

# Information Science Beyond the Border

by Luanne Freund and Heather O'Brien

Most ASIS&T members probably know that at any Annual Meeting, Canadians make up the largest group of international attendees. With the increasingly international orientation of ASIS&T, the Canadian presence is growing: in the past five years new student chapters have opened in Vancouver and Toronto, and in 2007 ASIS&T had its first “cross-border” president, Edie Rasmussen. In 2009, the Canadian members are very excited to welcome ASIS&T members to the Annual Meeting in Vancouver, on Canada’s beautiful west coast.

What many ASIS&T members may not know is that for almost 40 years, Canadians have had a separate information science association of their own. The Canadian Association for Information Science/L'Association Canadienne des Sciences de L'Information (CAIS-ACSI) was formally founded in 1971 “to promote the advancement of information science in Canada and encourage and facilitate the exchange of information relating to the use, access, retrieval, organization, management and dissemination of information.” [1]. The origins of the association are interesting, as it formed as an offshoot of the much older American Documentation Institute (ADI) in the same period that the ADI underwent the name change to the American Society for Information Science (ASIS). The story, as reconstructed by Kirsti Nilsen [2] from CAIS-ACSI archival material, is that in 1969, a group of Canadian ASIS members met in Ottawa with the intent to form a local ASIS chapter but instead ended up proposing, and eventually founding, a separate Canadian association. Like ASIS&T, early membership in CAIS-

ACSI was made up of computer scientists and information professionals from government and industry but gradually shifted to include greater numbers of academics and researchers.

Today, CAIS-ACSI is a single national association, run by a seven-person executive that is largely drawn from the academic faculty of the eight Canadian LIS programs. The current president, Kate Johnson, and vice-president, Nadia Caidi, are active members of both ASIS&T and CAIS-ACSI. This dual membership is true of many CAIS-ACSI members. Given the geographical span of LIS institutions in Canada – from the west coast (University of British Columbia, University of Alberta) to the central region (University of Western Ontario, University of Toronto, Université de Montréal, McGill University, University of Ottawa) to the east coast (Dalhousie University), CAIS-ACSI serves an important role in connecting and representing Canadian LIS researchers and practitioners from all regions of the country.

## CAIS-ACSI Activities

CAIS-ACSI achieves its goal of advancing information science in Canada through its journal, the *Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science (CJILS)* [3], and its annual conference, both of which are open to international participation. Like the *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology (JASIST)*, *CJILS* has a broad scope, publishing articles on a wide range of topics in information science and library science, as well as reviews of books, software and technology. *CJILS* also serves as a venue for French language publishing in information science, as it publishes both English and French language material and includes abstracts in both Canadian official languages. The journal was founded in 1970 and became a peer-reviewed journal in 1986 under the editorship of Charles Meadow

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(another well-known ASIS&T member). *CJILS* is published by the University of Toronto Press and is widely indexed. A subscription to the journal includes a membership in CAIS-ACSI and can be had for an economical \$49 (students) and \$75 (individuals).

The CAIS-ACSI conference takes place every year in late May or early June, which makes it an excellent complement to the ASIS&T meeting each fall. In comparison to ASIS&T meetings, CAIS-ACSI meetings are smaller and more intimate affairs, although they have the same focus on the communication of current research and networking. Typically, there will be under 100 attendees in total, from Canada, the US and farther afield, and between 30-50 papers presented in one or two tracks over three days. Given the size of the meeting and its casual atmosphere, it is easy to get to know other participants, to learn about and discuss diverse research areas and to make new professional connections. It offers a warm and welcoming opportunity for graduate students and new researchers to present their work and for established scholars to test out new ideas.

Over the years, the CAIS-ACSI conference has been held in cities across Canada, usually in conjunction with the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences [4], a large-scale, multidisciplinary meta-conference, which attracts scholars, researchers and students from around the world. So while

the CAIS-ACSI meeting itself is small, it takes place in the context of a much larger “intellectual festival” and offers the best of both worlds. The June 2010 conference will be held at Concordia University in Montreal, Quebec, and we encourage the ASIS&T community to consider taking part. Top conference papers are considered for publication in *CJILS* and the remaining papers are published in the online proceedings on the CAIS-ACSI website [5]. There are currently over 500 CAIS-ACSI conference papers and abstracts available in this collection, going back to 1993. The conference also features a student paper award, which offers students a great opportunity to travel and attend the conference and see his or her work published in *CJILS*.

Given the close ties between CAIS-ACSI and ASIS&T through shared origins, goals and overlapping membership, it is worthwhile thinking about how these two organizations can work together in the future. CAIS-ACSI plays an important dual role in the Canadian context, as an arena in which to examine issues of particular interest to Canadians and a means of connecting the Canadian information science community to broader international perspectives and issues. Opportunities to build ties between CAIS-ACSI and ASIS&T through shared projects, events and initiatives would serve the interests of both organizations and strengthen the position of information science as a profession and discipline in North America. ■

### Resources Mentioned in the Article

- [1] *CAIS/ACSI*: [www.caiss-acsii.ca/aboutus.htm](http://www.caiss-acsii.ca/aboutus.htm).
- [2] Nilsen, K. (2007). The Canadian Association for Information Science: A look at its thirty-five year history. *Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science*, 31(2), 163-177.
- [3] *Canadian Journal of Information and Library Science (CJILS)*: [www.caiss-acsii.ca/journal/journal.htm](http://www.caiss-acsii.ca/journal/journal.htm).
- [4] *Canadian Federation of Humanities and Social Sciences/Fédération canadienne des sciences humaines*: [www.fedcan.ca/english/congress/about/](http://www.fedcan.ca/english/congress/about/).
- [5] *CAIS/ACSI Conference Proceedings*: [www.caiss-acsii.ca/search.asp](http://www.caiss-acsii.ca/search.asp).