Preface

"Wisdom is not to be obtained from text-books, but must be coined out of human experience in the flame of life" [1]

1. Introduction

Experience and wisdom are gathered over time. But this compilation of six Miles Conrad Lectures (1998–2003) will save the reader a portion of that precious time by providing ready access to insights from some of today's most experienced and knowledgeable Information Industry leaders. In one of the lectures you will find a quote by philosopher George Santayana, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it". Yet these articles are not about "looking back". They are about lessons learned, proven tenets for success, current industry trends, and informed glimpses into the future of the Information Society – all from those who have helped to shape the information environment as we now know it. But a bit of history about the Lecture series and Miles Conrad himself is appropriate in order to thoroughly understand the relevance and importance of the information contained in this issue.

2. Background

In 1958 G. Miles Conrad was the Director of *Biological Abstracts* (now BIOSIS). With degrees from Oberlin College and Columbia University, he had already built a diversified career, having served as a researcher on six scientific marine expeditions as well as a curator for the American Museum of Natural History in New York, as a market research director for an advertising firm, and as a documentation specialist for the Library of Congress. At that time the USSR launched Sputnik into space, creating a very real fear that the United States was not effectively utilizing its scientific and technical resources. President Eisenhower issued a mandate to the National Science Foundation – to provide for the provision of indexing, abstracting, translation, and other services leading to a more effective dissemination of scientific information. National focus was on the Abstracting & Indexing (A&I) function. Under the leadership and with the encouragement of G. Miles Conrad, the major organizations already providing such services met to discuss the need for a forum in which they could get together to discuss common interests, share knowledge and expertise, and work together in the development of machine-readable databases and the techniques required to produce them. Fourteen of those organizations:

American Chemical Society	Engineering Index (now Elsevier Engineering Information)
American Mathematical Society	Institute of the Aeronautical Sciences
American Meteorological Society	National Agricultural Library
American Psychological Association	National Library of Medicine
American Society for Metals	Office of Technical Services
Armed Services Technical Information Agency (now DTIC)	Southwest Research Institute
Biological Abstracts (now BIOSIS)	U.S. Atomic Energy Commission (now DOE)

unanimously supported the idea, and that same year established NFAIS (originally the National Federation of Science Abstracting and Indexing Services – NSFAIS, with subsequent name changes to reflect the organization's broadening membership) to be that forum. Miles Conrad served as its first President, and in the following years represented the United States on many international delegations related to scientific and technical information, including UNESCO's first Working Party on Scientific Publications.

3. Miles Conrad memorial lectures

In 1964, Miles Conrad suddenly and unexpectedly passed away. To honor his memory, NFAIS established a lecture series in his name with the objective of not only recognizing and awarding someone who had made outstanding contributions to the information community, but also having them "address a suitable topic in the field of abstracting and indexing, but above the level of any individual service". Robert Cairns, Chairman of the Committee on Scientific and Technical Communications of the National Academy of Sciences – National Academy of Engineering gave the first presentation in 1968. And while the series has continued unbroken for 35 years, the topics are no longer solely focused upon the A&I community, but are relevant to the information community as a whole. It has been stated that "(...) taken together, the presentations reflect something of Miles Conrad: His penchant for identifying and attending to the important aspects of matters and for separating significant issues from ephemeral concerns. His balanced appreciation for the scholarly nature of content, the technical requirements of information processing, and the sound principles of organization, administration and management (...) his encouragement of the use and continuous updating of technical capabilities (...) and his appreciation that change is the normal expected environment of the information (...) community. His emphasis on cooperation at all levels among specialists and among services in examining and exploring mutual problems and objectives" [2]. Certainly the lectures that appear on the following pages reflect those very same qualities.

3.1. Lectures 1998–2003

The most recent six lectures appear here because of their immediate relevancy to current issues within the information community. The role of and need for information policy, the shifts in searching and database activity over time, the need to fundamentally understand one's business and customer needs, the evaluation of successful business strategies, the challenges to achieving global harmonization, and an appreciation and understanding of the current transformation of scholarly communication are all addressed – thoughtfully and insightfully. This compilation represents some of the best thinking on these issues and, as one reads through the various lectures, common guiding principles emerge despite the fact that each author is addressing a different topic. Such principles include: engage users in meaningful dialog and actually *listen* to them, stay close to one's core business, emphasize content over technology – the latter is a only tool, and take action – to be successful requires that one maintains a pace equal to that of change within our industry. Certainly, the collective wisdom of these Miles Conrad Lecturers is a legacy from which all readers can immediately benefit – whether new to or a long-time inhabitant of the information community (a complete list of Miles Conrad Lecturers can be found at www.nfais.org/about/Miles_Conrad_Lecturers_List.htm).

4. About NFAIS

As noted earlier, NFAIS was established under the leadership of G. Miles Conrad in 1958. Throughout its history, the Federation has dedicated itself to the fulfillment of his vision – the enhancement and advancement of the Information Community through a spirit of communication, collaboration and sharing. This objective is met by: facilitating the exchange of information among NFAIS members; promoting NFAIS members and their essential role within the Information Community; encouraging discussion, understanding and cooperation across all Information Community sectors; sponsoring topical conferences, seminars and educational courses; publishing newsletters, current awareness alerts, books and reports; developing Codes of Practice, Guiding Principles and White Papers on Information Policy and New Technologies. A list of NFAIS member organizations can be accessed at www.nfais.org.

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NFAIS is grateful to the authors for permitting their lectures to be widely disseminated, to the Editors-in-Chief of *Information Services and Use* and to IOS Press for their interest in and support of the lecture series. Together with them it is the intention to publish the Miles Conrad Memorial Lectures of the coming years on a continuing basis, starting in 2004.

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References

[1] Morris Raphael Cohen (1880–1947), American philosopher and educator, *A Dreamer's Journey* (see L.D. Eigen and J.P. Siegel, *The Manager's Book of Quotations*, AMACON, New York, NY, 1989, p. 143).
[2] I.L. Sperr, The Miles Conrad Memoral Lectures: Background and Significance, in: *Abstracting and Indexing Services in Perspective: Miles Conrad Lectures 1969–1983*, M.L. Neufeld, M. Cornog and I.L. Sperr, eds, Information Resources Press, Arlington, VA, 1983, p. 29.