

## 2016 ASIS&amp;T ANNUAL MEETING

***Diversity and Inclusion Luncheon: Report and Recommendations***

by Diane H. Sonnenwald, Lauren Harrison, Judit Bar-Ilan, Harry Bruce, Toni Carbo, Lynn Silipigni Connaway, Ixchel Faniel, Sandra Hirsh, Fidelia Ibekwe-SanJuan and Adam Worrall

**EDITOR'S SUMMARY**

ASIS&T has continuously worked to enhance diversity and inclusion over its long history, including the formation of the Special Interest Group/International Information Issues and the name change from the American Society for Information Science and Technology to the Association for Information Science and Technology. During the 2016 ASIS&T Annual Meeting (AM), a Diversity and Inclusion Luncheon was held to promote discussion and ideas of new ways for ASIS&T to promote diversity. Attendees of the luncheon were asked to share positive personal experiences with diversity, as well as share ideas for how to bolster diversity and inclusion in future AMs and for ASIS&T as an organization. Suggestions include the meeting being held outside of North America more frequently, inclusion of mentor programs for papers and new attendees of AMs, removing North American-centric language from communications and more ASIS&T board members from other continents. The suggestions were recommended to the ASIS&T Board for further discussion.

**KEYWORDS**

Association for Information Science & Technology  
cultural diversity  
international aspects  
meetings  
special interest groups

The authors of this piece are all active members of ASIS&T, having served in numerous positions throughout the organization. They designed and organized the luncheon and follow-up activities described in the article.

**A** SIS&T has a long history of striving to increase diversity and enhance inclusion across boundaries. For example, 30 years ago in 1982, the ASIS&T Special Interest Group/International Information Issues (SIG/III) was formed to promote international cooperation and communication.

Building on this tradition, a Diversity and Inclusion Luncheon was held at the 2016 ASIS&T Annual Meeting (AM) for the first time. The purpose of the luncheon was to celebrate diversity and inclusion and to generate ideas regarding how ASIS&T could continue to encourage diversity and support inclusion. The luncheon was designed and organized by Annual Meeting co-chairs, Diane Sonnenwald and Lauren Harrison. Eight colleagues, Judit Bar-Ilan, Harry Bruce, Toni Carbo, Lynn Silipigni Connaway, Ixchel Faniel, Sandra Hirsh, Fidelia Ibekwe-SanJuan and Adam Worrall, served as discussion leaders at the lunch tables.

When registering for the Annual Meeting in Copenhagen, attendees had the option of signing up to attend the luncheon and paying the additional luncheon fee of \$6.00. Due to space constraints, the number of luncheon participants was limited to 50. This number was achieved well before the early registration deadline. A sit-down meal was served to facilitate discussion during the lunch.

The luncheon began with a short presentation by Lauren Harrison. She shared a common definition of diversity: "knowing how to relate to those qualities and conditions that are different from our own and outside the groups to which we belong, yet are present in other individuals and groups. These include but are not limited to age, ethnicity, class, gender, physical abilities/qualities, race, sexual orientation, as well as religious status, gender expression, educational background, geographic location, nationality,

income, marital status, parental status and work experiences” (for example, see <https://las.iastate.edu/about-the-college/diversity/>; [www.cpf.navy.mil/subsite/diverse/what\\_is\\_diversity.shtml](http://www.cpf.navy.mil/subsite/diverse/what_is_diversity.shtml)). Diversity and inclusion also include knowing how to relate to those with different accents and speech patterns. An example of ASIS&T embracing diversity is its name change to Association for Information Science & Technology which was overwhelming supported by ASIS&T members.

During the lunch, participants were asked to share personal experiences or knowledge about experiences, where diversity and inclusion had a positive impact and to brainstorm ideas regarding mechanisms to further increase diversity and inclusion at the Annual Meeting and throughout ASIS&T. Highlights from these discussions are presented in the following sections.

### Experiences in Diversity

Discussions regarding experiences where diversity and inclusion had a positive impact included many different types of diversity, such as class, physical abilities, health and age, accents, speech, educational background, marital status of parents, work experiences, race and gender diversity. Examples included multi-disciplinary teams, and work groups comprising individuals with different levels of academic degrees and experience, for example, bachelors, masters and doctoral degrees as well as post-doctoral fellows. Other experiences involved incorporating different traditions of philosophy and theory into research projects, as well as different definitions of information.

Cultural diversity experiences were also shared. Meeting outside North America and having the opportunity to meet more attendees from different places was mentioned as a positive example. Differences with respect to intellectual property were noted, for example, intellectual property may not be a relevant or supported concept in oral cultures.

One lunch participant recalled her first New Members Brunch in 2009 as a fabulous experience. Before the brunch, the participant only knew names of well-known contributors to the field and had never met or spoken to them. At the brunch, everyone formed two circles, one within the other. There were five questions, not conference-related, and you asked those around you these questions. This was an opportunity to be drawn in even as an outsider and

meet people in the field, and the experience encouraged her to come back regardless of other diversity barriers such as distance, money, ethnic minority.

### Suggestions to Increase Diversity and Inclusion at the ASIS&T Annual Meeting

**Location, location, location.** Several participants suggested that the AM should continue to be held outside North America, perhaps on a rotating basis as done with other conferences such as SIGIR, the iConference and the Association for Digital Humanities. Holding an AM in China was proposed. Participants further suggested that the AM explore co-sponsorship with local organizations, provide more information to attendees regarding the host city, country and culture, and consider holding some events in local university or other nearby venues (which may also reduce costs). Web casting sessions to help those who cannot physically attend the AM was also suggested.

**Language.** Language matters; there should be no or limited use of abbreviations, acronyms and American-based terms. Many new attendees at the AM, even those for whom English is their first language, did not understand many SIG acronyms used at the SIG Rush event, nor even understand the terms *Rush* or *SIG CON*. It was also noted that at some events, such as the New Members Brunch, presentations and other activities can be difficult to understand when the sound system is not of high quality and/or speakers talk quickly.

It was recommended that the paper mentoring service for the AM be continued and perhaps expanded to provide a longer and more intensive interaction between authors and mentors, with the expectation that mentors would become co-authors. The mentoring service could also be extended to include posters and panel submissions, with guidance regarding mentoring provided.

Another suggestion was to allow opportunities for presentations in languages other than English and/or to loosen submission review criteria with respect to requiring polished written English and provide editing, or even translation, assistance. Could there be a forum in which it is possible to ask members who are proficient in English for help with writing and speaking English?

**Information sharing.** Providing AM mentors to first time attendees was proposed. These mentors could help attendees better navigate and understand the AM, especially when a student's advisor does not attend the AM. [Note: Sonnenwald presented an overview/introduction of the AM to students in Taipei, highlighting differences between the AM and conferences in Taiwan. Perhaps SIG/III could hold a webinar with members from different countries who can highlight differences they have found. If such a webinar could be promoted on the AM web page, first time attendees could get some insights into the AM in advance.]

It was also suggested that the "2-minute madness" in which paper and panel authors presented two-minute overviews of their papers or panels be brought back. This event would allow individuals to promote their sessions and provide a good overview of ideas and topics to attendees.

Another suggestion focused on bringing back "birds of a feather" dinners or other social events that brought people together to share information. Birds of a feather dinners could perhaps be scheduled to take place after the SIG Rush event.

Other suggestions included using QR codes (quick response codes) to facilitate exchanging slides and contact information, etc., and having one or more "open mic" periods. For example, one might be 15 minutes in length, offering individuals 1 minute to introduce other events and activities and celebrating diversity of ideas and activities.

Still another suggestion was to increase contribution formats, such as to have a un-conference event, additional bar camps and/or interactive experiences/sessions such as those at iConferences.

**Participation of practitioners.** It was recommended that participation of practitioners at the AM would increase diversity. Ideas regarding how to encourage practitioners to participate included inviting practitioners and professors of practice to come as speakers and holding workshops where practitioners and academics jointly explore issues. Professors of practice are individuals working in academia who have experience and expertise in work practices. In different countries, a variety of terms are used for these types of position.

Perhaps a separate practitioner "track" at the AM could be established, to provide more balance between theoretical and applied presentations. SIGs that are more practice-oriented could be enlisted to draw practitioners to submit to a practitioner track.

**Additional activities for students.** The issue of masters-degree student participant at the AM was raised. It was suggested that SIG/ED could have a valuable role in developing relationships between masters students and academics. For instance, SIG/ED could sponsor panels that discuss topics pertinent to master students such as "After your masters" and "Getting your Ph.D."

Not unexpectedly, more funding for students to attend the AM was raised. Another suggestion was providing an early career discounted registration fee, analogous to the existing transitional membership fee discount.

### ***Increase visibility and celebration of diversity at the AM.***

Diversity/inclusion guidance for creating and reviewing panels could be provided, and perhaps diversity with respect to panel composition could be a requirement or included as a review criterion. Panels could be asked to address diversity in their proposals, with proposers suggesting which type of diversity their panel includes. For example, diversity could be considered from participant perspective (panelists come from different cultures) or from a topic perspective, e.g., a panel on diverse definitions of information found in library and information science, information technology and philosophy.

Plenary topics and speakers should continue to reflect diversity and regionalism, and the diversity and inclusion lunch should continue. In addition, holding a multi-cultural/diversity talent show in conjunction with the SIG/III international reception or SIG/CON could help celebrate diversity.

### **Suggestions to Increase Diversity and Inclusion Throughout ASIS&T**

**Increased international competence of staff.** It was mentioned that it would be helpful for Headquarters staff to increase their knowledge and competence with respect to multiple international perspectives, including different sensitivities, ways of working, organizational structures and

practices, and methods of communication. For example, certificates for chairing committees, etc., are meaningful in the North America context but not so meaningful in other contexts. Recipients should be asked whether other forms of recognition would be helpful for their careers. For example, in some situations an appreciation letter or email sent to a member's director carries more weight in both academic and business settings than a certificate. In other cultures and situations, a personal gift is valued.

Furthermore, language and terms that are North America-centric should be eliminated from ASIS&T communications. For example, using names such as the "National Office" are confusing and/or discouraging to members and potential members outside the United States.

**Increased international participation in governance.** Lunch participants suggested that the Board consider ways that Board membership could better reflect the international composition of the membership and ASIS&T's goals for international participation. For example, could there be a requirement that there is at least one Board member from every continent? This may require a change to the ASIS&T constitution or bylaws and require virtual board meeting attendance in conjunction with the current face-to-face board meetings. It was noted that even if members were from outside North America originally, when they have lived and worked in North America for several years, their perspectives often change and may become North American-centric. Although recently several international candidates have not been elected, perhaps this could be solved by having members from each geographic region elect a board member from their region.

Another proposal was that ASIS&T should grow leadership in different regional areas and explore how synergies between student and regional chapters could be increased, allowing perhaps for new combinations of student and regional chapters.

**Increased communications to an international audience.** The ASIS&T website and listserv should continue to promote and value plurality of voices; for example, a person from a different country or continent could be featured each month. The person would not have to be famous or be a luminary.

ASIS&T should further promote or advertise the new membership fee structure and membership benefits. Benefits that are not applicable outside North America should be examined and corresponding benefits for international members found. The ASIS&T brochures written in a variety of languages should be re-instated.

There should be better communication regarding ASIS&T communication mechanisms. Many do not know how to sign up for newsletters and SIGs. Can any member post to ASIS&T social media sites, and if so, how?

**Increased visibility and consideration of diversity throughout ASIS&T.** ASIS&T should develop a code of conduct and inclusion.

The award processes, including nomination processes, should be more transparent and inclusive. For some awards, it is difficult for those outside North America to understand the requirements.

A membership survey should be conducted on an annual basis and include questions regarding diversity and inclusion. Perhaps a survey could be included as a component of the membership renewal process.

ASIS&T should look for best practice examples with respect to diversity and inclusion in other professional and scholarly organizations. For example, the British Computer Society recently offered a one-year free student membership to students in developing countries. Perhaps ASIS&T could do this as well.

## Summary Recommendations

Diversity and inclusion take time and effort, but ultimately make us wiser and stronger as an organization and as individuals. Best practices with respect to diversity and inclusion should be integrated throughout all components of ASIS&T, continually building on ASIS&T's strengths and past successes with respect to diversity and inclusion and forming a more perfect association. We recommend that diversity and inclusion be a high priority for ASIS&T.

To help achieve this, we respectfully recommended the following to the ASIS&T Board:

- Board liaisons should share this report with their respective committees and task force groups and discuss how they can incorporate pertinent aspects into their work

- A task force should be established to identify priorities and specific actions to be taken by the Board, SIGs, chapters, AM chairs and/or other members in discussions with them to enhance diversity and inclusion. The task force should also determine how practices could be reviewed and enhanced with regard to diversity and inclusion on an ongoing basis. We further recommend that the task force complete these tasks within a one-year time frame.
  - The Board should discuss this report with Headquarters staff, asking them to develop and implement plans to further support diversity and inclusion among membership.
- It is useful to continually, or at least periodically, reconsider our

understanding and practices with respect to diversity and inclusion. When crafting solutions, we should be mindful that there can be interconnected issues, some of which could be uncovered through conversations with a variety of individuals and through meaningful evaluations. The Diversity and Inclusion Lunch at the 2016 Annual Meeting enabled new conversation that we hope will be continued.

### Acknowledgements

Our thanks go out to the luncheon attendees who graciously shared their perspectives and insights and to the individuals, in addition to the co-authors of this report, who took notes of the various discussions. ■