The occasion of an inaugural presidential address is potentially daunting, representing as it does the moment when the suffix “elect” is removed, and you finally recognize that you are the person tasked with leading the association. A quick scan of previous holders of this office can add to the sense of unease as you see the names Watson Davis, Harold Borko, Eugene Garfield, Clifford Lynch and so many others; it gives one pause—and time to reflect that you also might just be getting a little older than you care to admit.

Any professional society moves slowly but it is the responsibility of the president to make sure it moves surely. With a presidential term being only one year, it is important that collective efforts over years build on what goes before, and in this regard, I intend to build on the efforts of Diane, my immediate predecessor, and those before her who initiated a push toward greater internationalization in order to build strength through a broader, global membership. It is clear that the energy and enthusiasm of our international members are key building blocks of a secure future for the association and, moreover, the concerns of an association claiming to be “the information association for the information age” are truly global. Our name and our actions should recognize this.

I certainly want us to bring new energy to our student chapters by offering resources, wherever possible, to enable chapters to organize and to become involved in the international...
The information field is often split into many competing groups and organizations. I want ASIS&T to build bridges across the divisions so as to live up to our claim of being the information society.

I realize that student chapters often serve purposes more related to local than association-wide engagement, but most information professionals find their way into the field via university-based information programs. We therefore need to be active here to bring ASIS&T’s value more clearly to the fore so that no matter where these graduates pursue their professional careers, membership in this association is a natural part of their identities.

In the coming year we will examine all forms of involvement in ASIS&T so as to engage as many members as possible in the major events of the society: the Annual Meeting, summits, webinars and so forth. To this end, the board is engaging this year in a review of the Annual Meeting structure and program content to ensure the most relevance to members. We need to move beyond practices of habit and avoid undue shift based on the makeup of a particular year’s program committee. The goal is to develop a clearer sense of how the conference can best serve the Society over time. In the same vein, we intend to explore our entire range of online communications, from the website to our continuing education seminars, with a view to developing a consistent and content-rich series of offerings that add real value to members.

But hand in hand with such continued efforts, I believe we need to think clearly about the role of our professional organization and reimagine what ASIS&T can offer to members in the 21st century. I do not just mean analysis of the benefits, the products of membership such as the pricing of the Annual Meeting or access to a digital library. I am thinking more about what membership of this professional association really gives you. I believe that the sense of community and identity that is fostered by membership might seem intangible, but, on reflection, it is key to a positive membership experience. Further, if we cannot easily demonstrate the value of ASIS&T to its members, then why exist and why ask others to spend their money to join?

I am sure many of you, like me, view ASIS&T as being unique in its coverage of the full information field, beyond agencies or job titles, and in so doing we put user values at the core of our mission. Are we clear ourselves on how and why we take this approach? This year I want to help members find better ways to tell our story and to articulate the aims of ASIS&T so that we can help shape better understanding of information education in our universities and of the value in information research to funding agencies and help our graduates and fellow professionals best explain their contributions to employers.

The information field is often split into many competing groups and organizations. I want ASIS&T to build bridges across the divisions so as to live up to our claim of being the information society. We must engage with relevant other groups including the iSchools and ALISE. It is worth recognizing that our membership is dropping while the iSchools movement is growing: so what can we learn here? Is this not a time when the growth in information education should be leveraged for mutual benefit? When Harry Bruce takes over from me next year, he will become the 5th ASIS&T president in a row to come from the ranks of the iSchools, so let us exploit the potential for constructive partnership.

There is work to be done, and it will take more than one year to make real progress, but let us accept the challenge of creating the best information association, member by member, chapter by chapter, SIG by SIG, so as to demonstrate the very leadership mantle we claim.