

And They Were There – Reports of Meetings

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SLA in 2025: One Member's View

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The state of Pennsylvania hosted three library association conferences in 2025: the Medical Library Association (April 29 – May 2), the SLA-Special Libraries Association (June 7-10) in Pittsburgh, and the American Library Association (June 26-30) in Philadelphia. Historically ALA is the oldest of the organizations (founded 1876), and over the years, the three organizations' paths have intertwined. Most recently, MLA and SLA sponsored a joint conference in Detroit, MI (2023), and ALA's past president, Emily Drabinski, was the keynote speaker at SLA's 116th Annual Conference and Expo (2025).

The Annual SLA Conference

The 2025 SLA conference theme, "Creative Transformation: Shaping the Future of the Information Profession," was also an opportunity to reflect on shaping the future of SLA as well (outlined further). This was the second year that SLA chose a college conference center venue- in 2024- University of Rhode Island, in 2025- the University of Pittsburgh campus. Just over 300 attendees represented the range of SLA's membership: students, those working in corporate, government, non-profit, academic, and other specialized sectors. Attendees came primarily from the U.S., but also Canada, Europe, and Asia.

Keynoter Emily Drabinski spotlighted ALA presidential year moments, travels, celebrated library heroes, weaving in experiences from teaching future librarians, and meeting fellow SLA conference participants. During a presentation on librarian advocacy, Emily added to the discussion, inviting anyone interested to a pre-ALA 2025 conference workshop on workplace solidarity, incorporating censorship and book banning themes.

SLA 2025 featured panels, roundtables, solo presentations, posters, and vendors' industry updates. Programming included the inevitable topic of AI, e.g., "Transforming Digital Collection Stewardship with AI-enabled Solutions" and "Configuring the 4Sets in the Era of GenAI." Attendees were updated on standards, patents, "hot topics" in chemistry, mathematics, astronomy, law, and engineering (and more). Presenters shared expertise on "Budgeting 101," the use of prompt engineering for physics research, issues in solo and other aspects of "special" librarianship. One session celebrated "Why It's Great to Be a Special Librarian," another explored "Expanding Horizons and Career Transformations." Two non-profit organizations' librarians shared "Unlocking Institutional Knowledge: Leveraging Institutional Repositories to Bridge Past Knowledge to Present Application." Current events were woven into sessions such as "Disappearing Guidance: Locating Previously Available Government Agency Information," and "From Collection Development to Collective Action: Librarians Have the Right Skills to Make a Difference." Although some sessions included video clips, unfortunately for those who could not attend in person, this was not a hybrid conference, and recordings were not made available.

Eighteen SLA conference travel scholarship awardees invigorated the conference with their presence and presentations. Some were pursuing master's or doctoral degrees, attending various U.S. or U.K. university programs, while others were new to the field. SNIPS – (SLA's Student and New Information Professionals Subcommittee) organized gatherings for them to network and have a "home base."

SLA communities (formerly called divisions and chapters) organized excursions, dine-arounds, and social gatherings. The Engineering Community toured the Allegheny Observatory. The Biological and Life Sciences Community informally celebrated its 90th anniversary with sweets. Western States attendees gathered at one local eatery while the joint "East Coast Meets the Midwest" – at another. Specialty communities brought together "birds of a feather" – from military, taxonomy, corporate intelligence, and academic, to SLA fellows with 2025 SLA scholarship winners.

Invariably, discussions about the future came up. Looking back at the now concluded 2025 conference, it is unclear which SLA conference traditions will endure, and at which conferences vendors will see longtime customers. Initiatives supported by SLA members also are trying to "crystal ball" the future, one being the 20-year-old public charity, non-governmental organization, Lubuto Library Partners, www.lubuto.org, which has had longtime SLA member support for library and children-focused initiatives in Zambia.

Changes for SLA and Its Members

Prior to the conference, in March 2025, SLA made an announcement to its members and in public channels, that rippled far and wide: SLA's board of directors voted for dissolution. The reasons outlined: dropping SLA membership figures (to about 1200 in 2025), and financial expenses that could not be covered by available funds, despite cost-cutting measures in recent years. Total dissolution (with a declaration of bankruptcy) was not the only option the SLA board explored. Alternatives included a volunteer-led model, and communications with other professional organizations about possible "alternative homes" for its members, that could involve organizational merger. (Members were not privy to the details).

On May 23rd, ASIS&T (The Association for Information Science and Technology, founded in 1937) and SLA (founded in 1909) publicly announced, as press releases indicated, "merger negotiations to explore a unified future for information professionals." Some members recalled that several decades ago, leaders of SLA and ASIS&T (then ASIS) discussed possible merger opportunities, but those did not come to fruition. In 2025, both organizations' boards decided to move forward. SLA members were alerted to review a framework document providing more information. SLA president, Hildy Dworkin,

assembled working groups, e.g., a merger working group, and one to identify SLA's legacy, including location of SLA association and community archives. SLA communities, both subject and geographic, began exploring where/how they would or could fit in as potential ASIS&T special interest groups. Each organization's members were invited to pose questions and comments about the ramifications of the proposed merger, and responses were posted in each association's site and otherwise communicated to members. Though each organization's board entered into the discussions and negotiations, the ultimate decision will be by vote of the organizations' members (some actually belonging to both organizations and can vote twice).

At SLA 2025, the hoped-for merger was in evidence as ASIS&T executive director, Lydia Middleton, was very much an active conference observer and participant. She attended conference sessions and social events, and sat at a table in the vendor showcase, ready with flyers and availability to talk with conference attendees and vendors. In 2025, ASIS&T continued with its strategic planning activities. Communications to SLA members about ASIS&T opportunities included an invitation to attend the next annual ASIS&T conference in the Washington, D.C. area (November 14-18, 2025).

Each professional organization has its own culture, organizational and management structure, and priorities. SLA has long touted its international membership, its support for information professionals in specialized environments, and its three-pronged approach — education, advocacy, and community building. In various venues, complementary missions of the organizations were spotlighted, as were some of the strengths that SLA could bring to a merged organization, including its “practitioner” approach, some of its unique specialty communities, its active local and regional communities, as well as its strong commitment to its student scholarship endowment. Through its channels, ASIS&T points out its strengths and priorities. At this writing, the 2025 SLA conference has concluded. Merger negotiations and scenario planning continue at board levels of both organizations, and the votes are forthcoming (in mid-August for SLA).

In the months since the March 2025 announcement, SLA communities continued planning activities, both virtual and in-person — meet-ups, educational events, book discussions, and presentations. For example, a small group (from IL, IN, IA, MN, MO) planned the 6th SLA Midwest Symposium, an annual event that in recent years has been virtual. It was decided to

make this year's event on August 1st free (no registration fee) for all. The half-day symposium will feature keynotes by Hildy Dworkin, SLA president, and Brian Pichman, a well-received technology speaker at the 2024 SLA conference, and will include briefer presentations selected from submitted proposals. In Chicago, an in-person tradition was revived, when the CAA (Chicago Area Archivists) and members of the SLA-Illinois community, gathered in a local brewery on July 23rd for a joint happy hour (the last one scheduled in Jan. 2019 was cancelled “due to the weather”). One of the causes for celebration (perhaps bittersweet) — this year, SLA-IL commemorated its 100th anniversary.

Should members vote in the affirmative on the merger of ASIS&T and SLA, the next phase will be a transition and a new “married life” involving integration of two related but distinct organizations. As the SLA merger framework document phrased it (in a section on brand identity and mission alignment), “to reimagine the merged identity.” In today's world, library and information professionals have many choices. As evidenced by the plethora of specialized and free-standing workshops, symposia, and conferences, professional endeavors do not necessarily require a “professional society home.” Still, as evidenced by the enthusiasm of new, up-and-coming professionals at the 2025 SLA conference, many may find value in having a professional society home — for networking, learning, and more. Whatever the outcome for SLA and ASIS&T, ultimately, each professional has choices to make and paths to take in their own professional journey.

Many of us will miss SLA as we knew it but remain optimistic for the future, whatever it holds.

It turns out that another SLA member also wrote up the conference: “SLA Faces Its Future” by Marydee Ojala, posted on July 29, 2025 <https://newsbreaks.infotoday.com/NewsBreaks/SLA-Faces-Its-Future-170689.asp>.

Disclaimer: Ramune K. Kubilius, a longtime SLA member, is neither an SLA (or ASIS&T) officer, nor a board member. For official information and updates on the SLA / ASIS&T merger, please contact Lydia Middleton (ASIS&T executive director) or Hildy Dworkin (SLA president).

Just in – See Merger Update below. 🍷

MERGER UPDATE – SLA and ASIS&T

On August 21, a press release announced that the merger is moving forward: “The Special Libraries Association (SLA) and the Association for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T) today announced that their members have cleared the way for the organizations to merge. SLA members voted overwhelmingly to accept the dissolution plan proposed by their Board of Directors. Separately, ASIS&T members resoundingly approved their Board's proposal to welcome SLA members into their organization along with the Association's remaining assets. These decisions clear the way for the two organizations to formally unite and build on their shared commitment to advancing the work of information professionals worldwide...”

ASIS&T site: <https://www.asist.org/2025/08/21/asist-and-sla-members-vote-in-favor-of-merger/>

SLA president's announcement: <https://sla.org/page/httpsslaorgpageSLADissolutionInformation> 🍷