

2007 Award of Merit Acceptance Speech

by Donald H. Kraft

Madam President, Mr. Executive Director, ASIS&T Board members, fellow members of ASIS&T, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

Let me first congratulate the other ASIS&T award winners. We all very much appreciate your contributions to the Society and to the field of information science and technology.

I am very honored by this award. Accepting it is for me a very humbling experience. As noted by last year's winner, Blaise Cronin, with this award you have placed me in superb company, alongside names such as Hans Peter Luhn, Cyril Cleverdon, Manfred Kochen, Bob Hayes, Tefko Saracevic, Jean Tague-Sutcliffe, Gene Garfield and Karen Spärck Jones, among many others who have had such a great influence on me and upon our discipline.

I know that as I mention names of people to whom I am indebted, I will accidentally omit some people, and I wish to apologize for that now.

This award has given me an opportunity to reflect, so please permit me to reminisce a bit. In 1970 I had completed my doctoral degree, marking me as a bit different from many of you because it was in industrial (or what my eldest daughter calls imaginary) engineering. I was just starting my career as an academic when I had the opportunity to attend the Conference on Interlibrary Communications and Information Networks at Airlie House in northern Virginia. Many library and information science luminaries were in attendance, including Joe Becker, who chaired the conference; Pauline Atherton Cochrane, then president of the newly renamed ASIS; and Henrietta Avram, among many others. For this newcomer to our field, this was a fantastic introduction to my newly chosen vocation.

Also in attendance at that Airlie House conference was my mentor, Ferd Leimkuhler of Purdue University, who first piqued my interest in library operations research and bibliometrics. He has always been an inspiration to me, and I believe that much of whatever success I have had as a teacher and researcher is due to him.

I also remember the University of Chicago's 1972 summer workshop,

where Don Swanson and Abe Bookstein brought together several researchers in library operations research. It was sheer joy for me as a young professor to see how others employed mathematical models to be applied to many different library problems. Mike Buckland was at that workshop demonstrating how library operations research could be applied in real library situations. By this time I was hooked.

I have learned so much from so many, and I am grateful for the friendship and collegiality that I have found in this great field. I was given the prestigious ASIS&T Research Award, in large part with their help and support. Moreover, I am pleased that I have been among some of the early researchers who applied fuzzy logic to the area of information retrieval systems – fuzzy sets certainly has its place in this area.

I am especially indebted to the late Larry Heilprin, who contributed so much to how I personally perceive our field. I have been complimented by being compared to Larry. I know I am not near his equal, but I am hopeful of some day getting closer, even as I continue my research upon retirement from LSU in May.

I know that I am being honored in part here today because of my many years as editor of the Society's journal. That editorship has given me a unique opportunity to see the evolution of our field as it has been reflected in *JASIST*. In the early days, when the journal was called *American Documentation*, it covered such topics as the definition of information, classification and indexing theory, as well as technologies such as microfilm. By the 1960s it included library automation and bibliometrics and its companions of informetrics and scientometrics. In the 1970s, as I began my professional career and the *Journal* became the *Journal of the American Society for Information Science* or *JASIS*, new topics appeared, including library operations research, online public access catalogs, users and uses of information systems, systems evaluation and information retrieval. Topics such as online information retrieval, digital libraries, electronic publishing, webology and webometrics and visualization came to prominence

in the last two decades. Today, we see *JASIST* moving to modern conceptual issues that include ontology and taxonomy, metadata, knowledge management, user centered and interaction design, information architecture and social networks. We have also seen articles using qualitative analysis as well as those that use quantitative analysis. I have been privileged to have been able to help move the journal to include articles about some of these advancements.

Moreover, I am grateful to the previous editors of our journal, especially Art Elias, who helped me get started as a *JASIS* author, and Charlie Meadow, my predecessor. I recall one time long ago when I was quite annoying, kvetching to Charlie about the refereeing of one of my articles. Thankfully, he overlooked this, adding a third referee so that the article, after much revision, was eventually published. Later, I apologized to Charlie, but his response was to invite me to serve on his *JASIS* Editorial Board, and later to become an associate editor. I am grateful that I have been able, apparently, to uphold the quality of the *Journal* that in 1985 I inherited as editor.

Let me also point out the physical changes, as well as the quality changes, in the *Journal*, including going from six to eight to 10 to 12 and now to 14 issues a year, the editorial changes, the fantastic covers, the addition of special topic issues for a time, and going from stapled issues to thicker ones with spines, are all due to a fantastic Editorial Board – just look at the list in any issue of *JASIST* to see what leading scholars they all are. In addition, our Society, and the *Journal*, have benefited by having a great publisher (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.), and a supportive Society. Thanks are also due to the authors for submitting articles and to the referees for reviewing them. *JASIST* could simply not do without all of their contributions.

A word about the publisher is due. First, John Wiley & Sons has recently acquired Blackwell Publishing, moving their peer-reviewed journals to Wiley-Blackwell. This promises an even brighter future for *JASIST*. Second, the publisher has moved to an electronic submittal system, enabling a more efficient way of submitting and refereeing the articles. Of late, Wiley-Blackwell is looking into the relationships between open access journals and citation rates and plagiarism detection, among other good things. Moreover, the publisher has been very supportive of me as well as of the Society, offering a cash award for the Best *JASIST* Paper Award, a

banquet on Wednesday night for the Society and improving the financial benefits from the journal that accrue to the Society. The publisher has also done fun things like the SIG CON 20th Anniversary Special Topics issue. In addition, the publisher has provided the Society with its digital library and has recently gone retrospective back to the first volumes of *JASIST*.

I am grateful to the many students, including my editorial assistants, and colleagues at LSU in the computer science department and the School of Library and Information Science, who have helped me along the way, some even deeming it worthwhile to publish with me. I want to specifically thank three colleagues who were co-authors with me – Charlie Meadow, Bert Boyce and Carol Barry – for their forbearance, especially when I attempted to be humorous.

Finally, I want you to know how fantastic ASIS&T is. While a bit small when compared to other information societies, we offer so very much. We have people who are active and who contribute so much to the Society. This includes Watson Davis Award winners such as Lois Lunin, who still does the Perspectives section for *JASIST* and who helps make being editor worthwhile. Consider, too, the presidents of our Society, including Candy Schwartz, who first conceived the ASIS&T digital library that I was privileged as president to be of some assistance in moving closer to that reality. I also note that many of the people who have been active in ASIS&T have served the Society in more than just one way. Because of all of them, I can easily say that I have stood on the shoulders of giants.

I am also very grateful to my family, my two daughters and my lovely, wonderful wife, Linda, who has been called a saint.

Let me conclude by saying that ASIS&T is a fantastic professional society. We have benefited from great scholarship and good leadership from the Board and our executive directors, including, of course, Dick Hill. ASIS&T brings together people from all over the map in terms of various disciplines. Incidentally, whether we call our educational academic units I-schools or dare to use the dreaded L word seems to me to be but an intellectually interesting exercise. The real issue is the continuance of the interaction of these disciplines to do research and to educate the next generations in order to solve the problems facing information professionals today and in the future.

I have felt that one could find an analogy of a library scientist to a

person in a dark room looking for a black cat, and an information technologist to a person in a dark room looking for a black cat when there is no cat. An information scientist, on the other hand, is analogous to a person in dark room looking for a black cat when there is no cat, but who is occasionally heard to be shouting, "I've got it, I've got it!"

Also, when thinking about ASIS&T, consider some of the plenary speakers we have had at recent ASIS&T Annual Meetings, including Brewster Kahle, Tim Berners-Lee and Susan Dumais. Consider, too, the

summits, the SIGs, the chapters, the seminars, the workshops, the tutorials, the sessions at Annual Meetings – it's all good. I am proud to be a part of it all. I have been lucky enough to have been able to participate and serve.

I encourage all of you to get and to continue to be active in ASIS&T – the rewards are there for the taking. For example, I was once given the privilege of being Dr. Chaos as a panelist as part of a SIG/CON session a few years ago: How cool is that? And, now, to be given this award is beyond my ability to express how honored and grateful I am. Thank you. ■

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