



**Empowering libraries
through technology**

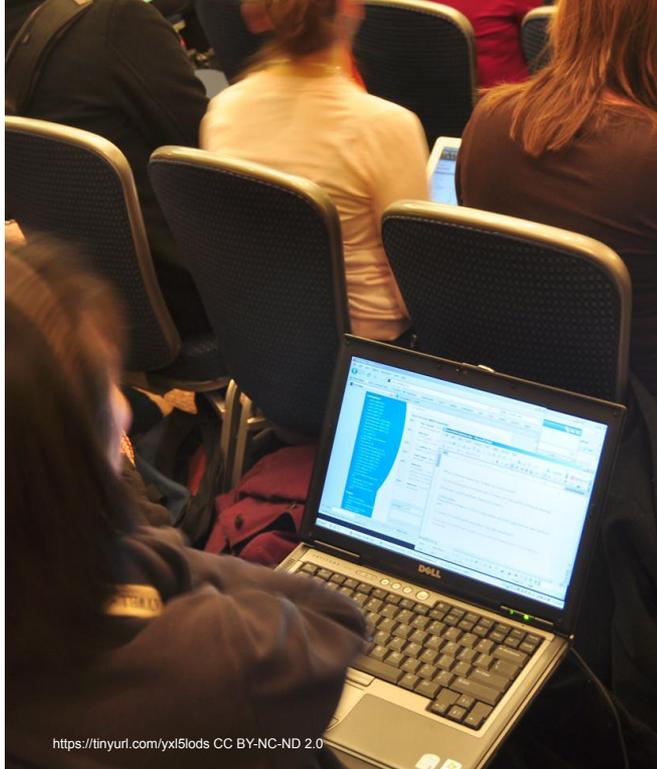
The Library and Information
Technology Association

Reflection on the History of LITA

August 28, 2020



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The scene in the mid-1960s

- In 1960, 41% of high school graduates went to college.
- In 1965, 51% of high school graduates went to college. (And that was starting to be a lot of graduates.)
- Universities expanded. They built massive new libraries. Computing at scale was finally in reach of larger institutions, and smaller institutions were interested.
- How to make this happen, and fast?
- Enter the second Clinic on Library Applications of Data Processing at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign in 1964. The automated serials control systems discussion led to a desire for another group that could meet at general conferences.



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From COLA to ISAD

- In 1965, this group formed a new organization with minimal governance, called Committee on Library Automation, or COLA. (We do love our acronyms.)
- But there was a problem: this group only allowed members who were actively engaged in development.
- Detroit, July 1965. Several hundred people packed an evening meeting to discuss the need for coordinated professional development in library technology.

“...much of the current activity was badly planned, imperfectly executed, and unnecessarily expensive, simply because there was very little opportunity for librarians to exchange information with each other.”

Salmon 1967, 638



Information Science and Automation Division (ISAD) Forms

- With 6 months, there were 863 signatures to form a new division.
- The precursors to ALCTS and LLAMA both suggested this as a new section of their divisions. (Just wait, all things in good time.)
- The first meeting was in New York in 1966. The division already had 2000 members.
- The first work was to establish a journal and conferences to ensure that work about library automation was available.
- There were larger goals: for example sharing library computer programs and distributing them from ALA Headquarters.



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ISAD Grows

- Starting with limited structure, ISAD grew and adapted as the members' needs changed.
- Regional institutes started as Library of Congress traveling roadshows on MARC. Henriette Avram was a great supporter of the division, and ISAD was instrumental in making MARC happen.
- Continuing the COLA tradition, there were discussion groups on various topics of interest (COLA joined in 1970).
- A committee five years after the founding of ISAD determined that it still had work to do and shouldn't disband just yet.
- In 1978, 75% of the membership agreed to change the name to LITA.



Highlight of LITA's First 25 Years

- 1973: MARBI Forms
- 1975: Sections are created
- Baltimore September 17-21, 1983: First LITA National Conference
- 1984: Sections are removed in favor of interest groups
- Still extant lecture series, awards, and scholarships created throughout this period.
- 1993: 5,802 members



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LITA in the Internet Age

- In the late 1980s, LITA programming looked at topics like “CD-ROM, Networking, and Copyright Issues”. By the mid-90s, it was “World Wide Web Client: How to Obtain and use Them”. In 2000 it was “Library Web Sites: The Next Generation”.
- (We haven’t solved all these issues).
- In 2006, Amazon Elastic Cloud started. The “cloud” was abstract to most people, but it changed library technology and collaboration. Over the next few years, helped along by the Great Recession, the nature of technology in libraries fundamentally shifted.



LITA Winds Down

- Nearly fifty years after ISAD started, it became increasingly clear that LITA--not unique among ALA divisions--was not sustainable. Thanks to the leadership of Andromeda Yelton, the abstract discussions eventually became the reality that is Core.
- ISAD started because ALA divisions, mirroring libraries themselves, were separated by function in a way that did not work for technology that crossed all areas.
- In the strange year of 2020, at this last LITA Board meeting, we can reflect that technology brought us together in the 1960s, and it has allowed us to keep our libraries functional this year, and it will keep us together in Core.

Sources

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