

Conclusion¹

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The IP 2050 Conference has been a fitting conclusion to the year we have spent celebrating the 80th anniversary of the founding of SILS. What could be a more appropriate way to end a celebration of the past, than to look ahead to the future? In the year 2050 SILS will be observing its 118th year and it is intriguing to imagine that in that year, the then dean and faculty might be planning another symposium looking ahead to IP 2100.

It is very difficult to summarize all the idea and concepts we have shared over the past two days. If one word predominated it was “information”, and I, for one, feel as though I am suffering from information overload. We all learned so much from the presentations and conversations that have been a part of IP 2050. One of the most obvious things we realized is that it is impossible to accurately predict the information world of 2050. However, each of the presentations provided helpful insights and some themes did emerge. It is clear that the environments in which future information professionals will work will be very different and many of the functions they perform will be new, however, there will still be a need to connect people to information. The schools that prepare information professionals are in a strong position and the programs they offer will be critical as we move to the even more information intensive world of 2050. However if the i-Schools wish to maintain their position, they will need to be more entrepreneurial and risk-taking because there will many more competitors in this new environment. Each of the presenters gave us a slightly different glimpse of the future; here are brief overviews of each.

Mike Eisenberg predicted that by 2050 we will be living in an ubiquitous intelligent environment. Education will be transformed. Each student will have an individual educational plan. I especially enjoyed learning about his notion of information alchemy which transforms data into wisdom.

Bill Graves reminded us of the need to take on the economic issues. We have to follow the money, and technology will be a means of helping us achieve a new model of an educational commons available to all.

Liz Liddy showed us the importance of taking an entrepreneurial stance if we want to succeed. She emphasized the need to take risks and be agile; she stressed the need for not only i-Schools but for entire universities to become more entrepreneurial.

David Silver shared with us the intriguing course he teaches at the University of San Francisco. He reminded us that it will be even more important in a more technology-intensive world to remain connected to the natural world and the changing seasons. I think we will all remember his adage, “Log off before you blog off”.

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Mary Chute spoke of the blurring of boundaries between the information professions. She also reminded us that although the environment is changing, the mission and the timeless values of libraries will endure.

Charles Lowry spoke of the increasing importance of open access material and asked us to consider what librarians will do to insure open access. He also posed the question of how we should educate future information professionals when the materials that used to be found only on library shelves are fully available on the internet.

Joanne Marshall spoke of the library workforce and the changes that she has seen over her own career. She stressed the importance of linking research to practice and of demonstrating the worth of information agencies by using evidence-based and outcome measurement.

Nancy Roderer used Wordles to illustrate the competencies of today's information professionals. There is already a great diversity of types of information professionals and by 2050 there will be even greater diversity. At that time, there will be even more organizations that will be considered information agencies and the competition will increase.

Ann Caputo described five trends that are affecting all of us, and she too stressed the growing competition in our field. She enumerated the most important skills and attributes that will be needed for tomorrow's information professionals: creativity, risk-taking, communication, listening and understanding, and agility and flexibility.

Bonnie Carroll spoke of the power of IT to expand human capabilities. She also predicted a darker future where users are the prey and information the predator and where individual privacy is in danger of being compromised. She too described the blurring boundaries between information professionals and the continued need for these professionals in the future.

Buck Goldstein recalled how in the past information professionals got left at the starting gate with revolutionary breakthroughs in search (Google) and design (Apple). There is a need for information professionals to be included in the conversations of today's and tomorrow's information problems. He also stressed the need for more entrepreneurial thinking at the intersection between innovation and execution.

Duncan Smith presented a fascinating group of case studies of individuals who had been successful entrepreneurs. All of these individuals shared some key attributes. They all: (1) had a customer or community focus; (2) used information to help a community achieve its goals; (3) used technology as a means and not an end; (4) realized the importance of collaboration and teamwork and (5) had personalities marked by curiosity and a spirit of inquiry.

Marshall Breeding described the disruptive forces that may affect us in the future. The changes in technology that will occur by 2050 are impossible to predict. We will go through two or three more technology cycles by then. There will be changes in higher education that will lead to a transformation in the library technology landscape. There will likely be a consolidation of institutions and a blurring of boundaries between information agencies.

Lorcan Dempsey spoke of the structural changes that will result as we move from a document-centric to an information-centric future. He described the rivers of data that have resulted as transfer costs have gone down and described the role that libraries might play in this new networked world.

Roger Schonfeld explained some trends in academic information that will affect the future: the growing digitization of primary and secondary research material; the fact that discovery is not bounded by institutions or resources; and the changes in instructional methods that are occurring as we try to teach students more efficiently and bring down the costs of higher education.

In summary, I think it is important to go back to a statement made by Mary Chute earlier today. She said that we do forecasting not to be right but so that we are not caught unaware. It is clear that we

would be very foolish to try to predict the information world of 2050, but some themes have emerged many times during these presentations that will help us move more confidently toward the future. The first is the need to develop more risk-taking, entrepreneurship, and agility in information professionals. The second is for us to be willing to break down silos as the blurring of boundaries between information professions and information agencies continues to grow. The third theme is the requirement for multi-disciplinarity in our field and the growing realization that individuals cannot work alone but must use teamwork to successfully meet the demands of the changing information world. As Buck Goldstein reminded us we must “open the tent” and look for ways to join forces and seek partners in new ventures. And the final theme of this conference is that above all we have to be proactive. As Joanne Marshall stated, we have to be the imaginers and the creators and the ones who will move our profession into the future we desire.

I will close by saying that we, the information professionals of 2012, need to recognize that change is inevitable and welcome the changes that are before us. But at the same time we must keep our eyes firmly on the future we hope to achieve. We are living in a world of increasing competition and our future is not assured. We will have to be nimble and always attuned to our changing environment to ensure our future success. The conversations of the past two days will help us all move more adroitly toward the information world of 2050.