ASIS to ASIS&T: A Society in Transition?

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ABSTRACT

In May 2000 the Board of Directors changed the name of the American Society of Information Science by adding the words: and Technology. Today this change may be considered minor, but for many involved in the society at the time – it was a change that had purpose and meaning. The intent of this study was to investigate the society’s transition toward a professional association more inclusive of practitioners and applied research. The study was conducted in two stages, using both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Stage 1 compared the research content both prior to and following the society’s name change in 2000. Stage 2 built upon the assumption that a professional association is a reflection of its membership. This study begins to scratch the surface toward helping to define the society and its research. A clear vision that is supported by the membership will guide the activities of the society and, in turn, will effectively serve the membership and its professional needs.

INTRODUCTION

In May 2000 the Board of Directors changed the name of the American Society of Information Science (ASIS) by adding the words: and Technology. Today this change may be considered minor, but for many involved in the society at the time – it was a change that had purpose and meaning. The public debate that preceded the association’s name change revealed both the concern and the interest that a name change may bring to this scholarly professional association.

This two-stage study extended the preliminary research results presented at the 2004 American Society of Information Science & Technology (ASIS&T) Annual Conference in Providence, Rhode Island (Mackenzie, 2004). The purpose of the current study was to investigate whether there has been any measurable change in the content of the research papers published at the annual conference since the Board of Directors’ decision to change the association’s name in May of 2000. This study also builds upon the results of the 2003 ASIS&T Membership Survey (Vaughan & Hahn, 2005) by capturing ASIS&T members’ perceptions as to the society’s transition.

BACKGROUND

In 1937 The American Documentation Institute was founded. It evolved though the 1950’s to focus on the development of principles and techniques surrounding information documentation and services. The American Documentation Institute was renamed in 1968 as the American Society for Information Science and “emphasized the fact that the membership of ASIS is uniquely concerned with all aspects of the information transfer process.” The society viewed itself as a “national professional organization for those concerned with designing, managing, and using information systems and technology” (ASIS&T and its members, 2003). In 1997 the call for participation for the 1998 ASIS meeting stated “The annual meeting focuses on the breadth of activities and endeavors of the information community with technical sessions covering virtually all of the specialties of the information profession” (Inside ASIS, 1997).

In 1998 Dr. Eugene Garfield accepted the position of President-elect of the association. In his position statement he included comments that suggested the American Society for Information Science reassert its “basic commitment to research” (Election underway… 1998, 3). In March 1999, as Dr. Garfield prepared to assume the presidency of the society, he proposed that the word technology be added to the name of the association - ASIS&T. He discussed the loss of membership to the society and the “perceived abandonment of applied information science.” He suggested that ASIS programs have been “divided between theory and practice” and...
that the society should place increased focus on “practical information technology based programs … in [our] publications and meetings.” Dr. Garfield emphasized that the society’s name be representative of an “added focus on technology… a dynamic group of SIGs … that reflect the current world of information science and technology -- its theory and practice.” Dr. Garfield concluded his proposal by suggesting that “ASIS&T could provide the leadership to fellow scientists and scholars increasingly drawn into the new information age and exert a significant effect on future information policy” (Garfield, 1999, 2).

During the debate over the name change, both active support and concern emerged from society members. Supporters of librarianship implied that the focus on technology might overwhelm the society’s focus on both librarianship and information science (Travis, 1999). Finally, in May 2000 the ASIS Board approved the change of name to ASIS&T. The board’s decision was supported by a membership vote that reflected 69.7% support for the name change (Garfield, 2000). It is now 2005 and some may suggest that the name change from ASIS to ASIS&T is not significant or offers minimal force behind the society’s research agenda. I suggest that the background on this board decision reflects intent and purpose that deserves recognition and study.

UNDERSTANDING AND DEFINING AN ASSOCIATION

A professional association can be defined by its name, membership, mission, and a variety of different characteristics and attributes. One such characteristic is the research that is presented at the association’s annual conference and published in the proceedings. It not only reflects the interests of the current membership, but also attracts new members who may be looking for a publishing venue and a networking opportunity with like-minded individuals. (James, 2003; Mackenzie, 2004). James (2003) suggested that an association’s annual conference is its “biggest branding opportunity. The content of the conference program should be strategically developed to ensure that the different disciplines and levels of expertise (and their unmet needs) within the field are sufficiently addressed.”

The ASIS&T mission statement suggests an interest in advancing “the information sciences and related applications of information technology,” but it is unclear as to the type of research that fills the agenda for the annual conference. Renaming the society may, in time, subtly influence the body of knowledge that emerges from our research venue. It has also been broadly emphasized that a “profession must capture and define a body of knowledge as its own … to promote its growth and advancement” (Basman, 1997).

The ASIS&T membership has in recent history been composed of many supporters of librarianship (Vaughan & Hahn, 2005). In 2003 Hildreth (2003) suggested that LIS research is “teetering on the far left end of a research continuum, where qualitative, exploratory, ‘grounded theory’ reigns. In our rush to engage users, and ‘feel their pain,’ to develop new hunches (hypotheses/theories) as to the causes of their difficulties, we may have forgotten that hunches need to be tested and confirmed” (Hildreth, 2003). Hildreth’s comments align with the perspective that the society’s research agenda may need to move toward the empirical end of the continuum. Also, as mentioned earlier, Dr. Garfield has suggested that ASIS&T reassert its basic commitment to research and to applied information science.

ASIS&T MEMBERSHIP SURVEY

Relevant to the readers of this article will be the most recent ASIS&T membership study (Vaughan & Hahn, 2005) published in JASIST. The survey results reflected a shift in membership over time. In 1979 the membership of ASIS was more heavily populated from the industrial sector (35.6%) while the most recent scan of the membership (Vaughan & Hahn, 2005) revealed a shift toward educational institutions (57.3%) up drastically from 1979 (26.9%). In 2003 the membership survey revealed the industrial sector to be only 18%. Overall, our current membership is a bit older, better paid and holds more doctoral degrees than the 1979 membership population.

The ASIS/ASIS&T leadership has known little about its changing membership over the last 24 years prompting the society’s board of directors, under the leadership of then President-elect Trudi Bellardo Hahn, to initiate an ASIS&T membership survey. An important insight from the 2003 membership survey that relates to
this article is that the “primary reason to attend ASIST Conferences is to listen to papers and presentations” (Vaughan & Hahn, 2005, 103) and that 18.6% of the respondents said that the annual conference would be more appealing if there was a change in the content of papers and presentations toward more applied and work related topics (Vaughan & Hahn, 2005, 100). Vaughan and Hahn further concluded that the “great decrease in the percentage of members working in industry and government sectors” might suggest “ASIS&T is losing attraction to people in those sectors…” (2005, 102). Dr. Garfield’s position that our society is losing membership can be tied to, or perhaps remedied by, the content of the annual conference. The renaming of the society was undertaken to attract a broader population and to refocus our attention toward research in applied science. The results of this research offer insight as to whether the transition has started to take place.

METHOD –TWO STAGE STUDY

The larger intent of this study was to investigate the society’s transition toward a professional association more inclusive of practitioners and applied research. More specifically the study focused on the research content of the ASIS&T annual meetings. It builds on the preliminary results presented in 2004 (Mackenzie, 2004) and further investigates whether there has been any change in the basic research presented and published since the society’s name change in 2000. When the preliminary results of the exploratory study were presented at the 2004 Annual Conference a promise was made to double the sample size and to add to this research perspective, the perceptions of ASIS&T members. This promise has been kept. As a result, the study was conducted in two stages, using both quantitative and qualitative research methods.

Stage 1 compared the research content both prior to and following the society’s name change in 2000; four years of conference papers were carefully reviewed. 100% of the contributed research papers for the years 1997, 1998, 2003 and 2004 form the source of comparison.

The conference years of 1997 and 1998 represented the society’s annual conference content prior to the name change and the conference years of 2003 and 2004 represented the content after the name change.

Three research questions defined the focus of stage 1:
1. Has there been an increase in new empirical research since the society’s change of name from ASIS to ASIS&T in 2000?
2. Has there been an increase in the use of human subjects within the research design of the contributed conference papers?
3. Has there been a reduction in the explicit reference to libraries?

Stage 2 builds on the assumption that a professional association is, and should be, a reflection of its membership. To extend the preliminary results (Mackenzie, 2004) and to provide a well-rounded investigation on the transition from ASIST to ASIS&T, a fourth research question was established:
4. Do ASIS&T members perceive any overall difference in the research presented at the conference since the society’s name change in 2000?

A questionnaire was developed to collect the data for stage 2. The intent of this research question was to gather perceptions as to whether the society’s name change had yet revealed a shift in the research presented at the conference.

Data Collection and Statistical Analysis – Stage 1

Data collection. 100 percent of the contributed research papers published in the ASIS/ASIS&T proceedings in 1997, 1998, 2003 and 2004 were reviewed. The following data elements were captured and coded:

- The research paradigm (quantitative, qualitative, solely theoretical, or combination of quantitative and qualitative).
- The research tool or method.
- Whether the paper described a system (i.e., performance of a system, design of a system).
- Whether human subjects were used within the research design.
Whether the word library (or version of the word) appeared in either the title or the abstract of the paper?

**Statistical analysis.** The Chi-square non-parametric test was used to compare the results prior to the society’s name change (represented by conference papers published in 1997 and 1998) to after the 2000 name change (represented by papers published in 2003 and 2004). The Chi-square non-parametric test is the most appropriate statistical test because the data is at the nominal level and the purpose of the test is to suggest whether the groups differ significantly (Sproull 1995). The Chi-square test pioneered by R.A. Fischer and referred to as Fischer’s Exact Test has been relied on “for simple 2x2 tables” with “small-N studies” (Deutsch, Lauer, Patel and Mehta 2001, 19) and was used to analyze the results of this study. (Mackenzie 2004).

**Data Collection and Analysis – Stage 2**

**Data collection.** The questionnaire was introduced to members at the 2004 ASIS&T annual conference. Though a few questionnaires were completed by members at the conference, it was imperative that a larger sample be captured. Therefore, a total of 430 questionnaires were mailed to ASIS&T members. The mailing addresses were drawn from the attendee list published at the 2004 ASIS&T annual conference. The financial constraints limited the mailing of questionnaires to U.S. mailing addresses only. The mailing dates ranged from November 24, 2004 to February 2, 2005. A total of 116 usable questionnaires were received. The response rate of 27% provided sufficient data for conclusions to be cautiously drawn.

**Analysis.** Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the stage 2 questionnaire data. In addition to the controlled questionnaire responses, respondents were permitted to provide comments to clarify any aspect of the questionnaire. Content analysis was selected as the data analysis technique for these open-ended comments. Content analysis allowed me to systematically categorize the qualitative data emerging from the comments reduce the data, and to draw out the primary themes of interest (Berg, 1998).

**RESULTS – Stage 1**

The results of stage 1 of this study offered both an aggregate and a comparative view of the conference papers accepted for and presented at the annual conference. Specific attributes were selected within the papers that could be statistically compared as well as offer partial evidence of a shift in research intent.

**Descriptive Results – stage 1:**

The results reported for stage 1 provided a preliminary picture of the research methods within the contributed papers. Aggregating the results of 1997, 1998, 2003 and 2004 we find that 73.2% of the 194 papers reviewed offered empirical research results with 50% including human subjects in the research design. The word library (or version of the word) appeared within the abstract and/or the title of 27.3% of the 194 contributed papers. Data analysis of objects or knowledge artifacts (i.e., transaction logs) was part of the research design for 38.7% of the papers. An assigned subject task or test was included for 24.7% of the papers and subject observation was included for 16% of the papers. A literature review (and theory) was the sole contribution of 17% of the conference papers. Papers that described systems (i.e., purpose, performance, design, framework) comprised 16% of the 194 papers reviewed aggregately from 1997, 1998, 2003 and 2004.

A variety of methods were used within the research designs of the contributed papers. Since these are conference papers rather than fully developed journal articles, it was not always clear as to the methods employed. Table A in the appendix provides additional information as to the research methods captured from the review of the 194 papers from 1997, 1998, 2003 and 2004.

The research picture offers more meaning when the aggregate results are separated comparing papers presented both prior to and following the board’s decision to change the name of the society to ASIS&T (table 1).
Table 1: Aggregate Results with Comparison (1997, 1998 to 2003, 2004)

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Papers offering empirical results (evidence/data)</td>
<td>142 (73.2%)</td>
<td>52 (62.7%)</td>
<td>90 (81.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical papers (solely)</td>
<td>52 (26.8%)</td>
<td>31 (37.3%)</td>
<td>21 (18.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research design included human subjects</td>
<td>97 (50.0%)</td>
<td>36 (43.4%)</td>
<td>61 (55.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Library” appeared in title and/or abstract</td>
<td>53 (27.3%)</td>
<td>32 (38.6%)</td>
<td>21 (18.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge artifacts or objects were analyzed or manipulated</td>
<td>75 (38.7%)</td>
<td>31 (37.3%)</td>
<td>44 (39.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject assigned a task or given a test (subject task)</td>
<td>48 (24.7%)</td>
<td>15 (18.1%)</td>
<td>33 (29.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject observed by researcher</td>
<td>31 (16.0%)</td>
<td>16 (15.4%)</td>
<td>15 (13.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papers offered solely literature review and theory</td>
<td>33 (17.0%)</td>
<td>22 (19.3%)</td>
<td>11 (9.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A system was described</td>
<td>31 (16.0%)</td>
<td>9 (10.8%)</td>
<td>22 (19.8%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Pertaining to the Stage 1 Research Questions:

The next section of results offers insights that help answer the first three research questions:

Research question #1: Has there been an increase in empirical research since the association’s change of name from ASIS to ASIS&T in 2000?

All 194 contributed papers were coded as either empirical or theoretical. The empirical papers comprised studies that used either quantitative, qualitative or a combination of methods from both paradigms. These studies uncovered new evidence. The theoretical papers were comprised of studies that offered no evidence as to whether the theory presented in the paper was supported or refuted. These papers may have offered new knowledge (i.e., theoretical frameworks) by drawing insights from previous research but no new evidence was offered.

Table 2: Empirical vs. Theoretical Papers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conference years</th>
<th>Empirical papers</th>
<th>Theoretical papers</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Before: ’97 &amp; ’98</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After: ’03 &amp; ’04</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total all 4 years</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 illustrates the mix of empirical and theoretical papers. At ASIS&T (after name change) 81.1% of the papers provided empirical results as compared to ASIS (prior to name change) in which only 62.7% of the papers were empirical in nature (table 1).

Using the Chi-square test the results suggest that there is a significant statistical difference in the increase of empirical papers from before (52) to after (90) the name change at the p value = .004 (one-tailed test).

Another variable that may suggest a move toward more applied research is the number of papers that describe systems (i.e., purpose, performance, design, framework). The results revealed that 22 papers (19.8%) in the ASIS&T (after) proceedings solely described a system (table 1). This is an increase from ASIS (before), which included only 9 papers (10.8%).
Using the Chi-square test the results suggest a statistical difference, though weak, in the increase of contributed papers that focused solely on system descriptions from ASIS to ASIS&T \(p\) value = .067 (one-tailed test).

**Research question #2: Has there been an increase in the use of human subjects within the research design of the published papers?**

A variable that may suggest a move toward more empirical or applied research is whether human subjects were part of the study’s design (table 3). The results revealed that 36 papers before the name change included human subjects (43.4%). The percentage of studies that included human subjects increased to 55% after the name change (61 papers).

| Table 3: Human Subjects within Research Design |
|------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----|
| Conference year            | Human subjects | Non-human subjects | Total |
| Before: ’97 & ‘98         | 36             | 47              | 83   |
| After: ’03 & ’04          | 61             | 50              | 111  |
| Total all 4 years         | 97             | 97              | 194  |

Using the Chi-square test the results suggest that there is a weak statistical difference in the increase of contributed papers that included human subjects in the design from before the association’s name change (36) to after (61) \(p\) value = .073 (one-tailed test).

Although not directly tied to this research question, the presence of a subject task within the research design may also indicate a shift to more empirical and applied research. The results of this study reflect a significant increase in the number of studies that required the human subject to perform a task or to take a test. At ASIS (before name change) 18.1% of the contributed papers (15) included a task or test for the human subject. Papers increased to 29.7% of the ASIS&T Conferences (after name change).

Using the Chi-square test the results suggest that there is a strong statistical difference in the increase of contributed papers that included a subject task or test in its research design from before (15) to after (33) at the \(p\) value = .044 (one-tailed test).

**Research question #3: Has there been a reduction in the explicit reference to libraries?**

The conference papers were reviewed to identify the word library (or version of the word such as librarian or libraries) in either the abstract or the title of each paper. Table 4 reports the findings.

| Table 4: Focus on Libraries |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----|
| Conference year            | “Library” appears | “Library” does not appear | Total |
|                            | in title or abstract | in title or abstract |     |
| Before: ’97 & ‘98         | 32             | 51              | 83   |
| After: ’03 & ’04          | 21             | 90              | 111  |
| Total all 4 years         | 53             | 141             | 194  |

At ASIS (before name change) 38.6% of the papers included the word or a version of the word library in either the abstract or title as compared to ASIS&T (after) in which only 18.9% of the papers included a reference to libraries (table 1).

Using the Chi-Square test the results suggest a statistical difference in the decrease of papers that reflect a focus on libraries from before the association’s name change (32) to after (21) at the \(p\) value = .004 (one-tailed test) and \(p\) value = .002 (two-tailed test).
RESULTS – Stage 2

Stage 2 provides insight into the perceptions of current ASIS&T members. Both quantitative and qualitative data emerged from stage 2.

Descriptive Results of Quantitative data – Stage 2:

Research question #4: Do ASIS&T members perceive any overall difference in the research presented at the conference since the association’s name change in 2000?

Of the 123 questionnaires received, 8 were eliminated because the respondents stated that they were not members of the society. The 116 remaining questionnaires were analyzed. The results for this research question were drawn from ASIS&T members that reflect the following demographics:

- 44.8% of the respondents were involved in ASIS prior to 1996.
- 60.3% of the respondents were involved in the association prior to 2000 when the association’s name was changed.
- 60% of all respondents were female. For those respondents involved in the association prior to 1996, 65.4% were female suggesting that more women might have completed this questionnaire. [Note: the 2003 ASIS&T Membership survey reported that 57% of ASIS&T members are female, which was similar to the 1979 results where 56% of ASIS members were female.]

Though not a primary purpose for the questionnaire, the results suggest a shift in the occupation of the membership over time (see table 5), aligning with the results reported in the 2003 ASIST Membership Survey (Vaughan & Hahn, 2005). The results for all respondents revealed that professors represent the largest occupation for our membership. The second most reported occupation by the respondents was librarian, followed by practitioner (e.g., information technology, business manager). Table 5 below reports the percentage of the respondents by occupation. A noticeable shift is in the shrinking percentage of practitioners and the increasing percentage of librarians. A loss of practitioners and the “perceived abandonment of applied information science” (Garfield, 1999, 2) were among the reasons that Dr. Garfield recommended the change of the association’s name and its increased focused on “practical information technology based programs” (Garfield, 1999, 2).

Table 5: Shift in Membership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation of respondent</th>
<th>% all respondents</th>
<th>% of respondents involved in ASIST prior to 2000</th>
<th>% of respondents involved in ASIS prior to 1996</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practitioner (e.g., manager, info technician)</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>36.2</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Librarian</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Researcher</td>
<td>.9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>3.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research question #4. The analyzed results for this question reveal that there has been little perceived change to the research presented at the annual conference since expanding its name and therefore expanding the society’s purpose. Although 26.7% of the 116 respondents stated that they had supported the society’s name change, only 12.1% perceived any change in the research presented at the conference since the change. 25.9% of
the respondents stated that they had not supported the society’s name change. The remaining 47.4% of respondents were indifferent or did not realize the society’s name had recently changed.

To drill down further, I eliminated from the analysis those questionnaires returned by individuals who had not been members prior to 2000, when the society’s name changed. The results from this more select sample of 70 respondents (61.4% female) revealed the following:

- 31.4% of this group stated that they had originally supported the society’s name change.
- 15.7% of the respondents with membership prior to 2000 did perceive a change in the research presented at the annual conference since the change from ASIS.

Taking it one step further – when considering the perception of only those members involved prior to 2000 who had supported the name change (22 respondents), only 13.6% of the “yes I support the name change” group perceived any change in the research presented at the conference since “ASIS.”

**Themes Emerging From Qualitative Data–Stage 2:**

The stage 2 questionnaires included an area for the respondent to explain any of his or her answers. 68 of the 116 usable responses included written comments. Nineteen of the comments directly restated the information that was captured in the questionnaire and offered no additional opinion or insight. The remaining forty-nine comments served as the raw data. The forty-nine comments were pulled apart to separate single thoughts resulting in 57 data points. Content analysis was the research method used to draw the themes from the data (Berg, 1998).

The comments were categorized into five groups: (1) changes in conference content, (2) changes in conference content that are not necessarily related to the society’s name change, (3) lack of change in conference content, (4) general comments, compliments or criticisms of conference content, and (5) suggestions related directly to the topic of this study. The data points within each of these categories were further condensed and summarized.

**Changes in conference content.** The twenty-two comments shared by those who recognized a change in the conference content ranged from positive to negative. Most of the comments suggested a perceived increase in applied research and an increased focus on practitioners. One respondent considered this increased focus as negative, stating “much more professional/practitioner – that is a loss.” The other comments included sentiments such as “research seems less theoretical, more applied,” “higher comfort level for non-library professionals,” and “increased sensitivity to practitioners and outsiders.”

Negative change to conference content was observed as well. One respondent suggested that the “ASIS&T conference is weakened by the growth of panels of low quality, instead of refereed papers. Compared to other scientific conferences, ASIS&T is a weaker academic conference in last few years.”

An increase focus on technology was a theme that clearly emerged. Most of the comments related to the increase in technology were positive. Respondents suggested that “technology and applications continue to evolve. There is much more and sophisticated work about web and information seeking.” “Inviting presenters from outside ASIS&T was easier when they heard the word technology.”

Two comments suggested that ASIS&T has increased its focus on library information science (LIS) with “more articles, presentations, papers on history and foundation of LIS.” With increased “attempts to understand the diversity, unity or unifying themes of LIS.”

Non-evaluative comments pertaining to a shift in conference content recognized that there are “more instances of multiple presentations by the same individuals and groups,” and that the research “on all aspects of information is using more rigorous scientific methods.”

**Changes in conference content unrelated to the society’s name change.** Fifteen comments reflected perceived changes in the conference content but did not want to link them to the change in the society’s name. Representative comments include: “This was the only year that there were enough presentations interesting to me. I don’t know if the name change had any effect.” “Change may be the natural evolution of the field of information

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1 Verbatim respondent comments
science and technology.” And, a “name is only a label and would not have any significant impact on the entity that bears its name.”

**Conference content is the same.** Eight comments suggested that NO change in content has occurred. There is “still focus on the academic not the applied sciences.” Also, it was suggested that the “society is still engrained in its former focus on documentation.”

**General comments, compliments or criticisms of conference content.** The open-ended nature of this research instrument invited general comments that, though not directly related to this topic, do provide insight into members’ views on the ASIS&T conference. The ten comments were divided between positive and negative. On the negative side respondents felt that there are “too many SIGs and too many panels – they just yack and present no research at all,” with the research being of “less contribution to information science because the theoretical discussions are most often trite and the applied work has very little reflection,” and that although the conference is enjoyable, “ASIS&T appears socially intimidating or impregnable to those not involved in service or governance structure.” On the positive side respondents suggested that they “appreciate the technology-oriented sessions,” and “continue to learn about new trends and ideas in the field.” There are “more opportunities to present research with the added poster session.”

**Suggestions pertaining to this research project.** Two comments focused on this project. One respondent made a very striking comment stating that had “anyone besides Garfield suggested the name change, it would not have gone through.” He went on to say that he didn’t “think anyone wanted to stand up against him [Dr. Garfield].”

**CONCLUSION**

The results of this study support neither a positive nor negative trend. The results do suggest that something is happening and that the society is in transition. Dr. Garfield voiced his concern that the society may be perceived to have abandoned “applied information science” (Garfield, 1999, 2), but the results of stage 1, suggest that as an association of researchers, we may be moving toward a renewed focus of research on practical and applied information.

Both theoretical and empirical studies seek to answer questions and build new knowledge, which is the essential purpose of research. But studies that seek new and original empirical results help researchers refute or support their theories, which invite further inquiry, research and ultimately application.

The high percentage of studies that included human subjects (aggregate 50%) and the large increase in studies that employed a subject task or test from 1997/1998 (18.1%) to 2003/2004 (29.7%) provided evidence that ASIS&T researchers value, and seek to understand, the end-user. Also, the increase in studies that included new empirical results emerged from an increase in conference tracks focused on information seekers, information seeking and use, searching and use, and user-centered design. All of these tracks lead to applied knowledge – applied to the use of information by human beings.

The stage 2 data added a further dimension to this research study. Capturing the perceptions of ASIS&T members revealed a weakness among the members toward experiencing a shared vision of what ASIS&T is or wants to be. Although the stage 2 statistical data revealed that members perceived little change in the research presented at the conference since the board adopted the society’s new name, the qualitative data provided some insight into the thoughts of members. Some members welcomed the increased focus on technology, applied research, and topics of interest to practitioners. Others viewed the changes as negative, perhaps even undermining the value of the old ASIS. The shift in membership is broadening the audience that ASIS&T must serve. The subtle transition away from theoretical toward applied research is welcomed by some and perceived as negative by others.

This study only begins to scratch the surface toward helping to define the society and its research. Four years selected from a long and rich history does not provide sufficient information to predict a continuing trend in this research shift, but it does provide a perspective of what is happening since the board approved the name change of the society. Also, the perceptions of members may inspire the ASIS&T board to facilitate a broader and deeper discussion on the vision and goals of this professional and scholarly society.
As mentioned earlier, the annual conference can be a professional association’s most important branding opportunity. It should reflect the interests of its membership as well as actively attract new members. A clear vision that is supported by the membership will guide the activities of the society and, in turn, will effectively serve the membership and its professional needs.

LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The methods constructed to explore the research questions neither considered every factor influencing the results (e.g., certain research methods that may be naturally on the rise) nor controlled for them (e.g., the conference themes.) Skewed results may result from the lack of questionnaires mailed to non-US addresses. Further research will view these research questions from different perspectives and will further define the association.

APPENDIX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table A: Research Methods used in Contributed papers:</th>
<th>ASIS 1997</th>
<th>ASIST 2003</th>
<th>Aggregate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Term co-occurrence</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus group</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject task</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject observation</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis of a diary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview – in person or telephone</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grounded theory or specific case analysis</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questionnaire</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social network analysis</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge object or artifact manipulated or analyzed (data analysis)</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Many studies used multiple methods

113 156 269 *

WORKS CITED


