The name change for ASIS&T, as you will now know, was overwhelmingly supported by members last fall in what turned out to be one of the largest ballot returns in recent ASIS&T history. As I write this, we are in the process of dealing with all the necessary legal and logistical aspects that must be addressed. The clear signal from members is that this is the right move for the Society at this time, and I hope we can leverage this enthusiasm in the months and years ahead to forge a greater international association for all our members.

Name changes are not new to many professional societies, and neither are dwindling memberships, financial challenges and threats from outside. This much was brought home to me vividly when I attended the Council of Scientific Society Presidents annual meeting last month in Washington, DC. This gathering of society presidents is described as the primary science policy organization in the world, and I was honored to represent ASIS&T. Given the problems discussed, we need to participate actively and regularly in this gathering, and I am of the view that our society can bring a unique perspective to bear.

Two concerns in particular dominated the discussion sessions I attended: publication revenues and predatory conference practices. The former, obviously enough, is driven by the recognition that increasing amounts of any society’s budget come from publication revenues. With library bundling practices and membership drops, several presidents spoke of the proactive steps their societies are taking to ensure their ongoing funding streams. The range of options employed is wide, from author
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.

charges to developing dedicated endowment funds to support publications, but the most exciting suggestion I heard was for the Council to facilitate a consortium process to handle the mechanics of publishing, probably through a service provider, which could be leveraged by individual societies as needed. The dream is to allow each member society the ability to retain full benefits of ownership for their journals but with the negotiating strength of the collective. Clearly there is some distance between the idea and its implementation, but it suggests that scholarly societies need not view themselves as passive or powerless in the scholarly publication economy. From the lively discussion that ensued at the meeting, it was clear that many professional societies believe this option is seriously worth exploring.

The predatory practices issue is something that we’ve not experienced with ASIS&T, but some society presidents reported competitors starting up conferences that are scheduled to coincide with or run in parallel to their major conventions and which are often titled and described ambiguously to suggest a relationship or official endorsement. The goal is to attract revenues by capturing the attention and resources of a legitimate association’s members. We’ve not had too many competitors try this with the ASIS&T Annual Meeting, but it is clear that the number of information-related conferences, often in attractive locations, is growing as businesses see the prospect of profits. And profits there are to be made, but the costs are more than financial: young faculty need to be very mindful of where they publish as they build their research records, and professionals seeking the best exposure to new ideas and practices can ill-afford to waste resources attending second-rate conferences. We all think we can tell the difference ourselves, but it’s clear that some outside interests feel there is an ambiguity here to be exploited.

All told, the Council of Scientific Society Presidents’ meeting confirmed for me the importance of looking outside our society for guidance and benchmarking. As the Association for Information Science & Technology, we should be exploring not only greater international coordination and activities but we should also be examining how our society can shape dialog and forge productive relationships with other disciplines that are impacted by the core concerns of our field. If you have not attended a business meeting at our Annual Meeting recently, you might not realize that our membership is small and is shrinking and that we are heavily reliant on publication contracts to ensure our financial survival. In this sense, we are no different than many other scholarly associations. What we do have, however, is an intellectual core that has relevance far beyond any single disciplinary boundary and by acting on this strength and our clear desire to grow internationally, ASIS&T can have a healthy future and in so doing, really live up its claim to be “the information society for the information age.”