

ASIS&T Information Professionals Task Force: October 2009 Update

by Nancy Roderer

From the first White Paper circulated in 2007 to the current time, the key question for the ASIS&T Information Professionals Task Force has been, “How can we identify current information education programs so that the stakeholder communities will have information relevant to their needs?” Answers to the question must come from all the groups directly affected by those education programs, including those who design and manage information programs, prospective students who seek out programs to fit their needs, prospective employers who are looking for graduates with the right portfolio of knowledge, skills and understandings to do the kinds of work needed in their areas of the information world and professional societies that want to be certain that they are providing professionals with the kinds of support needed in their careers. To-date most of the planning and design of programs has been under the purview of the faculty of academic institutions. While this structure assures that the programs meet the academic requirements of their institutions, they may not have had the

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level of input from other stakeholders that might make the programs more directly useful to students, employers and professional societies. An aim of the task force is to broaden the opportunity for stakeholder input in order to assure that information programs meet the needs of those who rely on them to support their career objectives and meet the needs of the information organizations they will serve.

Since 2007 the task force has

- commissioned a study to provide information on the number, location and particular thrust of existing graduate programs in information. The study, completed in April 2008 identified more than 900 graduate degree granting programs in information
- identified 60 key information organizations representing stakeholders and invited them to join our efforts
- convened a meeting of stakeholders at the Brookings Institute on September 9, 2008, to discuss ways in which information related to the existence of information programs could be made available to stakeholders.

Documentation on each of the above activities is available at www.asis.org/news.html.

In February 2009 the Task Force, in response to comments and suggestions by

stakeholders developed a proposed solution to respond to the expressed need to provide information on available graduate information programs. An identification database is proposed that would identify programs thus making it easier for prospective students, employers and society at large to understand what is and what is not included under the umbrella phrase *information professionals*. Program identification would vouch for content but would make no statement about quality. The database will provide information on the content of programs, their geographic location and other information pertinent to decision making. The database will provide those responsible for academic programs a way of seeing what is out there and how one’s own program relates, or not, to other programs in the region, in terms of disciplinary content, research focus and other relevant data elements. It will also provide professional associations the opportunity to look at the data and identify those areas of the information professions that are not represented in their membership, which can serve as a useful recruiting tool and a means of providing support to practicing professionals. The database is a way to describe the information professions based on the content of existing educational programs. A factor analysis can serve to provide a benchmark of the content of existing programs. The database will be kept up to date and will be a means of

showcasing the evolving nature of the field as demonstrated by its academic programs.

Five task forces will work on specific aspects of database development:

1. A *database framework task force* will conduct a factor analysis of a representative sample of the 900+ information programs identified to-date to identify types of programs and develop a framework for describing them.
2. A *database content task force* will develop a list of specifications for information to be included about each academic program and will define the information items required to describe programs.
3. A *database specification task force* will develop specifications for a program database to include the information specified by the database content task force. Particular attention will be paid to building a front end that will support social networking activities.
4. A *promotional task force* will develop specifications for a promotional campaign to inform stakeholders of the database, how it will be of benefit, how it is used and how it can be accessed.
5. An *administrative mechanisms task force* will investigate the administrative mechanisms that will be required to put the identification program and database management in operation.

At each step of the process, stakeholders will be invited to participate in the work of the task forces and will be informed regularly of progress.

The task force continues to bring professional issues to information organizations in general and to ASIS&T in particular. Two task force sessions were held at the Annual Meeting in Vancouver. The first of the sessions was Stakeholder’s Views on Information Education. It included presentations by Rachel Elkington, a recent iSchool graduate now working in an interaction design firm; Cynthia Fugate, associate director for research and instruction at the University of Washington Libraries; Deanna Morrow Hall, president of Corporate Information Resources, Inc., and Mark Greene, director of the American Heritage Center at the University of Wyoming, all representing professional societies. This presentation provided the opportunity for stakeholders to comment on the extent to which information about information programs has been available to them and how it might be more useful to their decision-making processes. It also provided a venue for educators to interact directly with stakeholders to discuss the above issues.

A second task force panel at the Vancouver meeting, System of Professions: Testing the Boundaries, addressed the information professions from a theoretical perspective. It included three speakers, Marcia Bates, University of California, Los Angeles; Prudence Dalrymple, Drexel

University; and Cassidy Sugimoto, a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. It was moderated by José-Marie Griffiths, also from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. Drawing upon their published research and professional experience, the speakers addressed various aspects of the information professions: the structure(s) of the discipline and the profession(s), their evolving relationships to one another and their intellectual heritage and future.

The work of the task force continues. The proposal described above is being discussed with potential funding agencies, and we hope to begin some version of the work within the next six months. As task force chair, I will be leading a People-to-People delegation to China to take this topic international, talking with a spectrum of information-related education programs in that country. Groups represented at our 2009 meeting have been invited to participate in the delegation, and we are seeking funding so that task force members can participate as well.

The Information Professionals Task Force will continue to provide opportunities for dialogue among the various stakeholder groups with the objectives of making the academic programs in information as useful as possible to all involved and of making the path to an information professional career more apparent to all. The task force welcomes your thoughts and your participation. ■