Leaders and members of the ASIS&T Special Interest Group/Information Policy (SIG/IPF) were honored with an invitation to edit the December/January 2014 issue of the *Bulletin*. I am equally honored to be asked to contribute to this one. Daily we read about issues related to information policy: whether it is policy surrounding personal information or information policy on a global scale, copyright, digital rights or intellectual property. It is hard to find an issue that does not have some information policy element; think about information sharing in regard to the missing Malaysian plane or the broad email search requests made by the U.S. Justice Department in its ongoing quest to identify potential terrorist threats. With these two examples it is clear that information policies frequently have a global reach and deal with international issues. In this brief article I’d like to talk about the development of information policy and its representation within ASIS&T. I will briefly discuss global information policy issues at the forefront of discussion today and end with a discussion of the revival of SIG/IPF and an outline of our plans for the future.

**Information Policy**

Information policy has held an important place in ASIS&T since the 1980s, in part due to the related work of notable SIG/International Information Issues (SIG/III) members Toni Carbo and Michel Menou. The field continues to mature and its importance to our understanding of the use of information in society is well documented. Over the years there has been an ongoing attempt to define *information policy*. In 1990, Overman and Cahill, drawing on Terry Weingarten’s publication from 1989, defined information policy as “the set of all public laws, regulations and policies that encourage, discourage or regulate the creation, use, storage and...
communication of information” [1, p. 803]. Later, Terrance Maxwell wrote that information policies “are social, political, legal, economic and technological decisions about the role of information in society, and at an instrumental level, as they impact the creation, dissemination, use and preservation of information [2]. Most recently, Sandra Braman has claimed in “Defining Information Policy,” which is among the essays introducing the first issue of the Journal of Information Policy, that “information policy is comprised of laws, regulations and doctrinal positions – and other decision making and practices with society-wide constitutive effects – involving information creation, processing, flows, access, and use [3, p. 3].

Drawing only on these three possible definitions from the past two decades, it is possible to recognize the common features: we can say that an information policy is an instantiation of decisions related to the creation, use, preservation and flow of information. This definition highlights information rather than data. Yet I assert it is important that we expand our definition back to the concept of data, particularly in light of today’s focus on “big data.” It is critical that we have a voice in creating policy that governs collection, use and preservation of data. Massive data stores are maintained in servers around the world – from the Twitter archive obtained by the Library of Congress to the national health records in individual countries. Who has access to this data? Why is it being stored? And do we have any say in its use?

Global Information Policy

The questions above are relevant to people throughout the world. Information policies have a global reach and, as technology has enabled us to reach seamlessly across the world, the data traces we leave along our way present a digital goldmine of information. Since Edward Snowden’s release of classified National Security Agency documents, policies of far-reaching data collection and surveillance have come to light. Talking with a Canadian military officer on my way to the iConference in Berlin, Germany, I asked his opinion of the NSA’s activities. He laughed slightly and said, “The funny thing is that we’re all acting like the NSA is the only organization doing this kind of data gathering. Any country with capabilities to monitor

email, social media and cellphone data is going to be leveraging that ability to gather intelligence.” The rest of us can only ever analyze these classified information policies after the practice has been exposed. We have to trust in the judicial process of checks and balances in the United States as well as any other country conducting such activities. In a recent opinion written by Washington, D.C. Magistrate Judge John M. Facciola in relation to a Justice Department request for an email search warrant, he states, “Its [the Justice Department] applications ask for the entire universe of information tied to a particular account, even if it has established probable cause only for certain information” [4]. Understanding how we can engender trust in an environment where nearly all of our actions leave a trace will be difficult.

After the public revelation that the NSA had monitored German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s personal cellphone, she was quoted as saying, “Friends don’t spy on each other.” A casualty of secrecy is often trust, and in a global information economy, the question of balancing secrecy with transparency is ever more important.

Expectations and legal protections of privacy are not held universally in the same way. Again, the NSA revelations prompted talks, particularly in Latin America and the European Union, of ways to change information policies to protect the data privacy of EU citizens. On March 12, 2014, the European Parliament voted strongly in favor of extending data protection laws (European Commission MEMO 13/923 and MEMO 14/60):

Data protection is made in Europe. Strong data protection rules must be Europe’s trade mark. Following the U.S. data spying scandals, data protection is more than ever a competitive advantage. … Today’s vote is the strongest signal that it is time to deliver this reform for our citizens and our businesses [5].

What this means for United States-based technology companies such as Google, Facebook and Yahoo is yet to be seen. These policies address one aspect of information policy concerns. At a global level, policies surrounding literacy, digital rights and access to information are also important and demand our attention.
Reviving SIG/IFP

In light of this urgency, over the past two years we have worked to revive Special Interest Group/Information Policy Special (SIG/IFP). We have a historically close bond with SIG/III, and one of our goals is to continue developing this relationship while we create a space where information policy-specific issues can be explored and discussed. This is not a bounded category but covers areas of eGovernment, digital rights, information law, international information law and information ethics (to name only a few). Each of these areas could form the basis for its own special interest group, and some do. Our goal with SIG/IFP is to create a space where we can discuss the policy-specific implications in each of these areas. It is important to do so because as information professionals many of us may have the opportunity to participate in policy creation and implementation activities. We need to be at the forefront of participating in making these decisions. Over the years we have jointly sponsored ASIS&T panels, and we hope a workshop is in our future. Most recently we are discussing bringing information ethics under the umbrella of SIG/IFP. A partnership with the special interest group on education (SIG/ED) is also under discussion with an online webinar on how to teach information policy. We know education is the key to addressing concerns of empowerment and trust.

Beyond creating closer bonds with existing SIGs, we hope to develop stronger relationships with practitioners outside of academe who are working in information policy-related areas. Since our association is for information professionals, we believe that we need to make a concerted effort to include individuals who are working in government agencies, think tanks, libraries or as independent contractors to find a voice in SIG/IFP and ASIS&T. One of our sponsored panels last year brought together researchers from the United States, Canada and the Royal Military College of Canada. While all held academic positions the participant from the Royal Military College of Canada was working on the frontlines, creating information and security policies with far reaching influence.

Plans for the Group

As this year’s chair I hope to firmly reestablish SIG/IFP as a group within ASIS&T. There are a number of ASIS&T members doing wonderful work in the area of information policy, and I hope we can come together to develop an influential voice to add to public and government discussions of these issues and many others. We are eager to develop relationships with individual scholars as well as established centers (academic or otherwise). It is exciting to consider our potential impact joining forces through SIG/IFP and ASIS&T. I have already mentioned work in the areas of international and global information policy, but there are additional areas within information policy that I hope to include.

Information ethics. Information policy is deeply rooted in a tradition of sharing and access. These values are important as we consider how to best regulate the flow of information. Values and ethics may be commonly held, but we cannot assume they are held with the same weight universally. We hope that policy decisions are based on a solid ethical foundation, yet this foundation is not necessarily the case. Policies are partisan and written to support and leverage certain stakeholders. Economic drivers may color which aspects of policy are prioritized. National and international information policies need to balance policies that ensure openness and transparency with those that are shrouded in secrecy. The general citizenry and for-profit organizations, as well as political or military leaders, need to be considered important stakeholders in information policy design.

Education and digital rights. Information policy is important to education and educators, whether the policy is about ongoing access to public information, digitization of books and the copyright interests that surround the activity or libraries’ constant fight to protect the privacy of their patrons. Those of us who work in colleges where computer and data science collaborations are possible have the opportunity to incorporate information policy education into data mining projects and software design. At the College of Computing and Informatics at Drexel University I have had the opportunity to design and teach an undergraduate course in information policy and teach an ongoing government information course. Student responses are encouraging and range from, “Thank you. This was one of my favorite classes of college…” to “I wanted to let you know that I had my
very first lobbying success yesterday on Capitol Hill! I attribute most of my understanding and government document navigation skills to you and your class.” Our students are eager to learn about information policy and participate in our political processes.

Government information. In addition to my involvement with ASIS&T some of our members are also involved with the American Library Association’s (ALA) Government Information Roundtable (GODORT). GODORT works closely with the U.S. Depository Library Council and the Government Printing Office to ensure ongoing access to accurate and comprehensive government information. Ongoing access to government information and expanded access to data are two major areas related to information policy, and our SIG is proud to acknowledge experts among our members. Big data repositories fall under the rubric of government information. Under the banner of creating an open government where transparency, participation and collaboration are key, the U.S. government releases massive datasets that are openly available through data.gov [6]. The regulations behind the release of this data are foundational information policies, and the next step is to consider how we, as information professionals, can best use this data for exploration and engagement. This use includes, for those of us who are educators, the opportunity to teach our students how to access and work with this wealth of data.

Plans for the Annual Meeting

While plans for this year’s Annual Meeting are still underway, SIG/IFP will be sponsoring a number of panel submissions to the conference planning committee. Topics include intellectual property issues from academic and practitioner perspectives, an examination of building and rebuilding trust through inclusive information policies and issues of surveillance and privacy. We hope to have a strong presence at the meeting in the form of accepted papers and panels, but also by member participation in a wide variety of conference activities.

Information policies have ever more influence on our lives, particularly as we conduct so much of our lives online and increasingly expect widespread access to accurate and comprehensive information. How this information is managed as well as what or whose data is made available are issues that affect us all. As information professionals many of us are uniquely positioned to take on active roles in this environment. I hope that SIG/IFP can be a place to bring together international, ethics, government, education and other information policy issues.

Resources Mentioned in the Article