The Need for Advocacy

Advocacy for information professionals worldwide can
- increase employers’ understanding regarding the value information professionals can add to their organizations;
- help individuals see benefits in studying to become information professionals;
- increase various funding agencies’ and government agencies’ perception regarding the importance of research and educational programs in our field; and
- improve the public’s understanding and appreciation of information professionals and research in our discipline.

These goals can, in turn, help increase career opportunities for information professionals, recruit students to our educational programs and reduce barriers to funding research and educational programs.

Plans for Increasing Advocacy

Sandy Hirsh, San José State University; Prudence Dalrymple, Drexel; and Marcia J. Bates, professor emerita, University of California, Los Angeles, members of the ASIS&T Information Professionals Task Force, have identified several ways ASIS&T can more actively advocate on behalf of information professionals.

As Sandy, Pru and Marcia noted in their recent report shared...
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with the ASIS&T Board, there are multiple challenges with respect to advocacy for information professionals. For example, there is no concrete definition of what it means to be an information professional. People who are not information professionals lack knowledge about information professionals’ knowledge and skills. Individuals and institutions do not recognize the value of participating in professional organizations such as ASIS&T. In general there’s a need to broaden people’s perceptions of our field.

Their suggestions regarding how to address these challenges include the following:

- Develop a new website that illustrates what it means to be an information professional.
- Review the ASIS&T website (especially the Information Professionals Task Force page) to identify areas of opportunity to provide more advocacy content.
- Have panels at the upcoming Library 2.012 that discuss (a) the benefits of belonging to a professional organization and (b) advocacy activities/strategies with respect to the information profession.
- Establish an Advocacy for Information Professionals Advisory Board
- Develop a strategic advocacy plan to identify longer-term advocacy goals and actions.

In the rest of this column I’d like to focus on two of the above items: developing a new website that illustrates our profession and creating panels that address advocacy at the upcoming Library 2.012 Conference (http://www.library20.com/).

Advocacy Web Pages

Pru, Sandy and Marcia have suggested that content for the new website could include some of the following elements.

- Video and written testimonials about what it means to be an information professional.
- “Top 10” lists, such as “Top 10 Reasons to be an Information Professional” and “Top 10 Information Profession Careers.”
- A campaign to broaden people’s awareness about the information professions as careers and as a skill set, such as through slogans like “Are you an information professional and don’t know it?”
- Utilization of social media marketing techniques to build grassroots level support by going viral. For example, attention could be drawn to various instances of information professionals in the news by, for instance, tweeting this information and/or adding it to the ASIS&T Facebook and LinkedIn.
- Include interviews with international thought leaders about information professionals to increase credibility.

They have also recommended that the new website be created under a generic URL, and the domain name rights to “InfoProfessionals.org” have been purchased. They propose that other related professional organizations, such as the i-School organization, could be invited to contribute additional content over time. There is strength in numbers, and advocating for our profession is a sufficiently large challenge that ASIS&T could benefit from contributions by others. There will be mutual links between the ASIS&T web pages and this new website.
Advocacy Panels at Library 2.012

Library 2.011, a worldwide virtual conference, had 6800 participants from 145 countries (see http://www.library20.com/page/2011-conference.) ASIS&T was a partner organization of the conference. Sandy, Marcia and Pru have suggested that we organize several panels for the Library 2.012 conference that would help advocate for information professionals.

For example, one panel could discuss the roles and benefits of belonging to a professional organization, such as ASIS&T. Panel members could be ASIS&T members at various points in their careers, for example, a student, a junior professional and a senior professional and could be from various geographic regions. Panel members could tell their stories regarding how ASIS&T has helped them. The stories may help encourage others to join ASIS&T. The panel presentations and discussions could be captured and included on the InfoProfessionals.org website described above.

Another panel could present and discuss how professional organizations, such as ASIS&T, are addressing advocacy for the information professionals. This may also encourage other organizations to provide content for the InfoProfessionals.org website and/or point to it from their organization’s website.

Your Participation

Marcia, Pru and Sandy welcome members’ suggestions regarding the new website, Library 2.012 panels, the Advocacy Advisory Board and the advocacy strategic planning process. If you would like to be included in a video, provide other content for the website and/or participate in a panel, please let them know. Please send email to the task force chair, Sandy Hirsh at Sandy.Hirsh<at>sjsu.edu, with your suggestions. The ASIS&T Board has allocated a small amount of money ($6,000) to begin development of the new website.

I'd like to thank Sandy, Marcia and Pru for their continuing efforts helping ASIS&T better advocate on behalf of information professionals. And my thanks also to San José State University, Drexel University and UCLA for facilitating Sandy’s, Pru’s and Marcia’s work with ASIS&T.

Thanks also to everyone who has participated in the discussion regarding the proposal to change ASIS&T from the “American Society for Information Science and Technology” to “ASsociation for Information Science and Techno logy.” There is still an opportunity to comment at: www.quicktopic.com/47/H/bvJVhSC8HTs. All perspectives are very welcome.