Information Policy: Introduction
by Brandi Loveday, Special Section Editor

EDITOR’S SUMMARY
The ASIS&T Special Interest Group on Information Policy (SIG/IFP) provides a forum for members to express their views and concerns about a key element of the association’s purpose, “to promote informed policy on national and international information issues.” Supporting that purpose, contributors explore Fifth Amendment protections, mobile data privacy, governmental use of cookies, self-destructing data, access to government information in Canada and how privacy has fared since the events of September 11, 2001. There are daily changes in information policy, often little noticed despite their significant consequences. Yet despite careers dedicated to research on information and its implications, those in the information science domain have remarkably little presence in discussions. ASIS&T members are urged to become knowledgeable about information policy, engage in debate and become involved, living up to the association’s stated purpose.

KEYWORDS
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privacy
data security
personal information
government information

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It is an honor and a pleasure to introduce this special section of the Bulletin, sponsored by the ASIS&T Special Interest Group on Information Policy (SIG/IFP). One article, from Caidi, Stevenson and Richmond, deals with access to government information in Canada, but most of the contributors from the SIG elected to submit articles focused on data privacy, personal privacy and other privacy issues. Grace Beganey writes on mobile privacy; Norman Gervais on U.S. government use of cookies; Shelly Warwick on the privacy environment post-9/11; Christopher Kotfila on self-destructing data in digital communication; and Shannon Oltmann discusses current legal findings regarding Fifth Amendment protections and surrendering the keys/passwords to encrypted data. These topics are by no means the extent of information policy, but the topics are of great importance to all of us.

Every information professional should not only be familiar with information policy, but should also make a concerted effort to explore the field, staying abreast of changes brought about by legislative and judicial decisions. Every day there are more such changes, more suggestions for change and implementations of policy with real consequences. Indeed, we continually see numerous articles and stories in the media revealing not only governmental abuse under poorly written information policies, but abuse by school administrations, insurance companies, publishing firms, patent trolls and more.

Academics and information professionals seem to be left out of the discussion as the media show us legislators and corporations making and influencing these decisions. Are they really representing our best interests or their own agendas? Do we, as information professionals, have a place in this conversation? We should, but we won’t until more of the professionals doing the research and spending time analyzing the fallout from these decisions stand up and become a part of the democratic process that is supposed to exist in the United States. Until then, there may well be no change for the better. It...
may not be possible to please everyone; however, it is our duty as students in this field (for we all are still students, no matter whether we hold a Ph.D.) to proactively address the information needs of a society that seems to be unable to protect itself or unwilling to, based on propaganda filtered to the public by the government.

Over the last three years as a member of ASIS&T and a graduate student, I have seen too few panels, too few discussions and too little (public) interaction within the organization regarding information policy. The conversations and topics are not easy, nor should they be. These policies govern our very lives and how we move about our day-to-day activities. To deny this field its due attention will allow governments to subvert and essentially strip away constitutional and human rights in the name of security, safety and the accumulation of wealth. I encourage you to read the articles and reflect on their implications. Internalize these discussions and take them back to your employers, your students and your colleagues. ASIS&T’s own “about” page on the organization’s website states, “ASIS&T increases the influence of information professionals among decision-makers by focusing attention on the importance of information as a vital resource in a high-technology age and promotes informed policy on national and international information issues by contributing to the formation of those policies” [emphasis added]. SIG/IFP urges that we be much more proactive in this area.

Share your research or your ideas for research via the mailing list available for SIG/IFP: sigifp-l@asis.org. If you aren’t a member of this SIG and want to help us “shine the light on information policy,” I encourage you to join and get involved, whether your interests are primarily on the social or legal aspects. Each side of information policy issues affects the other, as many of the articles in this issue illustrate. We cannot be influential in information policy if we are uninformed about our colleagues’ work. Bring your passion and insight, whatever it may be, to the table and start the difficult conversations.