

LISA – How We Got Where We Are Now

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Abstract. A brief overview of LISA conferences and how we arrived at LISA V.

At the end of the fifth conference on Library and Information Services in Astronomy, we thought it would be appropriate to pause a moment and look back at how we got where we are now.¹

When LISA started in 1988, held at the U.S. Naval Observatory in Washington, DC as IAU Colloquium 110, it was the first international conference ever especially for astronomy librarians, and nobody imagined that a second or third conference on this topic would follow later. Hence, the acronym missed any counting. Topics centered mostly around traditional information maintenance and delivery, publication and acquisition of books and journals from foreign countries and handling of astronomy-specific media such as sky surveys and observatory publications. Retrieval aids came mostly in print format, although some already had electronic counterparts even back then. Some presentations were truly ahead of their time and, when read today, almost seem to have been written only a few years ago.

Seven years later, the LISA II conference poster showed two Mona Lisas, one with a book in her hand, the other one, with “pixellated” edges, holding a diskette. This contrast was meant to symbolize the shift from print to electronic resources that had begun. Accordingly, the conference started off with so-called “hands-on tutorials”, educational sessions that were designed to give attendees an overview of the usage of selected technologies and databases. The Keynote Address, entitled “The changing role of librarians”, reflected on the evolving function of librarians.

In 1998, when LISA III was held, many information resources in astronomy had become interconnected and were available from anywhere, at any time. The conference focused on electronic journals including access licenses and new business models such as consortia, as well as archiving of e-documents. On the other hand, it also became obvious that the perception that all information resources are available electronically was (and still is) a myth.

¹More details on the history, logistics and content of LISA conferences can be found in Corbin & Grothkopf (2006).

The conference motto of LISA IV (2002) – “Emerging and preserving: providing astronomical information in the digital age” – stressed the importance technology had gained. A special session was devoted to virtual observatories; other highlights included presentations on digitization projects as well as citation analysis, a topic which was becoming more and more important among observatories.

So now we have arrived at LISA V, in the beautiful city of Cambridge, MA, with 115 participants from 22 countries – which once again emphasizes the traditionally large number of nationalities represented at LISA conferences. LISA V organizers were able to attract the highest number of invited speakers ever, as well as 37 contributed talks, 35 posters, a poster review and a panel discussion grouped around the conference theme “Common challenges, uncommon solutions”. The meeting provided an excellent forum to inform attendees about news in the fields of networked databases, digital data creation and preservation as well as experimental navigation and knowledge discovery tools. A big Thank You to the organizing committees (SOC, LOC, FOL), the institutional, private and commercial sponsors, to all volunteers and, last but not least, to all participants who made this conference a success!

References

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