Some Points about ASIS&T Global Initiatives
by Diane H. Sonnenwald

EDITOR’S SUMMARY
ASIS&T has long been open to members and collaborations beyond North American borders but is intensifying efforts to strengthen and expand its global influence. Special Interest Group/International Information Issues (SIG/III) serves as a foundation for awareness and outreach, and the Association name change is a meaningful reflection and reinforcement of a broader perspective. It is hoped that the European and the newly established Asia Pacific chapters will be the first of many more groups outside the United States and Canada to support international networking. ASIS&T has committed to link membership fees to national ranking on the United Nations Human Development Index, locate the 2016 Annual Meeting in Europe and delete language in websites, honors and policies that implies any national limitations. With ongoing diligence and support, an active international membership and global collaborations will be the norm.

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he recent global initiatives undertaken by ASIS&T are in many ways a continuation of past activities and efforts by many members over the years. For example, at the 1958 International Conference on Scientific Information co-sponsored by the American Documentation Institute (the predecessor of ASIS&T) 50% of the papers had authors from outside the United States [1]. Discussions regarding omitting the word American from the name of the association began in the late 1970s [1]. In 1982 ASIS and the Institute of Information Scientists (which is now the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals or CILIP) held a joint conference in Dublin, Ireland. Toni Carbo, who currently serves on the SIG/III Advisory Board, was a member of the conference organizing committee (see Figure 1). In 1982 the Taipei Chapter was the first chapter established outside North America [2]. And as discussed elsewhere in this issue, SIG/III was established in 1982. Thus, if the recent global initiatives within ASIS&T have gone a little further it is...
because there has been an excellent foundation on which to build. In addition to selecting a more global name for our association, recent global initiatives include membership fees linked to a country’s status on the UN Human Development Index; decision to hold an Annual Meeting outside North America; review of social media and awards for national biases; and formation of a new chapter located in the Asia-Pacific region. This article recaps and comments on those initiatives and invites members to propose additional initiatives.

It has been my great pleasure over the past two years to see that our members remain united in their resolve to increase ASIS&T’s global perspective. Of members who voted, 89.7% supported the selection of ASIS&T’s new name in 2012 – and more members voted in that election than typically vote in our annual elections for officers. SIG/III, under the leadership of Daniel Alemneh in 2011-2012, put together an excellent proposal regarding linking membership fees to a country’s rank on the annual United Nations (UN) Human Development Index. This policy was approved by the Board and subsequently extended following the suggestion of the International Relations Committee (IRC) to include other membership categories. Thus current students, early/transitional professionals and professionals who reside in countries categorized as having “medium” or “low” human development in the most recent UN Human Development Index can join for $20, $30 or $40 per year, respectively. (See www.asist.org/developingnationsmember.html for details.) Reduced fees also extend to retired members and members facing hardship. Maintaining equitable fees makes it possible for more individuals to contribute to ASIS&T and all members to benefit from their contributions.

The International Relations Committee (IRC) conducted an extensive survey and balanced report discussing members’ perspectives regarding geographic options for future Annual Meetings. Mei-Mei Wu, IRC chair at the time, led this effort, and Vivienne Houghton, a 2011 ASIS&T New Leaders Award recipient, worked diligently to create the survey instrument and help analyze data (see [3] for a summary of the report). As a result the Board decided to hold the 2016 Annual Meeting in Europe. An ad hoc committee of Harry Bruce, Dick Hill, Jens-Erik Mai, Katriina Bystrøm, Sanda Erdelez and me are working with others to identify locations in Europe for the 2016 Annual Meeting. We are also investigating the possibility of holding a co-located conference with a “sister” scholarly and professional organization in Europe and/or information science school.

Sometimes there are implicit barriers to participation for others that we overlook because those barriers are not barriers for us. For example, the word national was dropped from the title of the ASIS&T social media pages because “national” has no relevance in an international association. I also reviewed text describing ASIS&T awards for inherent biases toward North American practices. Consultations with the Information Science Education Committee, the Awards & Honors Committee, the IRC and the Board led to new wording that allows for submissions from students whose Ph.D. programs do not include a formal proposal stage. Of course, more can be done, such as renaming the award and changing its wording to allow students whose dissertation research is not a single study and monograph but a collection of studies and publications to compete.

Forming new chapters that can facilitate information sharing among members in a geographic area is another ASIS&T global initiative. In 2013 we saw the formation of a new chapter, the Asia Pacific Chapter [4]. The chapter was formed through the efforts of Yin Leng Theng (a 2012 ASIS&T New Leaders Award recipient), Makiko Miwa, Songphan Choemprayong and colleagues along with support from the European and Taipei Chapters and the ASIS&T Chapter Assembly. Makiko commented, “The birth of the Asia Pacific Chapter should contribute to the formation of a truly international community of information and library science professionals. We hope members of the region will help each other to attain this goal.” Yin Leng further noted, “Although some of us may know about the ASIAS&T Annual Meeting, it remains a conference that is expensive to attend and/or difficult to get work accepted and published. A regional presence can help to provide a platform for collaborations between established scholars and upcoming researchers in the region, raising scholarship and participation in ASIS&T events and activities.”

The European and Asia Pacific chapters encompass larger geographic areas than typically found in other chapters. However, members in these
chapters organize regional workshops and virtual activities and meet whenever possible at conferences, including the ASIS&T Annual Meeting. The European Chapter won the Chapter-of-the-Year Award in 2012 and 2103, demonstrating that it is indeed possible to have an active chapter that includes members that live in different countries or geographic areas. When discussing the benefits of belonging to a chapter, Isabella Peters, a member of the European Chapter, said, “Since I’ve been participating in the European Chapter I can feel what it means to be part of a globally connected and engaged community. I especially enjoy meeting members face-to-face for the first time (e.g., at ASIS&T conferences) and experiencing the connection between each other although we had only worked and corresponded via email before.” Interacting with colleagues face-to-face and virtually provides enjoyable opportunities to learn about and discuss innovations, educational programs, organizational structures and practices, and emerging research that would otherwise not be possible.

I would like to encourage members living and working in areas that do not have an active chapter to consider establishing one. Model chapter bylaws and a chapter officers manual are available to assist members. Members can also apply for chapter development funds to help finance chapter activities. For details, see www.asist.org/Chapters/chapters.html.

From 2012 to 2013 the number of ASIS&T members from outside the United States increased approximately 18%. To continue this trend, the current ASIS&T president Harry Bruce has asked the IRC to develop recommendations regarding policies and activities to support and encourage global membership. The committee has generated a preliminary list of recommendations. As acting chair of the IRC, I would like to ask all members to send suggestions to me (at Diane.Sonnenwald<at>gmail.com) regarding ways to further support and increase global membership.

In conclusion, the ultimate goal is for ASIS&T practices to be inclusive and flexible such that no one geopolitical or sociocultural set of practices inherently has precedent over others and all members benefit from sharing insights and solutions, collaborating to create new knowledge and in general assisting each other. This goal is not necessarily a new one. However, achieving this goal requires consistent and constant vigilance; our practices should be reviewed and open to improvements on an ongoing basis. By actively listening to and learning from each other, apologizing and accepting apologies when mistakes are made and embracing differences, we can enrich our association and our work and personal lives. While there should always be a place for local initiatives, I hope that “ASIS&T global initiatives” over time will become known simply as “ASIS&T initiatives.” That is, in the future global initiatives will not be special events or activities that occasionally occur but rather events and activities that frequently and usually occur.

### Resources Mentioned in the Article


