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## **ASIST Annual Meeting, Philadelphia, PA November 17-21, 2002**

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I attended the ASIST (American Society of Information Science & Technology) meeting to find out about other technological trends that other types of libraries are incorporating into their library's resources. After speaking with some members who said they find out about "bleeding" edge technology at the ASIST meeting years before they are in the mainstream, I decided this was going to be a very informative meeting. The most important revelation I gathered from this annual meeting was that law libraries are years away from "digitizing" our entire collections. I'll discuss that in more detail below. First, though, let me set the stage.

It all started with the "Newbie" reception. Never thought I'd be a newbie again at anything but it was fun! Several members of the national board gave an overview of ASIST and how their Annual Meeting is run. They gave us insight on how to get the most out of everything. *They even encouraged program hopping!* In each timeslot there are six different programs so it's a tough decision to pick just one. They also explained that there are only a dozen or so exhibitors at the meeting (with only a table full of wares). ASIST focuses more on programs than on vendors.

Next, the President of ASIST introduced international attendees from Nigeria, Belgium, Australia, China, England, Ireland and several other countries. I met information technology people, science librarians, Ph.D. candidates, professors of library science, and the librarian from the National Center for State Courts. It was a great mix of disciplines! There were over 700 attendees and I didn't know one of them! It was a great opportunity and I have to admit I was a bit anxious.

After the Newbie Reception, we joined the Opening Reception. I met an indexer from Genentech in the Bay Area, a researcher from Wellsley College in MA, and a Harvard science librarian. We talked for quite a while about our professional situations and what we wanted to get out of the meeting.

### **My Favorite Program**

My favorite session was "*Deeper Representation of Digital Information: From Metadata to Semantic Data.*" Three researchers that are working on digital library projects spoke about their ventures. I learned that metadata is more than cataloging. It is resource discovery and constructing new resources by recombining. Recombining is linking old materials (perhaps a chapter of a book in digital format) with other materials available (perhaps educational websites).

One speaker is doing eye-scanning research to find out where users look on websites and for how long their pupils scan information. This helps them focus on

how to most effectively organize their site. Another speaker discussed "concept" or "idea basis searching." This is not just word searching but idea searching. In concept or idea searching, specialized mark-up language is used. In some cases several different mark-up languages can be used which would link up to very different results. It was interesting because in our field we just do word searching. This way of searching is totally different and it's interesting to think of the possibilities when applied to the legal field.

## **Revelation**

The most important revelation I had from this annual meeting was that law libraries are years away from "digitizing" our entire collections. While several science research libraries are going digital (i.e., electronic), I realized how different the field of law is.

In science, research is based on journal articles and research reports. These are meant to be shared, downloaded, copied and used to create new research. Unlike us, they don't seem to care about copyrights. Also, once a research paper is written, one doesn't go back and change it every year to update it according to all the new research. This clears the path for digitizing libraries.

The law library, on the other hand is a completely different beast! Our treatises, case law and law reviews are all copyrighted. These materials, along with statutes, are always in revision with pocket parts and supplements, coming anywhere from once a year to several times a year. (We'll be paying our publishers for use of materials till the cows come home!) Our case law becomes superseded and overruled. We need to Keycite or Shepardize all cases and statutes. Most of the time, current material reigns supreme.

Law libraries are constantly evolving and changing because that's the nature of law and society. Law libraries are very distinct when compared with other disciplines.

## **Conclusion**

Overall going to the ASIST meeting was a great experience! The programs were all excellent. I'd recommend attending an ASIST Annual Meeting to anyone. I did feel a little out of my element but we all need to learn new things, meet new people and stay on top of our discipline. AALL (American Association of Law Libraries) does an excellent job in that respect, but it was fun to see how another organization is run and how they handle professional training.

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