environment, we should become more confident in our ability to put together an offering for which the demand will increase and not disappear. There is a lot of work to be done. In addition to our indexing we need to involve not only publishers but the ultimate consumers of our services, librarians and academics, as well as technologists. We all have need of each other. Our job descriptions need to adapt to the new world and will be enlarged at the same time. This adds up to increased opportunities.

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ASI conference presentations: a content analysis of major topics, 1997–2012

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Catherine Sassen analyzes the content of presentations made at ASI conferences held from 1997 through 2012, and identifies major topics and trends.

Introduction

The American Society for Indexing (ASI) holds annual conferences to keep members informed of new developments in indexing technology and the expanding role of indexing (ASI, 2012). Conferences also facilitate communication among members, provide educational opportunities, and raise awareness of quality indexing.

The first annual meeting of ASI was held on the evening of 16 June 1969 at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York (Harris, 1969: 189–90). The meeting consisted of reports by officers as well as discussions of old and new business. Attendees suggested several projects that ASI should initiate, including a newsletter and 'subject- or problem-oriented meetings.'

In the early years of ASI, an annual meeting was limited to one evening (Thomas, 1989: 125). This practice continued until 1972 when the First Annual All-Day Meeting was held (Preschel, 1973: 176–9). This meeting consisted of two sessions on indexing training courses and one session on the expectations of indexers and publishers. Since that time, ASI conferences have increased significantly in length and content. The most recent conference took place in San Diego, California from 19–21 April 2012. The conference program included a variety of workshops and seminars, with themes ranging from 'Getting started in indexing' to 'Taxonomy and thesaurus creation' (ASI, 2012).

The purpose of this article is to identify major topics discussed at ASI conferences from 1997 through 2012 and to explore how the topics have changed over time. ASI conference programs reflect topics of interest to indexers, and thus provide insight into concerns of the profession at large.

Literature review

Rowley (1981: 16–18) has written about the value of conference literature and the ways in which it may be used. Conference literature may summarize current problems and solutions in a discipline, offer an understanding of techniques and approaches in use, and provide insight into new advances and technological developments.

Several research studies in the field of library and information science have concerned the content of conference presentations. Coughlin and Snelson (1983) and Snelson and Talar (1991) examined the quality of research presented at selected national conferences of the Association of College and Research Libraries. Wilson (2010) analyzed sessions from library conferences in western Canada over a period of five years to determine their target audiences. Garner, Davidson and Williams (2008) studied the North American Serials Interest Group Conference proceedings from 1986 to 2005 to identify major topics and trends.

Methodology

This analysis of ASI conferences from 1997 through 2012 is based on conference reports published in *Key Words*, as well as conference program information accessed through the 'Past Annual Conferences' page on the ASI website. A complete preliminary program for the 2007 conference was not available on the website, but was accessed through the author's personal collection. All information about the 2006 conference was taken from reports in *Key Words* because very little information about that conference was found on the website.

Reports of presentations and poster sessions were included in the analysis. Types of presentations have varied

Table 1 Major topics of conference presentations

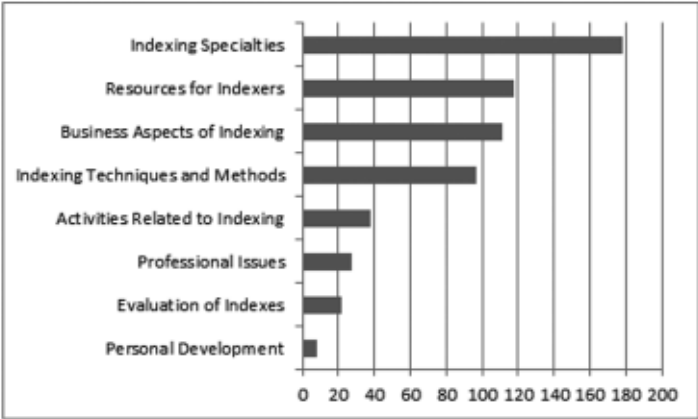| Topic	No. of sessions
Indexing specialties	178
Resources for indexers	118
Business aspects of indexing	111
Indexing techniques and methods	97
Activities related to indexing	38
Professional issues	27
Evaluation of indexes	22
Personal development	8

over the years, as well as the terms used to describe them. They included workshops, seminars, general sessions, breakout sessions, plenary sessions, question and answer sessions, panels, roundtables, and keynote addresses. Excluded from the investigation were reports of awards ceremonies, business meetings, dinners, receptions, orientations, tours, software fairs, and one-on-one peer review sessions.

Limitations

This content analysis is based on major topics in presentations that were described in preliminary program announcements and conference reports. It does not constitute an exhaustive examination of all subjects addressed in each presentation. This study excluded a few presentations because their descriptions did not provide enough information for content analysis. It is not known if all of the presentations listed in the preliminary programs were actually given at the conferences. Presentations were excluded from the analysis if the *Key Words* conference reports indicated that they were cancelled.

Categories

Perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of analyzing content from conference presentations is deciding how to categorize the topics. Calls for ASI conference presentation proposals have included a wide variety of categories. This analysis included eight categories, which appear in rank

Figure 1 Major topics of conference presentations

order in Table 1 and Figure 1. Some presentations were placed in more than one category because they covered more than one major topic.

Indexing specialties

The term 'indexing specialties' refers to the indexing of particular subjects, genres or formats. This was the largest category in the study, and was covered in 178 presentations. All 16 conferences included presentations in this area.

The indexing of electronic media was the most popular subject in this category. There were 71 presentations on this theme, and it was discussed at every conference from 1997 through 2012. Specific subjects included web indexing, embedded indexing, database indexing, online help indexing, ebook indexing, and CD-ROM indexing.

Trends in presentations on electronic media indexing reflect changes in the publishing industry. Presentations on CD-ROM indexing have diminished sharply since 2000, while those on indexing material available on the Web have increased dramatically. This reflects the fact that many types of resource that once were issued on CD-ROM are now made available online. Another trend concerns the growing popularity of ebooks. One of the first presentations on ebooks occurred in 2002 with a session entitled 'Why you don't want to index ebooks.' Obviously, this was not the last word on ebook indexing, and interest in this subject has expanded greatly since 2002.

Other popular indexing specialties included periodicals, newspapers, law, technical documentation, scholarly materials, foreign languages, medicine, health sciences, history, images, and social sciences. Themes covered less often were aerospace, archaeology, art, biography, botany, children's books, culinary arts, earth science, environmental science, fiction, gardening, genealogy, humanities, journalism, library science, literary criticism, political science, psychology, public policy, science, sound recordings, terrorism, and theology.

Resources for indexers

The second most popular topic of the conferences was resources for indexers. This topic was discussed at every conference from 1997 through 2012, and was represented in 118 sessions. The most prevalent presentation themes concerned dedicated indexing software such as CINDEX, MACREX, and Sky Index. Additional presentations covered a variety of other software, including Adobe products, Microsoft Office products, voice recognition software, and vocabulary management software. Other presentations dealt with finding information resources to assist in indexing. Four presentations covered reference sources for indexers, and 11 presentations concerned effective online searching.

Business aspects of indexing

The third most popular topic concerned business aspects of freelance indexing. This topic was covered in 111 presentations and was discussed at every conference from 1997 through 2012. The most prevalent subjects in this area were

client culture (concerning relations with editors, authors, and publishers), project management, starting an indexing business, marketing, and finances. Subjects discussed less often included office organization, record keeping, working on the road, and working with other indexers.

Indexing techniques and methods

Techniques and methods of indexing were addressed in 97 presentations, and were covered in all 16 conferences. Each conference included at least one instructional session on basic indexing techniques. Other popular themes included index editing, name indexing, term selection, and techniques for productive indexing. Subjects covered less often included acronyms, character sets, cross-references, exhaustivity, index style guides, note indexing, secondary indexing, subheadings, and the visual appeal of indexes.

Activities related to indexing

Activities related to indexing were discussed in 38 presentations, and were addressed in 15 of the 16 conferences in the study. The most popular subjects by far concerned the creation of thesauri, controlled vocabularies, and taxonomies. Other subjects included abstracting, information architecture, metadata, self-publishing, and the teaching of indexing. Presentations in this category have been more popular since 2003, reflecting developments in digital information retrieval that offer new opportunities for indexers.

Professional issues

Professional and career issues were the focus of 27 presentations. This topic was covered at 13 of the 16 conferences in the study. The most popular subject in this area was training in indexing, with a recent emphasis on the ASI training course. Other themes in this area included the certification of indexers, continuing education, ethics, and the activities of indexing societies in other countries.

Evaluation of indexes

Twenty-two presentations dealt with the evaluation of indexes. This topic was covered at 13 of the 16 conferences studied. The most popular theme was index usability. Other sessions dealt with index evaluation in general, peer reviewing, and judging indexes for the Wilson Award.

Personal development

Eight presentations concerned the topic of personal development. A recent trend began in 2007 with presentations on physical exercise. Sessions have covered physical fitness, stretching, yoga, and stress management. Other sessions in this category concerned osteoporosis treatment, prevention of Alzheimer's disease, work–family balance, and psychological aspects of indexing.

Discussion

This analysis of ASI conference presentations has revealed major issues as well as trends in indexing. Trends have reflected developments in information technology, the publishing industry, and the profession. Presentations on indexing specialties have encompassed new electronic formats as they were adopted by the publishing industry. Presentations on resources for indexers have provided a wealth of information about advances in indexing technology. Presentations on activities and skills related to indexing have included developments in digital information retrieval that offer new opportunities for indexers.

Considering the depth and breadth of conference offerings, it is clear that ASI conference planners and presenters have demonstrated a firm commitment to supporting practitioners at all levels. They have placed an emphasis on looking forward, embracing new technologies and adapting to change in the profession. As Dorothy Thomas (1989: 125–6) noted, these efforts have enabled ASI 'to prosper and to make a continuing contribution to the publishing industry and the world of information.'

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