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EDITOR'S SUMMARY

The special interest groups (SIGs) of ASIS&T provide a focal point for members with common interests to interact, share information, develop and sponsor programs, promote matters of concern and represent the organization. Since their inception in 1966, the topic areas that SIGs represent have evolved – expanding, shrinking and remixing as subfields in information science and technology have emerged and morphed. In 2011 the 15 traditional SIGs were joined by 4 virtual SIGs, and several SIGs invite ongoing exchange through Facebook and Twitter. While SIG topics have changed through the years, the groups remain a vibrant source of communication, collaboration and sharing. Members are encouraged to become active in one or more SIGs and even propose new interest groups.

KEYWORDS

professional associations
communities of practice
collaboration
information dissemination

Professional societies often include defined subgroups with shared interests, variously labeled as divisions, round tables, caucuses, sections, forums or topical groups. In the case of ASIS&T (and some other organizations such as ACM), they are special interest groups, or SIGs. The ASIS&T bylaws state that

the purpose of each Special Interest Group shall include but not be limited to: 1) advising the Board of Directors or the Society officers on matters pertaining to the Group's special interest or area; 2) organizing technical programs for such interests and areas including programs at Conferences of the Society; 3) collecting and disseminating information concerning its special interest; and 4) representing the Society in international, interdisciplinary, and interorganizational activities, either as a Group or through one or more of its officers or members, at the request of the Board of Directors or such pertinent Committee or Committees established by the Board of Directors (www.asis.org/Bylaws2006.pdf).

The bylaws include provisions for the organization of new special interest groups and for group dissolution.

SIGs date from 1966 and were initiated by President Laurence B. Heilprin “to keep members with strong but specialized interests in ADI [American Documentation Institute, predecessor of ASIS&T] and to allow expansion of the ADI in the direction of those interests.” [1, p. 194.] Taking a snapshot of SIGs at 15-year intervals – in 1981, 1996 and 2011 – allows one to see how both ASIS&T and information science and technology have evolved.

The *Proceedings* of the 1981 Annual Meeting include contributions from 16 SIGs:

- AH – Arts and Humanities
- ALP – Automated Language Processing
- BSS – Behavioral and Social Sciences
- CR – Classification Research
- ED – Education for Information Science
- EEI – Energy and Environment Information
- FIS – Foundations of Information Science

- IAE – Information Analysis and Evaluation
- ISE – Information Services to Education
- LAN – Library Automation and Networks
- LAW – Law and Information Technology
- MGT – Management of Information Systems
- NDB – Numeric Data Bases
- PPI – Public Private Interface
- TIS – Technology, Information, and Society
- UOI – User Online Interaction

The *Proceedings* of the 1996 Annual Meeting include contributions from 17 SIGs:

- AH, ALP, CR, ED, IAE, LAN, MGT, TIS
- CRS – Computerized Retrieval Services
- HCI – Human-Computer Interaction
- HFIS – History & Foundations of Information Science
- III – International Information Issues
- MED – Medical Information Systems
- PUB – Information Generation & Publishing
- SRT – Storage and Retrieval Technologies
- STI – Scientific & Technical Information Systems
- VIS – Visualization, Images & Sound

Comparing 1996 to 1981, there are eight SIGs in common, two expanded in scope (FIS to HFIS; EEI to STI), one renamed to reflect evolution in terminology (UOI to HCI), five no longer appearing (BSS, ISE, LAW, NDB, PPI) while six new areas of emphasis have been added (CRS, III, MED, PUB, SRT, VIS).

In 2011 the list includes 15 SIGs as well as some “virtual” SIGs (www.asis.org/SIG/sigs.html):

- AH, CR, ED, HFIS, III, MGT, STI, VIS
- DL – Digital Libraries
- HLTH – Health Informatics (formerly MED)
- IFP – Information Policy

- KM – Knowledge Management
- MET – Metrics
- SI – Social Informatics (formerly TIS)
- USE – Information Needs, Seeking and Use

Comparing 2011 to 1996, there are eight SIGs in common, two renamed to reflect evolution in emphasis (MED to HLTH, TIS to SI), seven no longer appear (ALP, CRS, HCI, IAE, LAN, PUB, SRT), and five are new (DL, IFP, KM, MET, USE). Virtual SIGs, which emphasize ongoing communication rather than activities such as program planning for the Annual Meeting, include bioinformatics, critical issues and information architecture.

This exercise demonstrates that ASIS&T has been responsive to changes in both information science (for example, increasing emphasis on such areas as metrics, social informatics and information needs, seeking and use) and information technology (for example, visualization, images and sound, digital libraries). International information issues and information policy both now receive attention, while a focus on areas such as classification research, education for information science, management, and history & foundations of information science has been sustained over decades.

Before the emergence of the web, SIG activities focused on sponsoring sessions at the Annual Meeting and publishing print newsletters. SIG-sponsored sessions remain an important part of the Annual Meeting, but information exchange can continue throughout the year through websites, email discussion lists, Facebook and even Twitter.

I would encourage all ASIS&T members to take an active role in one or more SIGs. And remember that you can collaborate with colleagues to propose new SIGs to ensure that ASIS&T keeps pace with new developments in information science and technology. ■

1] Farkas-Conn, I.S. (1990). *From documentation to information science: The beginnings and early development of the American Documentation Institute – American Society for Information Science*. New York: Greenwood Press.