

Information Quality in **Argentina**



ArgIQ's co-Director for research in bioethics, biosecurity, weapons of mass destruction, defence and strategy, **Maria José Espona** discusses information quality within a life sciences context, and how the organisation hopes to spread the importance of this methodology globally

Could you outline Information Quality in Argentina (ArgIQ)'s objectives and the reason for its inception?

ArgIQ is a non-profit organisation devoted to promoting information quality among communities and its application to several disciplines such as defence, weapons of mass destruction studies and strategy, as well as business applications. Since a large percentage of public and private organisations in Argentina do not have a standardised methodology to manage information, we are supporting their engagement in consultation activities, courses and conferences. We are also extending our activities to other Spanish speaking countries.

Can you highlight the academic activities being conducted through ArgIQ?

We teach information quality courses to postgraduates and organise free conferences and presentations for the whole community. During these events, we have international speakers from Germany and the US – the most prominent representatives of the discipline. Currently, we are designing online courses to reach a broader community interested in this topic.

Who inspired you to take up the position of co-Director?

Much of my inspiration comes from my professors at MIT and North Eastern University as well as other experts, including Yang Lee, MIT (DGIQ, EIDIQ, University of Kiel), Ismael Caballero (University of Castilla-La Mancha, FICDI) and Craig Fisher (Marist College). We share the same views about spreading the concepts of information quality and applying them to all fields of knowledge and practice. MIT awarded me with two distinctions based on my work in Argentina and South America: the Award in Recognition of Outstanding Contribution to Argentina Information Quality, from the MIT IQ Program (2011); and the Leadership Award from the MIT IQ Program (2010).

A significant aspect of your work is focused on tracking and controlling infectious disease in South America. What is the importance of this from a biological warfare perspective? Could you explain some of the work being conducted here?

I have been working in the field of non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction for almost 20 years, particularly regarding biological weapons. That research was part of my PhD thesis; however, I am still working on it to this day, attempting to better understand the history and causation of epidemiological diseases to identify whether they are natural or human-induced outbreaks. I track information all over the Internet – through all open sources – searching for information on different agents in South American countries. I am also designing a methodology that I hope can be applied to other regions.

Which biosecurity issues are you presently researching?

I am focusing on biosecurity issues related to bioethics education for life scientists and the biosafety level (BSL-3 and BSL-4) labs survey in Latin America. Dr Malcolm Dando from the University of Bradford, UK is my guide in this field.

What are the main bioethical concerns of today? Which controversial issues are currently being raised by biological and medical advancements?

One of the greatest challenges of the 21st Century is in showing researchers and practitioners the importance of understanding the dual-use aspects of their work and its potential impact on new weapons development, or the misuse of their work in this context. Education is a key aspect here; in most cases, life scientists are inexperienced and risk producing misdirected research. Following Dr Dando's path, I am working on raising awareness among the life scientist community in Argentina and South America.

Are there any bioethical and biosecurity issues which are specific to Argentina?

Since this region is fairly homogeneous, we share our issues. One concern is that bioethics is not a topic in grade or postgraduate schools, particularly in the life sciences arena. This topic must be taught and discussed from the very beginning of a graduate's academic course. This situation does not exclusively affect Argentina – it is a global challenge.

Do you have plans to focus your research in other directions? What do the next few years hold for ArgIQ?

We plan to organise more seminars and courses in order to spread the principles of information quality in our region. At the same time, we are working to implement and relate those principles in other areas such as judiciary processes, decision-making theory, human resources, etc.



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