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Alas poor ARIST; reviewing the information sciences

Academic disciplines usually have few have few scholarly resources that can reasonably be described as 'jewels'; *Journal of Documentation*, I am pleased to say, has been described as such in the past. The same label can certainly be applied to *Annual Reviews of Information Science and Technology*, which has for 45 years been the main forum for scholarly review articles in information science.

Not for much longer. The sponsoring body, the American Society for Information Science and Technology, has decided to cease publication after the next, 2011, edition. The reasons given for what ASIST (2010) describe as an "agonizing" decision are that "the emotional and intellectual attachment to a printed ARIST was outweighed by a consensus of where scholarly communication is going and by the desire for instant online access by readers and authors". Editor Blaise Cronin (2010) adds that he is sad, but "mindful ... of the shifts in author's and readers' behaviour that led to the decision". ARIST will be, to a degree, replaced by a series of what the ASIST announcement refers to as "shorter, more tightly focused review articles" in *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, which Cronin tells us will "focus on hot topics and emerging areas of interest in addition to providing more conventional bibliographic or historical reviews of a field or subfield". What makes the decision rather unusual is that the publisher, Information Today, is apparently willing to continue with the series; a reversal of the common situation where a publisher argues for closure on economic grounds, while sponsors and editors argue for continuation.

What I suppose this means is that articles in *ARIST* are – by intention – relatively lengthy, detailed, closely argued and extensively referenced. Not at all what can be read easily and quickly in any format, and not pleasant to have to read on screen. It seems sad though, that a discipline which generally argues for critical analysis of information, and for a reflective use of the research knowledge-base, should be unable to sustain its own main tool for doing so.

The latest, and now we must say penultimate, volume of *ARIST*, volume 44 with a 2010 publication date, shows what will be lost. Authoritative and scholarly articles on philosophy and information studies, on the history of artificial intelligence research accompany shorter accounts on developments of communication within science, the new-ish discipline of usage bibliometrics, and the status of the much-hyped h-index. An insightful analysis of the literature of facet analysis shows how this 'legacy' topic is again coming into vogue, Researchers and policy makers alike would find the reviews of digital government and of the information practices of immigrants of value. And so on, through the twelve chapters of the volume.

Do the discipline and profession of information science, to say nothing of its teachers and students, really not need this kind of high-quality information source? Apparently not. I have much sympathy with those who took the decision; having been, for a couple of years, editor of a short-lived European

equivalent, *Perspectives in Information Management*, I am well aware of the difficulties, and demand on time and resources, to create such a high-quality offering. But as someone who has used *ARIST* for many years, and has more recently relied on it as a resource for my students, I feel it is a very regrettable step. *Journal of Documentation* will certainly do its best to fill the gap, by seeking more review articles for our *Progress in Documentation* slot.

David Bawden

References

ASIST (2010), *ARIST to cease publication following 2011 volume*, available at <http://www.asis.org/news/ARISTcease.html>

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