Thank you for electing me ASIS&T president. I am honored by your selection and very pleased to have the opportunity to work with you in a number of timely and important areas. For my first column, I want to share my presidential address with you, and in this way let you know of a group of initiatives that I think are very important to the future of the society.

These initiatives are concerned with the information professions. To me, the uniqueness and power of ASIS&T comes from the diversity of its members, working in many different environments and using many different titles. What binds us all together is that we are all concerned with that powerful and fascinating triad of information, technology and people; that is, that we are all information professionals. My view is that we should do a better job of acknowledging that we are all information professionals and from there go on to work to strengthen the visibility and rigor of the information professions.

To me and to others before me, there are multiple information professions, but the collective term information professional encompasses all of these. The point here is not to lose the identity of the unique titles – librarian, faculty member, indexer, information architect, etc. – but to bring us together to acknowledge our commonalities and to work together. I was struck at the last meeting of the information architecture group by how easily they used the term information professional, and I think that we can turn things to our advantage if we follow suit.

I believe that all ASIS&T members (and many who are not) belong to the overarching category of information professionals, and my first request of you is that you acknowledge that and let others know. Figure 1 provides a graphic example – our own past president and executive director of the Coalition for Networked information, Cliff Lynch, proclaiming his status as information professional.

Marcia Bates described the information professions very thoroughly and eloquently in a paper that she gave this summer at the 6th Conference on Conceptions of Library and Information Science (CoLIS 6), based on her work with Mary Niles Maack on the Encyclopedia of Library and Information Science. I highly recommend the article to you, which was published in Information Research and is now available online[1]. In this article, Marcia makes the case that the information professional concept can be useful and applicable to all information professionals.

Figure 1
disciplines are orthogonal to the traditional academic disciples; that is, that they apply to the full range of subject matter, as shown in Figure 2, but are distinct from them. The figure shows the spectrum of information disciplines, ranging from the disciplines of the cultural record, associated with the arts and humanities, to the sciences of information, associated with the social and natural sciences. Within this framework, many more sub-disciplines can be identified, as shown. Thus we see arrayed in a logical manner the many areas of interest of information professionals and the many areas in which those information professionals may work, while at the same time we can see clearly not only the links between the information professions and the traditional academic disciplines but also the links among the information professions themselves. There is a wealth of information professions, but we have so much in common.

Information professionals come together in ASIS&T, learning from each other and building our field. By giving a name to our common basis, I believe that we can benefit in many ways. First, I believe that each of us as individuals can benefit personally from this affiliation. Secondly, I believe that our society can grow under the aegis of this new focus. And finally, I think that this will result in increased recognition of the information professions that will lead to benefits yet unimagined. I look forward to the day when we speak collectively of the information professions, as here.

Some of you have no doubt heard my personal story – that of a person who knew in the late 60s that she wanted to work with information, but who had considerable difficulty finding a place that would prepare me for that career. With help of an
advisor picked somewhat randomly out of a literature search, I was able to identify several schools that would meet my needs, and I received a wonderful education in information science from the University of Maryland. While I think the situation today is much improved, I still find people interested in information who don’t know how to pursue it educationally, or even that one can. Looking to the future, it seems to me that the ultimate goal is for young children to add “information professional” to the occupations they aspire to, right up there with firefighter and nurse, teacher and lawyer. Representing this goal in Figure 3 are my delightful grandsons, Nate, Alex and Tom.

My request of ASIS&T is that we celebrate and promote our status as information professionals. I have three things in mind:

- First, as individuals, each of us can acknowledge that we are information professionals and use the term liberally.
- Secondly, I would like to see ASIS&T, as an organization, promote the information professions. There is a role here for every part of ASIS&T – the board, SIGs and chapters, and all the committees. I invite each of these groups to consider how we can promote the information professions, and then to do so.
- Finally, my consideration of information professions and our evolution as a discipline leads me to think that it is time for there to be a process for the accreditation of information professional education. Over the last year I have been working with a task force on this topic, and we have produced a white paper laying out the challenges and opportunities of creating such a process. The white paper is available on the ASIS&T website (www.asis.org, under ASIS&T People and News), and I want to thank task force members Ann Prentice, Diane Barlow, Pru Dalrymple, José-Marie Griffiths and Kate McCain for all that they have done. We will go on this next year to a more detailed feasibility study, and we would be most grateful for the participation of those of you who are interested. Stay tuned for more details.

I hope that each of you will carefully consider these initiatives and do what you can to help. I would be delighted to hear from you.

Figure 3

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Resources