper must be written between September 1, 2005 and August 31, 2006. Eligible students must be sole (or first) author on the submitted paper. Letters of support should accompany the submission. Submitted papers will be evaluated by a committee of four judges; their decision will be final. Judging will be on the basis of the level of originality in the ideas and techniques, the possible applications and their treatment, and potential impact. The awardee will give a formal presentation at Sunbelt 2007 in Greece. The committee may arrive at the conclusion that none of the submitted papers merits the award.

The award will made for the second time in 2007. Funds for the award have been provided by Visible Path Corporation, New York (<http://www.visiblepath.com>).

Details for the 2007 Visible Path Graduate Student award will be announced shortly.