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Accreditation for Information Science: Has the Time Finally Come?

In September 1984, representatives from 17 American and Canadian library and information science associations met in Chicago, Illinois, to "examine the scope, structure, and costs of accreditation." The two-day meeting was sponsored by the Association for Library and Information Science Education (ALISE) and funded by an H. W. Wilson Foundation grant. William F. Summers, dean of the College of Library and Information Science at the University of South Carolina, presided at the conference, and other officers of ALISE also took leadership roles. We were there representing ASIS.

On the first morning, the assembled group heard an address by Richard Millard, president of the Council on Post-Secondary Accreditation (COPA). Millard described the many different models of structuring professional accreditation that currently exist, of which the ALA accreditation structure is only one.

During the rest of the conference, a number of issues related to accreditation were discussed in small group sessions. Robert Hayes, dean of the UCLA Graduate School of Library and Information Science, an ASIS past president, and the current chairman of the American Library Association's Committee on Accreditation (COA), asked the group not to critique present ALA accreditation procedures or policies, nor to discuss needed revisions in the 1972 Standards for Accreditation. Hayes is concerned about these two topics, but he

did not want this particular group to dwell on them. Instead, the time was to be spent in looking at alternatives to the current accreditation structure.

At the conclusion of the September conference, the representatives agreed that the process of accrediting programs in library and information science could be better served by an entirely new structure administered by a federation of professional information societies. The establishment of this federated structure was given a big boost by a grant awarded to ALA by the U.S. Department of Education. In fact, the contract was signed in the closing minutes of the conference.

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Cremmins, continued

I will report the results of my continuing lexicographic analysis of the candidate term "Language Processing" in two future PENultimatePOINT columns which now have the working titles of: (1) "Super 'Natural' Language Processor," concerning human-sided language processing, and (2) "Super 'Unnatural' Language Processing," concerning machine-sided language processing. Meanwhile, any written comments that readers of the *Bulletin* choose to send to me on the validity of the term "Language Processing" as a parallel term to "Data Processing" and as at least one of the primary terms to replace "Artificial Intelligence" would be most welcome.

Rural, from page 25

Progress has been good. We shall begin writing a final report in February, 1985, which will be submitted to NCLIS and to the Secretary of Agriculture. The report includes recommendations for a charter for NABRIN, functions and the format and criteria for board membership. The Planning Committee has decided to recommend that NABRIN should function as an advisory board to the Secretary of Agriculture since the Secretary has all of the authority needed to put future NABRIN recommendations into effect. All of the requirements of the Federal Advisory Act of 1972 will, of course, be complied with.

I am reasonably certain that ASIS members and others within the information community will be concerned with the makeup of NABRIN. I can only say here that the Planning Committee is recommending that the balance among library, information services, extension, and telecommunications communities; the public and private sectors; and finally the federal, state and local interests (all represented on the Planning Committee) will carry over to NABRIN, if and when it is established.

Accreditation, from page 9

The grant provides support for an 18-month planning period, during which delegates from eight societies will develop procedures and guidelines for their associations' future participation in accreditation. These delegates will have three formal meetings: January 1985, July 1985, and January 1986. The expected outcome is a published report containing recommendations for implementing a new accreditation structure.

Certain members of ASIS, especially in SIG/ED and the Education Committee, have been discussing the potential role of ASIS in professional accreditation (approval of a program after it meets specific requirements) and certification (approval of individuals who demonstrate competence in a profession) for many years. The discussions have foundered, however, under the weight of insurmountable practical problems of implementation and the enormous costs involved. Accreditation has been too big for ASIS to carry alone.

Those ASIS members who care about the issue, therefore, will probably be delighted to hear about a workable and affordable mechanism that finally allows the Society to get involved in the accreditation process. Some may have concerns, however, about accreditation itself. They may worry that strict standards for accreditation could stifle experimentation and innovation, both of which are vital to a rapidly changing field. Others may be concerned about how the concept of "information science" will be defined, measured, and evaluated. Even among the members of ASIS, there is little agreement on definitions.

It is agreed, however, that the field is interdisciplinary, evolving rapidly, and that it has extremely fuzzy borders. Some in ASIS would argue that information science is a more general field than library science; others would contend that it is just the other way around. Still others believe that information science is separate and distinct from library science, and that educational programs for each should be separated.

If programs in information science are to be accredited, however, definitions, scope, competencies, etc. will have to be clarified and expressed in measurable terms. The difficulty of this task should not be underestimated. On the other hand, the significance of the project as a whole should not be forgotten either. This is an opportunity that has been long-awaited. Let us hope that the time for ASIS involvement in accreditation of educational programs has indeed finally come.