Leading the Leaders

To serve as ASIS president is to serve in a remarkable office. ASIS' strengths as an interdisciplinary and diverse organization are also its challenges from the perspective of providing leadership and planning for the growth of what is actually a small business. The presidents of ASIS and their presidential issues and contributions have continued to play these themes over the organization's 50-year history.

ASIS presidents have ranged from research scientists to practitioners, from information managers to information entrepreneurs. The presidents have come from a diversity of educational backgrounds, including physics, chemistry, psychology, librarianship, statistics, engineering and business. They have held positions in every sector of the economy, from government to non-profit, from private business to academia. So what do they have in common?

All ASIS presidents possess qualities of leadership and a desire to serve the science and the profession. Most of them have distinguished themselves in their careers before they assume the ASIS presidency. Among their many notable contributions are development of systems for the storage of large information/data files; facilitating cooperation among university computer centers; application of information science and technology to major government programs; exploration of the foundations of information science, especially in the application of cybernetics; development of statistical methods of automatic indexing and abstracting; pioneering work in thesaurus construction and machine-aided indexing; implementation of proven management techniques for information processing; seminal investigations into transparent systems; and service as the Librarian of Congress.

Ten ASIS presidents have been awarded the prestigious ASIS Award of Merit, the highest honor bestowed on an information scientist. Others have shown unparalleled energy and enthusiasm for the Society through many years of continuous service. In fact, seven presidents have been honored with the Watson Davis Award, given to members for outstanding and continuous service. Collectively, the ASIS presidents have worked their ways up the association ladder performing in every other office available in the Society.

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Themes, Trends and Events of ASIS Presidential Decades

1937-1948
- Forging interorganizational alliances among government, scholarly organizations and professional/scientific societies interested in documentation
- Providing research workers with necessary materials/funding
- Capitalizing on post-WWII interest in science

Watson Davis 1937-46
Waldo G. Leland 1947
Vernon D. Tate 1948-49

1949-1958
- Leading the development of documentation as a central force in the advancement of science
- Expanding access to ADI and improving financial viability by becoming a professional membership organization
- Synthesizing the state-of-the-art by providing forums for a new generation of “information scientists”

Luther H. Evans 1950-52
E. Eugene Miller 1953
Milton O. Lee 1954

1959-1968
- Promoting the development of information technology, using microfilm as a storage and retrieval medium
- Establishing continuing funding source for ADI
- Emphasizing the internationalization of science, with representation at UNESCO
- Promoting documentation as a profession and toward a science

Karl F. Heumann 1959
Clayd Dake Gull 1960
Gerald J. Sophar 1961
Claire K. Schultz 1962
Robert M. Haye 1963
Hans Peter Luhn 1964
Laurence B. Hellperrin 1964-65
Scott Adams 1955
Joseph Hilsenrath 1956
James W. Perry 1957
Herman H. Henkel 1958
Harold Bozo 1966
Bernard M. Fry 1967
Robert S. Taylor 1968
- Encouraging long-term planning as a positive force
- Making ASIS a technical model of scientific communication for the profession
- Continuing emphasis on internationalization
- Focusing attention on public image of ASIS and information science
- Recognizing efforts of loyal society volunteers with the establishment of the Watson Davis Award
- Addressing financial problems by licensing the Journal to John Wiley & Sons and emphasizing stable management and conservative financial policy
- Emphasizing new technological opportunities
- Developing society leaders through the Professional Leadership Development Program

- Participating in public policy arena
- Working toward better marketing of ASIS products and services
- Gaining a better understanding of ASIS' role in the information profession through statistical analysis of membership and market needs
- Positioning the society for strategic growth through effective leadership and emphasis on planning
- Emphasizing international relations through development of non-U.S. chapters and joint international meetings
- Maintaining a prominent position in the profession by organizing inter-societal activities
- Recognizing information science as a discipline of stature and importance
Acceptance of the ASIS presidency requires an intense commitment of time and energy, as well as a financial commitment by the president's employer. For three years, while progressing from president-elect through president to past president, an individual must consider ASIS in virtually every professional endeavor undertaken.

ASIS presidents have agreed to serve for many different reasons. Some have worked their way through the Society with compulsion and conviction; others have served because they possess the skills or prominence that is right for the times. What is clear, however, is that once the office is attained, the benefits are forthcoming.

Each presidential term has its glories: presenting testimony on Capitol Hill; presiding over a forum of presidents from dozens of other professional societies; turning around a bleak financial picture; and setting the Society on a path of effective long-range planning.

One former president said that serving as ASIS president is worth a million dollars—a reference to the value of the prestige, contacts and visibility that come with the office. Another past president cites less quantitative rewards, particularly the ability to make an impact on the profession and, in some cases, on national policy. Many agree that the interaction with colleagues leads to professional and personal friendships that last a lifetime. Still others enjoy the personal satisfaction of recognition as a leader of one's peers.

Among past presidents, one consensus is obvious: the job is never done. Every president comes into office with ambitious plans and high expectations. But most leave office, after but one short year, with the more realistic satisfaction that contributions have been made to assure the future of the organization.

Issues of ASIS Presidencies

Personal discussions with many past presidents at the ASIS 50th Anniversary Conference brought to light several interesting points about the 50 years of ASIS. Although the questions and issues of information science and society management have changed over the years, many of today's themes are the same as those of years past. Good management, internationalization, rapidly-advancing technology, the need for planning, membership growth, volunteer participation and financial stability have been consistent concerns for ASIS and its presidents.

But this certainly does not mean that ASIS is stagnant. Rather, it means that we have maintained our responsibility for the basic elements of a professional society and we have continued to seek better ways of serving the membership.

All in all, serving as ASIS president is an opportunity to give back to the profession a small piece of what has been gained. ASIS is the professional home for its members and ASIS presidents want to help make it the best place to be. A trademark of the ASIS presidency has been that one can be successful reaching for a star with both feet firmly on the ground!

Bonnie C. Carroll
Oak Ridge, TN

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